Massey University

Exploring the Impact of Job Insecurity on Employees' Well-being: A Phenomenological Study in the New Zealand Higher Education Sector

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Abstract

In response to escalating financial challenges in the higher education sector in New Zealand, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions have undertaken significant organisational restructuring efforts. However, these initiatives, along with employees' awareness of financial challenges, have simultaneously heightened uncertainty among the workforce, resulting in an increasing prevalence of job insecurity among employees. The purpose of this research is to analyse how employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being in the New Zealand higher education sector. Notably, prior research suggests job insecurity has a negative impact on employees' well-being, but there are limited studies, particularly in the higher education sector, that explore the authentic experiences and consequential effects on perceived personal well-being. This gap is even more pronounced when it comes to using qualitative approaches to understand the perspectives of employees.

Using a qualitative research approach within the interpretivist paradigm, this exploratory study aims to address this gap by exploring the multifaced dimensions of the subjective phenomenon of job insecurity and its impacts on employees' perceived well-being. In this study, job insecurity refers to instances in which employees feel threatened by the security of their positions because they have been notified of changes to their jobs or have observed insecurity in the workplace, which has led them to perceive potential changes to their jobs. This study employs thematic analysis of data gathered from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 17 employees experiencing job insecurity in the New Zealand higher education sector to answer the following research question: How do employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being?

Three sub-questions were also used to guide the research:

1. What are the stressors that arise from job insecurity?
2. How do the stressors of job insecurity impact the well-being of employees?
3. How do employees respond to the challenges posed by job insecurity?

During thematic analysis, the theoretical frameworks of stress theory and conservation of resources theory were drawn on to derive salient themes from the empirical data. The findings present three main themes: stressors, effects on well-being, and behavioural and attitudinal responses. Within these themes, there are 12 sub-themes identified. These findings collectively support a discussion on the negative impact job insecurity has on employee well-being that existing literature and theoretical frameworks have identified, with the domino effect emerging as a major revelation. The domino effect demonstrates how the initial stress of job insecurity can trigger a cascade of negative impacts on various aspects of employee well-being.

Overall, the outcomes of this research shed light on the genuine and unique experiences of employees working within the country's higher education institutions, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between job insecurity and employee well-being.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In recent years, the higher education sector (HE) in New Zealand has faced unprecedented upheaval, with widespread deficits exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to financial challenges, universities have undertaken significant restructuring efforts, leading to substantial job losses. The commission, in their Financial Overview of the Tertiary Sector, warned that universities are on the brink of running out of money, with several institutions reporting large deficits in 2023 and forecasting tight liquidity in the coming years. Even if they managed to survive without going into liquidity, the institution will be facing paying off debt for years to come. (Gerritsen, 2024). New Zealand's globally ranked universities, along with the recently merged Te Pūkenga, the largest provider of vocational education and training experiences, are grappling with financial losses as the number of international students remains below pre-COVID levels and unexpected decrease in domestic enrolments and increases in general operating costs (Craymer, 2023; Ross, 2024). The 2023 decline in enrolments has been attributed to a 'perfect storm' of factors, leading universities to propose cuts as they search for ways to mitigate financial pressures (McNeilly, 2023).

According to Smith (2024), the University of Otago (Otago), Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), and Massey University (Massey) are among the institutions that have been cutting staff and reorganising offerings in an effort to save money and pay their bills. For instance, VUW reduced its staff in September 2023 by disestablishing 140 roles. In addition to cutting 65 jobs, 75 staff members took voluntary redundancy, and 60 programs were reviewed, resulting in the elimination of six courses. Similarly, Otago saw 118 staff members accept voluntary redundancies in July 2023 and expected more to come. Additionally, Massey has cut 20 jobs from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences in February 2024. Two schools within the college: the School of Humanities, Media, and Creative Communication, and the School of People, Environment, and Planning took the brunt of these reductions. In total, the number of jobs lost was even higher, with an additional 17 individuals leaving through voluntary redundancy, resignation, or retirement. On the other hand, AUT had proposed to make 170 staff redundant in 2022, but this plan was suspended following legal challenges by the Tertiary Education Union. As a result, those affected were given at least six more months before any decisions would be made regarding their employment, leaving a lingering sense of insecurity.

Similarly, Te Pūkenga, the national institute encompassing all polytechnics, has seen its workforce shrink by approximately 15% due to mergers and financial cutbacks. This protracted and challenging period was further complicated by the government's announcement in December 2023 to disestablish the New Zealand Institute of Skills & Technology, impacting 270,000 students across 16 polytechnics and nine industry training organizations (Smith, 2024). The breakup of Te Pūkenga follows an April restructuring proposal that initially projected 200 roles would be cut across these institutions. Formed by the Labour Government to consolidate New Zealand's polytechnics into a single entity, Te Pūkenga had already proposed the disestablishment of over 400 roles, alongside 51 vacant positions, and the non-renewal of 350 fixed-term employment agreements (Schwanecke, 2023). The disestablishment introduces yet another significant change, compounding the uncertainty and adjustments staff must endure for the second time in the running.

With these changes, as well as employees' awareness of institutions' financial situations and increased uncertainty about future employment, job insecurity has grown more common in academia. Notably, as job insecurity has become a growing worry in the sector, it is recognised to cause considerable pressures that can have a variety of detrimental consequences for employees (Darvishmotevali, 2020; Richter et al., 2014). Job insecurity is commonly defined as a sense of impotence in maintaining desired continuity in a challenged work scenario (Witte, 1999; Hellgren et al., 1999; Vander Elst et al., 2014). The sense of work uncertainty is closely linked to negative consequences on employee well-being. (Muñoz Medina et al.,2022). This underscores the need to further investigate the impact of job insecurity on employees' perceived well-being.

The research question for this study is: How do employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being? To address this question, the study will examine the experiences of HE employees in New Zealand who are facing job insecurity and explore how they perceive these experiences impacting their well-being. The study will focus on employees who have either received confirmed notice of job loss or who perceive job loss as imminent. Following a review of the academic literature, a qualitative, phenomenological approach will be adopted to explore the lived experiences of 17 HE employees in New Zealand. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews (SSIs) were conducted, and the resulting data was transcribed and analysed thematically to provide insights into the impact of job insecurity on employees' well-being.

Key findings from thematic analysis indicate employees experiencing job insecurity perceive a negative impact on their overall well-being, particularly in their physical and mental health. One major revelation is the domino effect, which demonstrates how the initial stress of job insecurity can trigger a cascade of negative impacts on various aspects of employee well-being. The domino effect reveals how job insecurity impacts not only immediate health and external conditions but also internal states, disrupting personal relationships, decreasing motivation, lowering job performance, and lowering self-esteem. This perpetuates a cycle of stress and declining well-being has been a notable factor as it has not been explored in previous literature.

The discussion and analysis provide an understanding of how job insecurity affects employees' subjective well-being by adopting their views and experiences, particularly focusing on individuals who have experienced confirmed or perceived job loss. These findings align with existing literature that highlights that such stressors experienced during periods of job insecurity can have adverse effects on employees' well-being. The insights obtained from this study offer valuable insights into the complexities of detrimental effects on the well-being of employees experiencing job insecurity. The findings underscore the importance of addressing job insecurity to foster a healthier, and more stable work environment for HE employees in New Zealand. Implementing strategies based on these findings can help employees alleviate uncertainty and improve overall conditions across the sector.

This chapter outlines the research topic and objectives, as well as a synopsis of the contributions. The study's background is presented first, followed by the motivation and justification for the research, including identified gaps in the literature. The next part outlines the research objectives and questions, followed by an explanation of the underlying research paradigm and methodology used in the study. The significance of the study is also presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of the thesis structure.

1.1 Research Background

Job insecurity has become a significant issue across workplaces in New Zealand, with the HE sector particularly affected. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue, driving organisational changes and downsizing efforts in response to financial pressures. According to the 2022 New Zealand Education data, the enrolment of domestic students faced a decline, with a 4.1 percent drop equating to 14,855 fewer students compared to the previous year. Simultaneously, international student numbers saw a reduction of 13.7 percent, equivalent to 5,370 students, decreasing from 39,075 in 2021 to 33,705 (Education Counts, 2022). The global pandemic brought about unprecedented disruption in the HE sector. Closed borders effectively halted the international education market, while a decline in domestic student numbers in recent years has further strained universities (Heyes, 2023).

With both domestic and international enrolments remaining below pre-COVID levels and cost pressures escalating, tertiary institutions have implemented restructuring strategies to navigate the post-pandemic environment (Carnegie et al., 2022; Desmarais, 2023). The financial challenges have made teaching students barely profitable for universities and loss-making for polytechnics, leading to urgent cash flow issues (Gerritsen, 2024). As a result, universities and polytechnics have resorted to making life-changing decisions, including temporary job suspensions and significant layoffs. These measures, characterised by redundancies and cost-cutting, have significantly heightened the pervasive sense of job insecurity within the sector (Mitchell, 2023).

Moreover, as indicated by Gupta and Dhar (2024), organisational changes stemming from the pandemic have emerged as a major factor contributing to increased job insecurity among the workforces. While the broader labour market crisis significantly increased objective job insecurity across all sectors, the subsequent organisational downsizing and layoffs intensified subjective job insecurity among those who remained. This heightened sense of insecurity has had detrimental effects on the health and productivity of employees who survived the layoffs. Therefore, investigating job insecurity necessitates a focus on both confirmed job losses and perceived threats of job loss.

The term ‘job insecurity’ is defined in various ways in the literature. For this study, job insecurity is defined as a perceived threat to the continuity and stability of employment as currently experienced (De Witte, 1999; Hellgren et al., 1999). This definition captures key elements from existing definitions, including the perception of threat to one's job, the emphasis on subjective experience, and the risk to job security and working conditions (Shoss, 2017). While redundancies and job cuts may help universities reduce spending, they have profound effects on employees, ranging from professional staff and academic tutors to highly educated academics. The stress associated with the perception of job loss can have serious consequences, as job insecurity is linked to lower mental health outcomes such as psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and minor psychiatric issues as well as physical health issues like increased illness, hypertension, obesity and sleep disorders (De Witte, 1999; Muñoz Medina et al., 2022). The inherently stressful nature of job insecurity significantly impacts individuals' lives, fundamentally affecting their overall well-being (De Witte et al., 2012). Therefore, from the perspective of those affected, proactive and emotional responses to manage the effects of job insecurity are an important way to alleviate stress Giunchi et al., 2019).

In addition to impacting employees' personal lives, job insecurity also affects their socio-economic factors. From a workplace perspective, changes can alter the culture, norms, and trust within the work environment. Heightened job insecurity has been shown to cause psychological stress and heightened sensitivity, which can diminish cooperation among colleagues in sharing information, expertise, and skills (Liu, 2011). From the employees' perspective, job insecurity can have a ripple effect, leading to mental and physical health issues and disrupting work-life balance. Employees may struggle to manage other aspects of their lives, such as family and additional responsibilities, as job-related stressors take their toll (Haar, 2013). Research indicates that job insecurity can impact marital satisfaction, disrupt daily routines, reduce social interactions, and strain overall family relationships (Blom et al., 2020).

This study explores how employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being, identifies the stressors contributing to their stress, and examines how employees respond to these challenges.

1.2 Research Justification

Job insecurity falls somewhere between psychological well-being and unemployment research, addressing the problems of employed people who are afraid of losing their jobs. While there is abundant literature on the effects of unemployment on individuals, such as depression and anxiety, there is a significant gap in comprehending job insecurity, particularly in qualitative investigations (De Witte et al., 2012; Blom et al., 2018). Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's research (cited in Muñoz Medina et al. 2022) highlights that while much research has focused on the quantitative aspects of fear of losing a job, less attention has been given to qualitative aspects, as they much gravitated on cross-sectional data (Låstad et al., 2015). Job insecurity is viewed as a perceptual experience or a real occurrence, as it is based on the individual's perceptions and interpretations of the immediate work environment, making qualitative research particularly appropriate (Anand et al., 2023). To fully comprehend individuals' perceptions and experiences with job instability, qualitative research is necessary (Muñoz Medina et al., 2022)

In the New Zealand HE sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified job insecurity due to financial pressures and restructuring (Mitchell, 2023). This sector's specific context highlights the need for qualitative research to understand how employees perceive and manage job insecurity, a critical aspect that has not been sufficiently investigated. This presents an opportunity for studying, addressing this gap will provide valuable insights into how job insecurity affects well-being and inform strategies to support affected employees (Muñoz Medina et al., 2022). This research aims to explore how job insecurity impacts the perceived well-being of employees in the HE sector. The sector has been relatively overlooked in academic studies, especially given the recent emergence of these issues in the wake of the pandemic (Gerritsen, 2024)

1.3 Research Objective and Research Question

The primary objective of this phenomenological study is to examine the employees' lived experiences of job insecurity and how it may impact their perceived well-being using participants currently employed in New Zealand's HE sector.

To comprehensively study the complex nature of job insecurity as a phenomenon, a qualitative research design will be used. This method will allow for a thorough examination of how employees might perceive the negative effects of job insecurity on their well-being. The study will focus on the phenomenon of lived experiences related to job insecurity, with the objective of understanding how these experiences are connected to individuals' perceived wellbeing, specifically targeting perceived job insecurity within the HE sector in New Zealand.

To conduct this research, the primary research question is:

How do employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being?

To help answer the main research question, the following sub-questions were designed:

1. What are the stressors that arise from job insecurity?
2. How do the stressors of job insecurity impact the well-being of employees?
3. How do employees respond to the challenges posed by job insecurity?

1.4 Research Contribution

This research aims to examine the association between the experiences of job insecurity and employee's perceived well-being. By delving into the lived experiences of these employees, the study will compile a rich array of perspectives, opinions, and first-hand experiences that can significantly contribute to existing knowledge.

This study makes a dual contribution to the job insecurity literature. Firstly, it explores the stressors that arise from job insecurity and its impact on well-being. This is particularly relevant given the increasing consequences of job insecurity on mental and physical health, which extend from work to home (De Witte et al., 2012). By examining both the psychological and physiological effects of job insecurity, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these stressors permeate various aspects of employees' lives. It addresses not only immediate workplace concerns but also the broader implications for employees' overall quality of life, family dynamics, and social interactions.

Secondly, the study is timely and pertinent in the context of the current challenges faced by the tertiary education sector in New Zealand. The financial pressures and organisational changes prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated job insecurity, making it a critical issue for employees in this sector. By focusing on the higher education environment, this research sheds light on a sector that has been relatively underexplored in job insecurity studies. It examines how the unique pressures and uncertainties of the post-pandemic landscape affect employees' perceptions of job security and their well-being. Job insecurity in the academic landscape has not been extensively studied, making this study one of the first to explore its effects in the HE sector.

Furthermore, this research utilises qualitative methods to delve deeply into the lived experiences of employees, capturing the nuanced ways in which job insecurity impacts their lives. This qualitative approach allows for the collection of rich, detailed data that can uncover the complexities and personal narratives often overlooked in quantitative studies. By engaging directly with employees

through interviews, the study captures authentic insights into their feelings, thoughts, and coping mechanisms in response to job insecurity.

In summary, this study not only fills a gap in the literature by addressing the underexplored area of job insecurity in the higher education sector but also offers practical recommendations for improving employee well-being. By highlighting the pervasive effects of job insecurity on mental and physical health, both within and beyond the workplace, this research underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to support employees in navigating these challenges.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents three bodies of literature: job insecurity, well-being, and responses, all of which are critical components of the study topic. This chapter begins with an overview of the job insecurity literature, focusing on what makes job instability stressful and worth investigating. The second segment examines well-being literature, focussing on how job insecurity can affect individuals' well-being. The third option discusses responses, in which employees may discover that after experiencing firsthand job insecurity, they would respond, frequently in the form of coping techniques. After the literature review, the theoretical frameworks used to guide the research will be introduced. The final portion concludes this chapter.

2.2 Literature Search and Review Method

An initial exploratory search of the literature was conducted to define the scope of the literature. The sources included electronic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, Google Books, and Massey University Library. The following key words were used in the literature search:

1. Job Insecurity, stressors,
2. Well-being, physical Well-being, mental Well-being
3. Responses, coping mechanisms, behaviours, attitudes

These keywords were applied separately and in combination to search the literature in electronic databases, identifying references where the keywords appeared in any data fields, including title and abstract. As discussed in Section 1.4, Research Contribution, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature on job insecurity and well-being by broadening the understanding of how job insecurity affects perceived well-being based on empirical data. Accordingly, criteria were set to include primarily references related to job insecurity and its effects on well-being, ensuring that supporting references were relevant to the research question.

After the initial search to develop the research question, further literature searches and reviews were conducted throughout the study. This ongoing search was facilitated by peer discussions and additional database searches. The process described above helped establish the scope and focus of this study.

2.3 Job Insecurity

Job insecurity is the perceived threat to the continuity and stability of employment in the institution as currently experienced (De Witte, 1999; Hellgren et al., 1999). Research on job insecurity has consistently demonstrated an association between job insecurity and the effects on mental health, physical health, motivation, and satisfaction, regardless of the specific firm, industry, or country studied (De Witte, 2010). Job insecurity has been defined in various ways within the literature and since then received significant attention. While multiple definitions of job insecurity exist, scholars have drawn a consensus that there is an abundant number of stressors that are attached, and with detrimental consequences (Gupta & Dhar, 2024; Shoss et al., 2017).

Researchers suggest job insecurity can be considered as a stressor, and stressors are characteristics with negative consequences for both the individual employee and his/her organisation (De Witte et al., 2012). Actions aimed at enhancing a company's competitive position may inadvertently diminish employee security, such as downsizing or restructuring. Therefore, while employees typically perceive job threats negatively, senior managers might consider structural changes that result in job losses as a necessary but challenging aspect of their decision-making role. Considering this, individuals in higher managerial positions who are involved in decision-making processes may experience job insecurity quite differently from those in lower levels of management (Reisel et al., 2007). Further, studies have demonstrated that the mere perception of being at risk of job loss is enough to trigger symptoms of anxiety and depression (De Witte et al., 2012).

Qualitative investigations have offered detailed insights into the nature of employees' anxieties regarding job security, encompassing concerns about maintaining their lifestyles, managing mortgages, and planning for the future. It is worth noting that the negative repercussions extend beyond the employed individuals to affect their spouses and families (Burchell, 2011). Emerging research indicates that there is increasing focus on identifying and exploring key concepts that influence job insecurity in organisations. The focus on identifying potential predictors of job insecurity has significant potential to mitigate the detrimental effects experienced by those affected by job insecurity. Understanding how these negative experiences can be alleviated is essential, not only from a theoretical perspective but also due to the documented practical consequences associated with job insecurity (Näswall & De Witte, 2003). By pinpointing a group that is particularly vulnerable to job insecurity, it may be feasible to proactively address and reduce these feelings of insecurity in the future, therefore the research topic and angle are in line with current interest.

2.4 Well-being

A prolonged sense of stressors regarding job insecurity is anticipated to have adverse effects on well-being, encompassing both physical and mental aspects. This proposition aligns with prior research, which has both theoretically postulated and empirically demonstrated these consequences insecurity (Näswall & De Witte, 2003). In the literature, job insecurity has indicated that stressors considerably raise employee job stress, impair job controllability and predictability, and broaden an employee's perceptions of threat and loss (Anand et al., 2023) It is also worth noting that, because job insecurity is fundamentally a subjective experience, no two employees facing the same objective situation will perceive and experience it in the same way due to differences in their interpretations and perceptions. This shows that even when confronted with the same objective circumstances,

people's perceptions of job insecurity may differ (Hellgren et al., 1999). Firstly, individuals who exhibit varying levels of job insecurity may have different perceptions of the severity, or how likely they believe they would lose their work. Those with a stronger sense of uneasiness are more likely to regard the threat as serious than those with lower degrees of job insecurity. This perception may be related to the person's sense of control over the circumstance. Those who believe they have more control or faith in their ability to mitigate the threat may not perceive it as serious (Näswall & De Witte, 2003).

Secondly, another critical factor influencing the level of perceived threat is the perceived severity of the potential outcome, which, in this case, is job loss. Those who perceive job loss as a highly serious event will naturally feel more vulnerable to it and experience heightened insecurity. This difference could be attributed to varying perceptions of one's own vulnerability. Some individuals may see themselves as more vulnerable, lacking the confidence that they possess the necessary resources to cope with the consequences of job loss. These explanations of job insecurity, in which the extent of job insecurity experienced depends on the individual's perception of vulnerability and their personal resources to counteract the threat, brings to attention the significance of qualitative research to delve into these experiences individually and comprehensively (Näswall & De Witte, 2003).

Multiple research projects have repeatedly found that job uncertainty and accompanying pressures have a negative impact on both psychological and physical health (De Witte et al., 2016). Numerous studies have found that employment uncertainty during a crisis is related with a variety of psychological problems. These include mental symptoms like anxiety, despair, and weariness, as well as behavioural symptoms such as cognitive and emotional deficits and sleeplessness, which might have a physical impact (Anand et al., 2023; Gupta & Dhar, 2024). Job insecurity also reduces job performance and organisational commitment (Shoss, 2017; Sverke et al., 2019), as well as broader macroeconomic behaviours such as lower consumer spending (Lozza et al., 2013) and postponing life investments in family planning, such as marriage, having children, purchasing a home, or obtaining a bank loan (Chirumbolo et al., 2021). Consequently, people suffering job instability frequently feel inadequate in their roles, worried that their perceived lack of skills would lead to rejection by colleagues and the organisation, which may further diminish their self-perception (Anand et al., 2023). Nevertheless, it is essential to examine individual-level factors that may have been influenced by the subjective job insecurity.

2.5 Responses

Job insecurity often leads to consequences that prompt responses from employees. When employment becomes uncertain, individuals typically feel apprehensive because they believe their resources to meet work needs are insufficient. This creates a challenge in controlling the threat; employees may discover strategies to manage and respond to job loss. According to the literature, these reactions can be behavioural or attitude-based efforts to manage specific demands (An et al., 2023). Employees' behavioural responses to possible job loss include increased absenteeism and job-seeking activity. Attitudinal responses, on the other hand, include employees' inner feelings and perspectives on the situation, which can be negative or positive (Callea et al., 2019; Hellgren et al., 1999). These responses reflect attempts to cope with or control demands and conflicts in order to reduce stress (Giunchi et al., 2019). Employees experiencing job uncertainty are encouraged to apply

problem-focused coping mechanisms, which include behaviours that directly address the stressor, such as active coping, planning, and seeking instrumental social support. In involves controlling negative emotions and cognitions related to the stressor, such as seeking emotional social support, reinterpretation, redefining, acceptance, or denial (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For individuals to overcome the effects of job insecurity, individuals must adopt coping strategies to manage stress and protect their psychological and physiological well-being (An et al., 2023).

2.6 Stress Theory

In this research, stress theory, as proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), will serve as the theoretical framework to elucidate the potential impacts of job insecurity on worker well-being. Stressors are elements within the environment that induce stress. The specific strain reactions that individuals experience as a result of these stressors can vary depending on how they perceive and manage these stressors (Mazzola et al., 2011). Stress theory proposes that job insecurity is perceived as a work-related stressor, leading to negative outcomes for workers, and it is considered one of the most significant stressors within organisations (Witte, 1999). The literature underscores that the source of anxiety, in addition to the actual loss of the job itself, is crucial, and as such, a growing body of research has delved into the detrimental effects of job insecurity on employees (Sora et al., 2010). Stress in the context of job insecurity involves emotional responses tied to concerns about the potential threat or uncertainty of future job losses (Muñoz Medina et al., 2022). Job insecurity places workers in a position of vulnerability, stemming from their limited ability to gather contextual information about the potential consequences of unemployment. The inherent uncertainty about the future makes it challenging to assess and select appropriate coping strategies to navigate this insecure situation (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). In the same way, employees exhibit emotional responses in reaction to the stress generated by this situation (Mazzola et al., 2011). These responses are, in part, influenced by how individuals cognitively assess the stressors, especially when considering outcomes such as employee well-being (Silla et al., 2009).

According to stress theory, job insecurity is perceived as a stressor. If the research reveals that employees experience the symptoms of heightened anxiety, depression, or emotional distress due to job insecurity, it can be explained as a response to the perceived stressor (Cox et al., 2000). Stress theory suggests that individuals employ various coping mechanisms to manage stressors. Coping has been viewed as a response to an emotion, particularly unpleasant emotions to deal with stress (Goel & Verma, 2021). If the findings indicate that employees engage in behaviours such as increased absenteeism, seeking social support, or engaging in unhealthy habits due to job insecurity, they can attribute these actions to coping strategies which is part of their experience.

2.7 Conservation of resources (COR) Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory by Hobfoll (1989) sheds light on the adverse effects of job insecurity on employee outcomes. According to the literature, when individuals face the prospect of resource loss or its actual loss, it triggers feelings of stress. In response, people strive to safeguard, preserve, and augment their resources, which encompass physical objects, personal attributes, energy, and various conditions (Cheng et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). Among these resources, employment is particularly significant. When employees sense the threat of losing their job-related resources, they may channel less energy into their current roles to avert further resource depletion,

given their uncertainty about the future. Simultaneously, they might engage in job-searching activities during work hours instead of focusing on their present duties (König et al., 2010). These coping behaviours suggest that employees experiencing job insecurity may be less engaged in their current jobs (Cheng et al., 2014).

Furthermore, in uncertain work environments characterised by downsizing and staff reductions, the remaining employees may face increased workloads (Hellgren et al., 1999). To safeguard their resources, such as maintaining their current job, some employees might choose to work overtime to surpass their employers' performance expectations. This response leaves them with less time and energy for their personal lives (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Moreover, concerns about future job security and household financial stability could reduce employees' confidence in fulfilling their roles as spouses or parents. This might lead to dissatisfaction in marital and family relationships (Cheng et al., 2014) and decreased energy levels at home. Consequently, the adverse effects of job insecurity may extend into the family domain (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). Although these cascading effects of job insecurity haven't been extensively studied, drawing upon the COR theoretical framework, the utilisation of SSIs this study has the potential to offer valuable insights into the personal experiences of individuals on how job insecurity has influenced their physical and mental well-being.

The COR theory emphases the loss of resources as a key aspect of stress (Cheng et al., 2014). If the findings reveal that job insecurity is linked to a perception of resource loss, such as financial security or opportunities for career growth, will help to align with the COR theory premise. As previously mentioned, in alignment with the COR theory, individuals allocate resources to protect against potential resource loss and enhance their resource pool. The existing literature indicates that when employees actively seek alternative job opportunities, dedicate additional time and effort to their current roles to mitigate further losses or take actions to secure their employment, these behaviours can be interpreted as efforts to maintain or acquire resources in response to perceived insecurity (Probst, 2000).

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted the multifaceted nature of job insecurity and its significant impact on employee well-being. While substantial research has explored job insecurity's effects on various psychological and physical health outcomes, as well as organisational consequences such as job satisfaction, commitment, and performance, there remains a notable gap in understanding its specific implications within the HE sector. The review has underscored the importance of distinguishing between quantitative and qualitative job insecurity, recognizing the subjective nature of these experiences and the critical role of individual perceptions and attitudes.

The limited body of qualitative research in this area presents an opportunity to delve deeper into the personal experiences of employees facing job insecurity, particularly within the context of the tertiary education sector. By focusing on the lived experiences of these employees, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing rich, empirical insights into how job insecurity influences well-being. Such an exploration is timely and relevant, especially in light of the ongoing financial challenges and restructuring efforts within New Zealand's higher education institutions.

This research will utilise stress theory and COR as theoretical frameworks to guide its investigation. By applying these frameworks, the study aims to address a critical gap in the literature and contribute both theoretically and empirically to the existing body of knowledge. Understanding the nuanced experiences of job insecurity among employees will provide valuable insights into improving and managing job insecurity within the higher education sector. This research is expected to offer practical recommendations for mitigating uncertainty and fostering a resilient and healthy workforce, especially given the significant challenges currently facing the higher education sector.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology for this study. As discussed, the research objective of this study is to explore how employees' lived experiences of job insecurity impact their well-being. To achieve this goal, the study examines the lived experiences of HE employees in New Zealand going through job insecurity and explores how these experiences relate to their perceived well-being. As explored in the previous chapters, job insecurity has a significant impact on an individual's mental and physical well-being, given that the threat of job loss is inherently stressful in nature. These issues are considered to have many negative outcomes for the workforce and organisation in the long run. While individuals deal with the uncertainty of job retention or the reality of job loss, literature shows that job insecurity has an adverse impact on employees' personal lives and overall well-being (De Witte et al., 2012). This exploratory study seeks to uncover how job insecurity has impacted the overall well-being of employees working in New Zealand's HE sector.

This study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of job insecurity and its profound effects on employee's well-being. This study utilises a qualitative approach rooted in the interpretive research tradition. The focus is on exploring the subjective experiences of employees, including their perceptions and emotions, in response to the research question: how do employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being?

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm, also known as a research tradition, refers to the theoretical or philosophical way in which the world is viewed and understood, guiding all aspects of research design. The term paradigm was initially used in the field of research to signify a philosophical way of thinking, and later in educational research, as a word used to characterise a researcher's worldview and their own interpretation of social reality (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). That is the lens through which a researcher views the world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Researchers are required to understand and articulate beliefs about the nature of reality, what can be known about it, and the methods to acquire such knowledge (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). A researcher's perspectives and thoughts about any studied subjects subsequently guide their actions, thereby shaping the investigative process and prescribing techniques for data collection and analysis (Kamal, 2019). For instance, research paradigms define a researcher's philosophical orientation, shaping how they approach their research and interpret the significance of their data in order to make sense of the world around them (Khatri, 2020). Moreover, each paradigm provides unique viewpoints on the nature of social reality and the most appropriate means for studying it, which are consistent with various research methodologies.

A paradigm consists of four elements: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Creswell, 2012; Khatri, 2020; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Importantly, the components of ontology and epistemology serve as the foundation pillars of research, similar to the footings of a home, laying the groundwork for the entire structure (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Research paradigms differ in their understanding of reality as objective or subjective, and their way of producing knowledge, which may be inductive or deductive (Uzun, 2016). A paradigm, then, has important implications for every

decision made in the research process; it is equally important to examine closely the philosophical underpinnings of epistemology and ontology that guide this current study (Kamal, 2019).

Ontology relates to the underlying nature of reality, and researchers hold assumptions about the nature of reality, how it exists, and what can be known (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Ontological assumptions can alter researchers' perspectives on the world or the substance of the social phenomenon under investigation, revealing whether that reality is relevant or real (Scotland, 2012). Researchers adopt a stance on their views of the true nature of things and how they function, as philosophical assumptions on reality profoundly guide them throughout the investigative process. These assumptions, concepts, or propositions help to guide the thinking that goes into choosing the type of research problem, formulating the research questions, determining the nature and types of reality and knowledge, selecting the methodology, and determining the value of the research work (Creswell, 2012; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Further, Bryman (2016) presents the notion of social ontology, which explores whether social reality is objective and exists independently of social actors or if it is subjective and socially constructed through those actors' perceptions, actions, and interpretations. This research is underpinned by a subjective ontological position.

Epistemology is concerned with the process of acquiring knowledge, understanding how we come to know reality, and determining what qualifies as knowledge within the world. This field of study focuses on the nature of human knowledge and comprehension that researchers can achieve in order to extend and deepen our understanding within the field of research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). An objective ontological position corresponds to a positivist epistemology, whereas a subjective ontological position corresponds to an interpretivist epistemology (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Positivism's ontology is realism, based on permanent natural laws that exist independent of the researcher. This lens guides researchers to see the world as observable and measurable (Golafshani, 2003). In research methodologies, objectivity implies minimising all sources of bias and eliminating as many personal and subjective notions as possible. Positivism aims to ensure objectivity throughout data collection and analysis, as well as replicability and validation of results (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

In contrast, interpretivism rejects the notion of a singular, verifiable reality that exists independently of the researcher. Instead, realities are viewed intersubjectively, implying that truth and reality are constructed, rather than discovered. Consequently, human beings differ from objects of natural science (Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to this lens, observers cannot perceive external reality without being influenced by their worldviews, concepts, and backgrounds (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). While positivism seeks to explain human behaviour through observation, identification, prediction, and measurement, interpretivism is driven by the desire to understand and interpret human behaviour, acknowledging that social reality is experienced, and constructed through personal experiences in the real world within the natural settings studied (Hussain, Elyas & Nasseef, 2013; Kamal, 2019; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Interpretivist research allows for multiple interpretations of social reality, aiming to ensure acceptance by others and data integrity through evidence consistency or data dependability (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). This research study is undertaken through an interpretivist lens.

Researchers who embrace a relative ontology acknowledge multiple realities within the studied context. These realities are explored and reconstructed through human interactions between the researcher and the participants. In subjective epistemology, meaning is derived from the data, through personal cognitive processing shaped by these interactions (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As the paradigm assumes that humans are inextricably linked to their knowledge, the researcher and participants collectively contribute to shaping reality and knowledge. These perspectives highlight how research and participants co-create understanding, reflecting their shared and individual interpretations of reality (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Consequently, such researchers aim to introduce a particular version of social reality and knowledge based on the continuing interpretations of participants, while acknowledging that these interpretations are always evolving and not independent of human experience (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Accordingly, in cases where several well-argued interpretations of a phenomenon existed, no single interpretation is selected or preferred as the correct one. Instead, the existence of multiple perspectives is acknowledged, recognising that different participants have unique experiences and bring diverse perspectives to the same subject of study (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

Two research methodologies can be used alone or in conjunction with one another; qualitative and quantitative. Both methodologies differ in numerous aspects, including philosophical foundations, the application of theory, sampling strategies, and research designs (Gill, 2020). These diverse orientations, methodologies, and assumptions influence the data collecting and strategies. While a quantitative researcher relies on statistical methodologies to determine the validity and dependability of their research findings, this study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, with the researcher developing and adopting procedures to assure the reliability of their investigation (de Gialdino, 2011; Noble & Smith, 2015). This research study is undertaken using a qualitative methodology.

Qualitative research seeks to investigate the complexities of social reality and is designed to study people's life experiences. This aligns with the goal of this study, which is to explore the lived experiences of employees facing job insecurity (Tuffour, 2017). Qualitative strategies employed in this research include ensuring consistency, transferability, confirmability, and applicability. The credibility of qualitative research is established by the degree to which the findings align with reality, which is to ensure interpretations of data are consistent and transparent (Noble & Smith, 2015). Further, Scotland (2012) highlights that qualitative research is considered acceptable when it provides comprehensive evidence and presents plausible and justifiable explanations, hence maintaining internal validity and credibility. Qualitative findings should be generalised and applied to other populations or situations, hence increasing external validity and transferability. The research process and findings should be replicated if other researchers can record the same data in the same manner and reach the same conclusion, ensuring reliability and dependability.

The nature of this study, which focused on exploring the lived experiences of participants, along with the researcher's interpretivist worldview influenced the choice of the research approach. As described in the following section, a qualitative phenomenological study was developed and conducted to offer insight into participants' lived experiences. Embracing the interpretivist paradigm and adopting a qualitative research approach, allowed the researcher to understand concepts such

as consistency, transferability, confirmability, and applicability, and has been applied to ensure the rigor and validity of this study.

3.3 Research Approach

3.3.1 Phenomenological Research

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to investigate job security and its impact on employee well-being within the HE sector. Phenomenology is recognised to be a suitable methodology for gaining insight into the essence or structure of lived human experiences and how things are perceived (Tuffour, 2017). This approach sought to unearth truth and understanding from the perspectives of the individuals being investigated, proving particularly valuable when a phenomenon of interest lacked definition or conceptualisation (Walker, 2007). This phenomenological research aimed to reveal the subjective insider meanings experienced by individuals. As such, it is consistent with the interpretivist worldview, which seeks to understand phenomena from the perspectives of the individuals themselves (Finlay, 2009).

Phenomenology is a research method that is dedicated to capturing the core of an individual's lived experience regarding a specific event or phenomenon, with job insecurity serving as the primary focus of this study (Mapp, 2008). By employing this method, the study sought to inquire into the subjective perceptions, lived experiences, and intricate meanings of job insecurity for employees (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research promoted collaborative researcher-participant relationships and open-ended dialogue in order to fully value the participants' perceptions of the phenomena. This necessitates the use of qualitative methods of data collection, which enabled the researcher to enter the informants' world and gain access to their lived experiences (Walker, 2007).

While the phenomenological approach was chosen as the most appropriate research method for this study and its inquiry, the researcher initially considered using a case study approach. However, upon careful consideration, it became clear that the concept of lived experiences resonated more closely with a phenomenological framework (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case study approach in similar ways is an empirical investigation into a phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are unclear. This approach carried out in a natural setting, sought to understand the nature of current processes in previously understudied areas (Andrade, 2009). While the case study method can help researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, they frequently focus on a single or a small number of cases, which the researcher did not consider sufficient to capture the diversity and breadth of experiences related to job insecurity in this sector. (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

Using a phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the lived experiences of individuals facing job insecurity. This method enabled the capture of rich data to better understand employees' unique experiences and perspectives, including the stressors they encountered, the impact on their well-being, and their responses to these challenges. This insight sets the foundation for the subsequent section on exploratory research design.

3.3.2 Exploratory Research Design

Interpretivism predominately adopts qualitative methodologies, as these approaches often provide deeper insights required for interpretivists to completely understand specific contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm is best suited to qualitative methods, as it depicts a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever-changing. Adopting qualitative ways to explore reality is consistent with this worldview (Thomas, 2003). As a result, the research design is defined to be a master plan, a sequence of research tasks, and activities performed by researchers to collect and analyse data (Mbaka & Isiramen, 2021).

According to Mbaka and Isiramen (2021), researchers often categorise research designs as either exploratory or conclusive. An exploratory study enriches the quality and value of research by intending to explore the research question, determine the nature of the problem, seek new insights, ask questions, and evaluate phenomena that have not been clearly defined, shedding new light on them. Both qualitative and exploratory research are used to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, experiences, attitudes, intentions, and motivations. Based on observation and interpretation, these approaches allow the researcher to put oneself in the position of the participants to understand how they see the world, think and feel from their perspectives (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Fundamentally, this research approach allows researchers to place greater weight on the perspectives of the participants. This corresponds well with the intention of this study, which is to explore the lived experiences of job insecurity and its effects on employee well-being.

3.3.3 Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is a methodological inquiry designed to enlighten meanings that are less perceptible (Tuffour, 2017). It is inductive and focuses on exploring 'what,' 'why,' and 'how' questions, unlike quantitative studies that prioritise 'how much' and 'how many.' Additionally, qualitative research aims to learn interior perspectives directly from participants. It is therefore emic and idiographic. The research questions dictate the data collection strategy. As a result, the researcher considered using tools such as focus groups and in-depth interviews. These qualitative methods are employed in natural settings to collect textual, vocal, or visual data for detailed description and interpretation (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This approach proves particularly useful when it helps researchers develop knowledge of unfamiliar, intricate, and undefined phenomena and problems that lack clear definitions (Fossey et al., 2002). Using a qualitative approach, researchers are able to construct a holistic picture, analyse words, report participant data, and conduct the study in a natural environment.

Researchers undertaking qualitative studies seek to observe and interpret people’s perceptions of diverse situations and events, obtaining a snapshot of these perceptions in their natural setting (Khan, 2014). In particular, qualitative content analysis employs a range of techniques to analyse textual material in order to elucidate themes within the data, A key feature of qualitative research is the systematic process of coding, which entails assessing the meaning within the text, and assigning themes to the data, it helps to develop a description to exhibit aspects of social reality (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Therefore, the qualitative approach is important for researchers to gain a thorough understanding of complex issues in detail and in-depth, as it enables the capture of powerful and compelling data based on human experiences (Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, this approach also

allows for the inclusion of multiple perspectives from various employees within the research scope, increasing flexibility to change and transcending the limitations of both inductive and deductive approaches (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

This research investigates the perspectives of employees within the higher education sector, to identify themes and concepts using an exploratory qualitative approach. Using this method the study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts of job insecurity on employees' perceived well-being in the HE sector in New Zealand.

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Data Collection

Research methods are the tools, procedures, or instruments used to collect data and answer research questions. Many aspects of qualitative research influence the researcher's preference for selecting the method, including the researcher's worldview and thoughts on their research process as part of knowledge production (Milena et al., 2008). Qualitative research often incorporates a variety of approaches depending on the study paradigm and approach. These methods include ethnography or participant observation, qualitative interviewing, focus groups, and language-based approaches such as discourse analysis, with focus groups and in-depth interviews being the most used data collection techniques (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Milena et al., 2008). An in-depth interview resembles a conversation, but its approach is intended to elicit deep insights from the participant's perspective. The method is utilised to collect detailed information that sheds light on an individual's viewpoint and perceived meaning of a particular phenomenon (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020).

This study collected data through qualitative interviews. This technique is particularly suitable for interpretive research that seeks to explore the nuanced meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Noble & Smith, 2015). In-depth interviews are an effective way to encourage participants to express their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences; they are a valuable qualitative method for eliciting personal insights and experiences, resulting in rich data on how individuals interpret and understand their world. The stories of participants provide the researcher with access to their lived experiences, emotions, and social contexts (Fossey et al., 2002). In-depth interviews, unlike focus groups, surveys, or informal interviews, allowed the researcher to delve further into individuals' knowledge and experiences.

As such, in order to investigate the impacts of job insecurity on employees' perceived well-being, the purpose of this study was to collect in-depth data on participants' personal feelings, opinions, and experiences with job insecurity. Interviews are an appropriate way to acquire in-depth data for further conceptual development and analysis. These interviews allow the researcher to understand how individuals interpret and navigate their world, with the researcher retentively listening to their narratives and interpretations (Gubrium et al., 2012).

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

This study employed SSIs to facilitate a better understanding of each participant's unique perspective rather than a generalised understanding of the phenomenon. SSIs are commonly utilised in qualitative and interpretive research. The rationale for their use stems from the belief that an open-

ended interview allows interviewees to express themselves more freely than a structured interview or questionnaire. An advantage, of SSIs is that they allow interviews to focus on a certain topic while also providing flexibility for the researcher to explore pertinent ideas that may arise during the interview process (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). In SSIs, the researcher prepares an interview guide organised in a tentative order, generally including a list of questions and prompts tailored to address the research questions. The interview guides keep the interview focused but flexible and conversational (Adams, 2015; Fossey et al., 2002). SSIs are adaptable, allowing new questions to be included after hearing interviewees' responses during the interview process, whereas structured interviews adhere to a predefined list of questions and have limited flexibility.

Furthermore, the interview is conversational and interactive between interviewer and interviewee, allowing for variations from one interview to another based on individual discussions and the organic flow of conversation (Naz et al., 2022). The traditional study design for an SSI begins with the researcher introducing the research topic to warm up, build rapport, and emphasise the purpose and confidentiality of the interview, followed by a background information sheet for the participants to complete and establish demographic details. This phase contributed to ensuring that there is context about the participant and their professional experience when analysing and comparing data in the data analysis stage. After establishing demographics, three main sets of questions came next which made up the body of the interview. An SSI allows the researcher to delve into the questions that cover the main topics of the study, offering a structure to guide the interviewees in answering the research question (Fossey et al., 2002). Subsequently, rather than being read verbatim, the guide provided structure and focus to the natural flow of conversation during each interview. As the aim was to draw subjective input from participants, the guide included primarily open-ended questions with follow-up probe questions.

Open-ended questions are more effective in revealing empirical data, and they allow the interviewer to navigate the conversation and interviewees to verbally express themselves (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Banha et al., 2022). Although initial responses may be cursory, the interviewee was probed to a deeper level to gain a better understanding of their values, views, and experiences, among other things (Naz et al., 2022). Indeed, the versatile structure and ability to adapt have made SSIs a popular approach for data collection, especially given their suitability for both individuals and focused groups (Kallio et al., 2016). During the SSI process, planned questions derived from the literature review were asked, but unplanned questions arose regularly, adding depth to the range of data collected.

3.4.3 Interview Guide

During the literature review, the stressors of job uncertainty, employees' well-being, and employees' personal responses emerged as key topics among previous studies related to the impacts of job insecurity on employee well-being. These concepts helped establish research sub-questions and organise the structure of the SSIs. The researcher developed interview questions using knowledge from each of these topics while remaining flexible to accommodate any new information (Naz et al., 2022). The arrangement of the interview questions was customised to each participant's response, striking a balance between structure and openness. This method enabled the new questions to be incorporated as needed based on the interviewee's responses (Aung et al., 2021). Participants were free to ask for clarifications, and the researcher made sure to provide examples where necessary.

Probes were also used under certain questions to obtain additional information, ensuring a thorough comprehension of the topics (Al Balushi, 2016; Ayres, 2007). Using an interview guide (see Appendix A for details) comprised of questions designed to encourage interviewees to reflect and share their perspectives and experiences that are similar and comparable. The questions were focused on unveiling the impact of job insecurity on their perceived well-being, but also leaving room for new questions depending on the interviewee's responses during the interview process (Naz et al., 2022). Therefore, the interview guide was structured around three overarching themes originally derived from the existing literature on job insecurity and designed to address the research sub-questions.

3.4.4 Sampling

Sampling, including sample size and sampling designs, is critical in qualitative research. These considerations assist qualitative researchers in determining the most appropriate sample sizes and types of designs that align with their research objectives (Omona, 2013). Qualitative research does not adhere to rigid sampling procedures like quantitative research. In qualitative research, sample selection has a major impact on overall research quality (Coyne 1997). Creating a flexible and thorough sampling plan is the first step in ensuring that participants have the ability to express themselves. Such a method also encourages participant-driven data over researcher-driven data (Milne & Oberle, 2005). Purposeful sampling is widely employed in exploratory studies to locate and select information relevant to the phenomenon of interest, particularly when knowledge is limited. This method is intended to lay the groundwork for future research, as it is consistent with the goals of this study, which are to better understand the impacts of job insecurity on employees' perceived well-being (Douglas, 2022; Palinkas et al., 2015). As a result, purposeful sampling was selected as the primary sample method based on the research objectives, rather than probability or random sampling (Douglas, 2022).

Purposive sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups with extraordinary knowledge or experience regarding the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). In addition, Bernard (2002) notes the significance of availability, willingness to participate, and the ability to convey experiences and viewpoints in a clear, expressive, and reflective manner. In contrast, probabilistic or random sampling seeks to ensure the generalisability of findings by minimising selection bias and controlling for known and unknown confounders. However, these approaches are not suitable for this study, where the goal is to gain in-depth insights into unique experiences and perspectives related to job insecurity. Therefore, purposeful sampling emerged as the most appropriate sampling method for this study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Moreover, purposive sampling allows the researcher to collect only the data necessary for their investigation. This is crucial, considering that analysing qualitative data often takes more time than analysing quantitative data. Establishing criteria for inclusion and exclusion, along with limits on the number of participants, has helped to minimise the volume of data to be analysed. As a result, the resources required to complete a high-quality study are reduced (Douglas, 2022).

The initial sample selection criteria for this study included:

1. Currently employed in a HE institution in New Zealand.
2. Have experienced job insecurity, either through receiving a letter of confirmed job loss or perceiving a potential job loss.
3. Have been impacted by job insecurity, either positively or negatively.

As the interview process began, it became clear that recruiting employees through purposeful sampling was difficult due to the sensitive nature of job loss information inside organisations and individuals. In qualitative research, researchers often employ several sampling methods in their investigations. For this study, the researcher employed snowball sampling to gather more willing and available participants (Gill, 2020). Snowball sampling has grown in favour of an effective method for recruiting study participants, particularly when striving to target hard-to-find or difficult-to-access populations (Parker et al., 2019). As described by Noy (2008), snowball sampling is a method in which researchers identify potential participants through referrals from current participants.

This iterative process is based on informants referring the researcher to others, who then introduce the researcher to more informants, resulting in a cascading effect similar to the progressive build-up of snow in a snowball. The literature also defines snowballing, as a type of vertical or deep social networking that often starts with a small number of initial contacts (Noy, 2008). From these connections, researchers establish links with other potential participants, gradually building sampling momentum and increasing the sample size resembling the accumulation of snow into a ball (Geddes et al., 2018). Importantly, snowball sampling can be used as a major method of obtaining informants or as a supplementary strategy to improve sampling clusters and reach new participants and social groups, particularly when traditional contact avenues have proven ineffective. In this study, a dual combination of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling has been beneficial to the researcher (Noy, 2008).

In qualitative research, sample size is typically determined by data saturation, which occurs when no new information is obtained from interviews. While there are no strict guidelines for establishing sample size, researchers must recruit enough participants to generate sufficient quality data to understand the phenomenon of interest (Gill, 2020). Determining data saturation is a subjective process, and often difficult to identify with certainty that no new insights would emerge from additional interviews. However, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) suggest that data saturation often occurs between the 9th and 17th interviews, with an average around the 13th interview. In this study, the pre-defined sample size was between 15 to 18, and the researcher concluded data collection after the 17th interview, having reached the upper end of this range.

3.4.5 Data Collection

Using purposeful sampling, and referring to the set criteria, the researcher collected relevant contact information of sample employees gathered from the public websites of HE institutions in New Zealand. For this research, multiple higher education institutions were targeted to gather a wide range of perspectives within the sector, including both universities and polytechnic institutions.

A written email was sent inviting employees who were suffering from job insecurity due to either actual or perceived job loss to participate in the SSIs. In accordance with the ethics procedure outlined in section 3.7 Ethics, a formal email with the information sheet (see Appendix B) detailing the purpose, ethics, and goals of the research, as well as a consent form, was sent to employees inviting them to participate in the research. Managers and department email addresses gathered from the institutions' websites, were asked to forward the email to their respective teams. To confirm the eligibility of the participants, the researcher ensured the participants were employed by

a higher education institution, and experienced perceived or confirmed job loss. The researcher ensured that communication was maintained and that a suitable time to conduct the interview was set aside for individuals who responded with a keen interest in participating.

3.4.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study is a small-scale methodological trial undertaken before the main study to evaluate the feasibility and allow the researcher to practice and refine the methodology. It provides an opportunity for researchers to test methods and ideas, identify potential issues and make necessary changes before initiating the full-scale study (Kim, 2011). Pilot studies are often associated with quantitative research to test a particular instrument, but they are equally important in qualitative research. They serve as a preliminary step for the main study, ensuring the viability and development of the methodology, regardless of the paradigm used (Majid et al., 2017).

A pilot study allows researchers to develop or refine a research question, determine the best methods for pursuing it, and receive valuable feedback from the pilot participants to refine and adjust before proceeding with the final study (Ismail et al., 2018). In particular, for SSIs, researchers can test their questions with participants to identify any problems or limitations in the interview design. This enables them to make required changes if problems develop (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). According to Harding (2013), completing a pilot study is imperative for interviews as it helps reduce flawed data. Piloting the interview questions allows researchers to make any necessary adjustments to the interview guide before starting the main study.

As a result, the researcher conducted a pilot study and interviewed a participant using the initial interview guide. The pilot participant was selected as someone who works in a similar role as the intended participants and is familiar with the background of job insecurity in New Zealand's HE sector. They were available for a face-to-face interview, which allowed for feedback data collection methods. After completing the pilot interview, the researcher acknowledged the weaknesses and limitations and asked the participants for their input. The insights from this pilot study were gathered to develop the interview guide (Turner III, 2010). During this process, several interview questions were rephrased for clarity, new questions were added, and sections were modified to improve the interview's clarity and flow. The final interview guide was evaluated with the pilot participant and the researcher's supervisors before the full-scale investigation began.

3.4.7 Interview Procedure

The main full-scale study was conducted utilising both face-to-face interviews and online Zoom meetings. Given that the researcher's sample population was spread around New Zealand, it was made appropriate to offer these two options for practicality. The researcher offered face-to-face interviews to local participants, which appeared to be the preferred option, while Zoom meetings were used for those located in other towns. Face-to-face interviews have traditionally been the major method for collecting data in qualitative research (Opdenakker, 2006). The benefits of face-to-face interviewing include direct interaction between interviewer and interviewee with no delays. The researcher could easily observe body language, facial emotions, intonation, and other nonverbal social signals (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Social cues provide the interviewer with additional information that can enrich the verbal responses of the interviewee, which assists in the

contextualisation of the data gathered (Irvine et al., 2013). Importantly, a physical meeting can increase the likelihood of creating a safe and comfortable environment for interviews. However, the value of these traits varies depending on the purpose and research question. In this study, job insecurity can be a personal topic, thus face-to-face interviews help create a safe environment and comfortable atmosphere for participants (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021).

However, given many participants in the study are geographically distributed around New Zealand and may be unable or unwilling to travel, depending solely on face-to-face interviews was impractical. To address this issue and assure time and cost feasibility, Zoom meetings were utilised as a cost-effective and easy alternative when face-to-face interviews were not possible (Gray et al., 2020). Accordingly, Zoom interviews have made the study population more accessible, as participants could join from anywhere, regardless of their location. This eliminated the need to consider factors such as travel and distance, offering researchers more flexibility and convenience while conducting interviews (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021).

Once suitable participants were identified, invitations were emailed to them, together with an information sheet (see Appendix B) detailing the nature of the research and a consent form (see Appendix C). Those who responded with interest were given an interview schedule to select a time slot. They were informed that each interview would last approximately 30-40 minutes, not more than an hour. Participants were assured that the study was entirely student-driven, confidential, and would not be shared with their institution. The initial email conversation provided an opportunity for the participants to ask questions or express any concerns they may have. Before scheduling the interview, they completed and submitted the consent form, which described their rights as participants.

Before starting the interviews, the researcher ensured that the recording equipment was set up and ready to use. During the interviews, the researcher followed the interview guide closely (see Appendix A for details). The interview started with an introduction to the study, a reminder of their rights as a participant, which served as the basis for the interviews. Following the introduction, the participants were given a background information sheet for completion (see Appendix) to gather demographic information, after which the researcher proceeded to ask the first set of questions. Using the interview guide, participants were asked to articulate their perceptions of the stressors linked to job insecurity, share personal experiences of how these stressors affect their well-being, and discuss strategies they employ to cope with these impacts. This approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of how job insecurity impacted the perceived well-being of employees providing rich qualitative data for analysis.

Between questions, the researcher used prompts to steer the conversation, prioritising open-ended probes. The researcher frequently asked 'wh' questions—who, what, when, where, why, and how—particularly focused on 'how' and 'why' questions when interviewees highlighted the hardships and problems, they encountered due to job insecurity (Raworth et al., 2012). For short answers, such as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers, the researcher asked participants to clarify or explain their reasoning, depending on the context. These questions facilitated a more in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, which are detailed in Chapters 4 and 5. Following each interview,

participants were asked if they could recommend any potential participants, internal or external, who may be interested in participating in this study.

Although the researcher verified participants' suitability via email correspondence and encouraged more descriptive answers during the interviews by asking for explanations when short answers were given, two participants were ultimately deemed to be invalid for the study. One participant had not experienced job insecurity, and the other continued to deliver short answers without touching on the topic, despite the researcher's attempts to prompt more detailed responses. Consequently, both interviews were excluded from the dataset, the final dataset included 17 valid interviews.

3.4.8 Transcription

According to Stuckey (2014), after completing the interviews, the recordings are transcribed into textual form to allow for extensive analysis and analytic coding. This transfer of dynamic, context-specific oral language into written language is critical for data organisation and reliable recall during analysis. Written language can be systematically managed—sorted, copied, examined, assessed, and quoted— which allows for a full assessment of interview material (Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

The researcher used Riverside, an AI-powered transcribing software, to assist with transcription. To ensure accuracy, interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after they were completed, as hearing the conversation while it is still fresh in memory facilitates the transcription process (Longhurst, 2003). After transcription, the transcripts were sent back to participants for verification as promised by the researcher, which helped to strengthen the rigour of qualitative research (Enworo, 2023). Following member checking the transcripts were processed for systematic data analysis, as discussed in the subsequent section.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, with the exclusion and omission of word fillers, such as "um" or "ah". Fillers are words that participants use to fill in blank spaces as they pause to think. Transcribing these fillers adds no value to most analytic qualitative methodologies, except narrative analysis, hence they should be avoided. The content of the data takes priority, and the transcription process needs to focus on accuracy without unnecessary interruptions. Therefore, the research eliminated such fillers to reduce distractions, impose clarity, and maintain focus on the data content (Stuckey 2014).

3.4.9 Thematic Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis involves arranging and evaluating interview transcripts systematically to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon. This process is about interpreting large volumes of data by identifying significant patterns, deriving meaning through themes, and building a logical chain of evidence to comprehend the relationship between the data and the research problem (Wong, 2008).

Thematic analysis is a widely used data analysis technique in qualitative research for "identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). While thematic analysis is primarily concerned with data description, it also incorporates interpretation through processes such as selecting codes and constructing themes to understand the dataset. This method is imperative for

learning about the experiences, thoughts, or behaviours of individuals experiencing job insecurity (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Thematic analysis is noted for its flexible and accessible approach to exploring data in a rich, thorough, and complex manner, making it particularly useful for novice researchers (Nowell et al., 2017). It is beneficial for examining the “perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). This method is well-suited to the purpose of this study since it allows for the analysis and comparison of different employee perspectives in order to better understand the relatively unknown interplay between job insecurity and well-being. Furthermore, thematic analysis is specifically well-suited to the interpretivism paradigm since it allows for the systematic investigation of a wide range of data to illustrate how certain social constructs emerge (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The researcher then applied thematic analysis to examine each interview transcription line by line and paragraph by paragraph, revealing hidden and deep themes within the data that will be presented in subsequent chapters (Parker & Roffey 1997).

This study takes a systematic, grounded theory approach focused on conceptual thinking and theory development rather than empirical testing of the theories (Khan, 2014). According to Parker and Roffey (1997), a grounded theory approach seeks to organise emerging data analysis through a systematic examination of the interviews that includes many rounds of coding and data comparison. The analytical procedures for data coding and analysis follow the constant comparison method. Each observed event is compared to others to identify similarities and differences. This continuous comparison approach aids in uncovering and explaining patterns and variations (Bitsch, 2005)

Using a grounded theory approach, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the resulting findings are all reciprocally related. Rather than starting with a theory to verify, researchers begin with an area worth of study and allow relevant theoretical constructs to emerge from the data. In most cases, the findings and results are complex and formulated through iterative data analysis, which includes developing themes, and analysing their relationships in order to generate an explanation based on the obtained data (Parker & Roffey 1997). These processes allow the researcher to be attuned to nuances during the data analysis process. This ongoing re-examination and coding in response to new emerging data and analysis is a feature of grounded theory (Pozzebon et al., 2011). The following sections provide a detailed explanation of each step used for this study.

3.4.10 Coding

The iterative coding method consisted of three primary rounds of coding, which provided the researcher with several themes to work with, followed by three further iterations to refine the final set of themes, which occurred during data analysis. Coding is an essential component of qualitative research. It lays the groundwork for the analytical process, allowing researchers to break down the body of data in front of them, study its constituents, and then reassemble it in a meaningful way (Eliott, 2018). According to Creswell (2015, p. 152), "text data are dense data, and it takes a long time to go through them and make sense of them". Coding addresses this challenge simply by indexing or mapping data, to provide an overview of disparate data, enabling the researcher to make sense of them in relation to the research questions. Another way to define coding is to look for patterns in the interview transcripts, and tag data that is relevant to recurring themes, such as identifying all

occasions in an interview where a participant addresses a particular research question and assigning a corresponding code (Elliott, 2018).

The process of assigning codes to data allows for the interpretation of large segments of text and information in new and meaningful ways. It is evaluating how these segments are connected leads to the identification of themes (Belotto, 2018). As a result, the thematic analysis focuses on identifying themes that emerge from the data and are crucial in characterising the phenomenon. A theme is a recurrent pattern of data that emphasises commonalities, interprets aspects of the phenomena, and represents similar codes or categories (Elliott, 2018). The coding process requires ongoing re-examination of data to find these themes. This approach involves identifying patterns in the data, with the themes that emerge serving as analytical categories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The success of any research effort is determined by accurate data analysis and the development of valid information. One of the first processes, coding, allows the researcher to interpret the acquired data, serving as a bridge between data collection and more in-depth data analysis (Khokhar et al., 2020). The coding process includes identifying and encoding key phrases to capture the qualitative richness of the phenomenon. This organisation of data helps in the identification and development of themes. Despite being lengthy and producing several codes, the method requires continuous assessment to prevent overlap and redundancy. Over time, the codes are consolidated into themes, which serve as the main headings in Chapter 4, the findings section (Creswell, 2015). While there is caution against generating too many codes, some authors believe that repetition can reveal major patterns. Though several codes may exist, their significance to the data may not be immediately evident. Repeated observations could signify an emergent pattern, and hence potential research findings. However, in the early stages of analysis, such repetition may imply that the codes are too broad and lack detail. This necessitates refining or subdividing the codes into sub-codes for more detailed analysis (Elliott, 2018).

As part of the grounded theory approach, a three-step coding process is employed: open, axial, and selective coding (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). These coding techniques aid in constructing a deeper theoretical understanding of the collected data. Importantly, the open, axial, and selective coding strategy allows for a cyclical and dynamic data loop in which the researcher engages, continuously compares data, and applies data reduction and consolidation strategies (Williams & Moser, 2019). Open coding begins the coding process by breaking up the data into smaller segments in which concepts can be identified and thoroughly analysed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is an analytic method used in qualitative data analysis, where the researcher identifies and categorises concepts related to the observed data and phenomenon, hence investigating various concepts and themes for classification (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022).

Open coding is known for its emphasis on conceptualisation and categorisation of phenomena through a comprehensive examination of the data (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). The purpose of open coding is to capture the main idea of each part and develop the best code to represent it by constantly comparing collected data for similarities (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019; Noble & Mitchell, 2016). Axial coding, the second phase of qualitative data analysis, explores the relationships between concepts and categories generated in the open coding process (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Axial coding aims to uncover and establish links between primary categories and

subcategories, which may show significant relationships (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). Finally, selective coding entails integrating and validating the categories developed during axial coding into a cohesive theory. This phase involves expanding and integrating the results from axial coding to identify emergent themes at a more abstract level (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019; Noble & Mitchell, 2016).

The researcher adhered to a three-step coding process, conducting at least two rounds of each step to ensure that the themes accurately reflected broader patterns. During open coding, the 17 transcripts were thoroughly analyzed line by line and paragraph by paragraph to uncover the main ideas (Parker & Roffey, 1997). This process resulted in 640 references allocated to the initial 106 codes. Examples include stressors, the domino effect, changes to internal and external relationships, mental and psychological well-being, physical well-being, over-commitment, regrets, and low opportunities. During axial coding, the researcher analysed all codes relevant to the research question, identifying relationships and structures between them. Through iterative analysis and continual data verification, the themes were refined by merging similar codes to generate broader themes that better reflect the data (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). At this point, the codes were divided into 8 main themes and 15 sub-themes, with 407 references allocated to these codes. Finally, in selective coding, the researcher integrated and validated the themes by carefully examining the research question and sub-research questions, which aided in refining the final themes. Through the iterative coding process, the final refined set of codes included 3 main themes and 12 sub-themes. These themes were then defined and explained further in the findings and discussion chapters.

3.4.11 Continuous Comparison

It is important to note that the coding process continued throughout the data analysis. Iterative rounds of coding were carried out, with data being re-examined and re-coded. The researcher examined codes for similarities and differences, identifying connections and further integrating them, resulting in the final themes and sub-themes presented in the findings and discussion chapters. Throughout the process, the researcher kept asking fundamental questions such as "what is this?" and "what does this mean?" This inquiry enabled the researcher to maintain curiosity while effectively contextualising emerging answers (Pozzebon et al., 2011). This iterative process involved comparing data and codes through a series of coding steps, leading to frequent renaming, and reorganisation of codes and categories. The final versions of the codes reflect the researcher's efforts to capture the substance of their content and effectively convey its meaning (Elliott, 2018).

3.4.12 Memo Writing

An integral part of the coding stage is creating memos concurrently when assigning codes. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), memos are unique written notes that help to track the analytical process. They capture creative thoughts, demonstrating the evolution of analysis and giving the researcher an analytical perspective. Memos are mostly used to record ideas or reflections while coding, allowing for the examination of data parallels and differences (Stuckey, 2014). The grounded theory approach's central rule is to write theoretical notes. Failure to record written notes and proceed directly to organising or writing up after coding, means the researcher is not adhering to the principles of grounded theory (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019)

Acknowledging the significance of memos in tracking the analysis process, the researcher meticulously documented memos about the transcripts, codes, categories, themes, and their connections to the research questions. Digital memos were recorded and stored in NVivo software and the Notes application on the researcher's laptop. Examples of some of these comments include: "This comment indicates depression and anxiety," "Differences between precarious employees on fixed-term contracts and those undergoing restructuring," "Migrants and immigrants find it harder to secure employment," and "Women, especially with families, are more prone to job insecurity." These memos were further reviewed to generate ideas and comments for the findings and discussion chapters.

Recognising the importance of memos in tracking the analytic process, the researcher meticulously wrote memos about the transcripts, codes, themes, and their relevance to the research questions. Quotes that seemed interesting but did not appear to relate to an obvious code were accompanied by a memo reminding the researcher to return to it later once codes have been refined. Digital memos were recorded and saved on the researcher's laptop using NVivo software and the Notes app. Some examples of these statements are: "This comment indicates depression and anxiety," "Differences between precarious employees on fixed-term contracts and those undergoing restructuring," "Migrants and immigrants find it harder to secure employment," or "Women, especially with families, are more prone to job insecurity." These memos were also written to generate suggestions and comments for the results and discussion sections.

3.4.13 NVivo

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) has become increasingly popular for supporting data analysis processes in qualitative research in various methodological fields, including grounded theory (Dhakal, 2022). NVivo, a program within the CAQDAS packages, offers advanced querying functions, and robust tools for data and coding comparison, facilitating thematic analysis (Olapane, 2021). CAQDAS packages often include features such as content searching, linking, coding, query, writing and annotation, mapping, or networking. These tools help to support the creation of an efficient data management system allowing managers to organise large volumes of unstructured data. This systematic organisational is imperative for tracking, accessing, and documenting data, including the analyses that are part of it (Carcary, 2011). This structured approach helps transform research evidence into the final research output as opposed to a disorganised and anecdotal approach to data analysis (Silverman, 2004). Additionally, CAQDAS enhances the transparency of the analysis process by effectively documenting the researcher's thoughts and interpretations, making the logic behind their conclusions traceable. As a result, a rapid and rigorous qualitative data analysis can be achieved (Carcary, 2011).

It is important to select a CAQDAS program where functions are compatible with the research needs, approach, and nature of data (O'Kane, 2020). Firstly, the researcher noted that the study involved textual data from 17 interviews, which necessitated storage and management
for flexible, and efficient coding and retrieval (Bazeley & Jackson, 2019). Secondly, effective memo and annotation functions were beneficial for data analysis. Thirdly, the exploratory-abductive nature of the study required the researcher to be linked with empirical data. All the software chosen needs to facilitate the grounded-theory approach which are the techniques mentioned, open coding,

writing memos, and axial coding. As a result of these considerations, NVivo 2020 was selected as the preferred choice for this investigation. (O'Kane, 2020).

NVivo version 2020, a type of CAQDAS, has emerged as a powerful tool for managing large datasets and extracting valuable insights from textual documents (Dhakal, 2022). The strength of NVivo is based on its high compatibility with qualitative research designs and data analysis methods such as grounded theory (Zamawe, 2015). Moreover, its comprehensive features, and user-friendliness, enrich the processes of managing, analysing, theorising, visualising, and interpreting qualitative data systematically and individually. It also offers code-based inquiries, annotation, and document editing capabilities, enabling researchers to explore complex phenomena in greater depth and uncover meaningful patterns and connections of their subjects of study (Dhakal, 2022; Kraiwanit et al., 2023). The software's capability allows for easy, effective, and efficient coding, resulting in better data retrieval and storage. Although it can be challenging to use at times, it significantly enhances the robustness of qualitative research. As it has proven to be an effective software program, this study used NVivo for analysing data (Dhakal, 2022). Fundamentally, the data can be critically evaluated using NVivo's tools, which can then be linked to the development of a conceptual framework from raw codes.

Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of using NVivo so that researchers understand what the software can and cannot do. Bazeley and Jackson (2019) emphasise the potential disconnects between the researcher and the data that can occur when relying too heavily on automatic analysis, which can lead to inadequate data interpretation. Despite the software's significant features, the main analytical work is still done outside of it, with the researcher remaining the key instrument for analysis. Overestimating software capabilities is risky since computers cannot perform independent rational processes or replace the analyst's interpretative skills (Altmann, 2013). Therefore, researchers need to be mindful of these limitations and proceed with caution when utilising the program. They are in control of the research, which involves understanding the data, applying codes and categories, making connections, and conducting the analysis.

3.4.14 NVivo Data Analysis Process

The following phases have been the methodological process undertaken by the researcher in thematising the gathered data using NVivo to derive relevant codes for understanding the data:

Phase 1: Familiarising with the data

Once interviews have been transcribed with the assistance of Riverside, the transcripts were imported into NVivo for the initial review. To understand the content of the data and identify relevant concepts, the researcher had to read and re-read the data. Immersing oneself in the data allowed the researcher to actively seek out meanings and patterns. New insights may emerge with each read; thus, it is important to revisit the transcripts regularly to become thoroughly familiar with their content (Belotto, 2018). During this stage, notable quotes were highlighted, and memos were written to capture thoughts and insights, needed for the next phase of generating codes (Zamawe, 2015).

Phase 2: Initial Coding

After reviewing the data and developing early ideas, the researcher began the first round of open coding. This phase involved organising the data into meaningful themes. According to Bazeley and Jackson (2019), coding in qualitative research is a dynamic and iterative process that goes beyond the surface level of systematically assigning labels to segments of data. It requires continuous review and reflection as part of the overall integration of analytical processes in the study. Conversely, a major error to avoid is strictly pushing through codes; instead, expect valuable insights to emerge spontaneously during the process. A more nuanced approach requires striking a balance between identifying fine-grained themes (splitters) and recognising wider patterns (lumpers).

Coding is defined to be segments of data that are labelled with categories or words to form appropriate groups of related data together (Altmann, 2013). This study used the open, axial, and selective coding in order to map concepts and produce themes (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). This iterative process is described as comparable to sorting laundry; it sorts codes to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2019). The initial round of open coding is a technique that organises raw data into structured, meaningful categories that facilitate deeper analysis. It involved reading data repeatedly, enabling new insights to arise, and coding them appropriately. Examples of some initial codes in addition to the those mentioned in section 3.4.1 Coding, include responses to job insecurity, a mind shift set, ways employees internalise job insecurity, workplace setting, interpersonal dynamics in the workplace, and strain on support resources.

Phase 3: Identifying Themes

Additional rounds of coding were undertaken, once all 17 transcripts of data had been coded and collated. The process of conducting multiple rounds allowed the researcher to refine the codes and ensure themes accurately reflected the dataset to answer the research questions. The researcher then proceeded to axial coding, which involves refining codes and identifying themes. This phase emphasised putting the codes in context with each one another to identify broader themes to better reflect the collected data, rather than focusing on distinctive and unique codes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Interview extracts that had been coded were analysed again for common themes based on frequency and significance, with irrelevant data discarded.

The initial codes identified in phase two were revised and organised into greater themes that correspond to the research question and sub-questions, and the theories discussed in the literature review regarding the impacts of job insecurity. Examples of some main themes in axial coding include the domino effect, effects on mental well-being, and effects on physical well-being, navigating job insecurity, stressors, struggles of the managerial class, and underemployment and job dissatisfaction. In this phase, themes were further divided into sub-themes. A few examples of sub-themes are effects on job motivation, low self-esteem and loss of identity, emotional strain, navigating depression and anxiety, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, worsening health conditions, and attachment to the job. These themes were developed by recognising patterns within the codes and integrating similar ones to build a complete picture of what was portrayed (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

As interview extracts began to come together with broader codes, stronger themes that captured the overall data emerged. For example, ‘maintaining a healthy lifestyle’ and ‘worsening health conditions’ were merged to form a broader theme of ‘physical health’ and this is a sub-theme that

sits under the main theme effects on well-being. Another example, 'low self-esteem and loss of identity', 'emotional strain,' and 'navigating depression and anxiety' were merged to form a broader theme of 'mental health' as another sub-theme of well-being. A thematic map generated from data analysis highlighted overarching themes and their sub-themes, providing a more organised structure and structured foundation for deeper analysis.

Phase 5: Finalising Themes

Once the main themes and sub-themes were identified, the researcher revisited the data with fresh eyes and the refined the codes using selective coding. It was important to subject the themes through another round of analysis to build the narrative and ensure coherence with the data, while minimising overlap among the identified themes. The themes were evaluated in accordance with the research question and sub-questions, guided by the literature. When overlaps were discovered, similar themes and sub-themes were merged in NVivo to maintain clarity and consistency, and their names were adjusted to improve clarity and articulation, aligning them more closely to the data and addressing the research questions. Themes that initially appeared intriguing but did not substantively help address the research question and sub-research questions, such as the importance of communication, struggles of the managerial class, and changes in internal and external relationships, were removed. Additionally, several themes were reorganised to better fit under different main themes, ensuring a more coherent and effective analysis. The final main themes include stressors, effects on well-being, and behavioural and attitudinal responses. Under the umbrella of these themes are sub-themes that share the same central organising concept but focus on specific aspects. These themes and sub-themes have been analysed in the discussion section.

Phase 6: Final Product

The final step is to summarise the data findings and report on the themes in order to effectively convey the narrative. This includes presenting relevant extracts that support the analysis and ensuring readers fully understand the key themes (Olapane, 2021). The final product is presented in Chapter 5 Discussion.

3.5 Research Quality

In qualitative research, it is essential to establish terms and methods for assessing research quality that offer alternatives to traditional concepts of reliability and validity (Bryman, 2016). Reliability refers to the degree of consistency and stability over the course of the research process. A high degree of stability indicates a high degree of reliability, implying that the results are repeatable (Golafshani, 2003). In qualitative studies, achieving consistency in terms of replicability or generalisability is challenging due to the contextual and interpersonal nature of the research inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It has been widely recognised in quantitative research, but it is now reconsidered in the quantitative research paradigm. Nonetheless, reliability and validity are important concepts for qualitative researchers to consider when designing a study, analysing results, and assessing the quality of data (Golafshani, 2003).

Researchers require reliable means to judge the quality of their work, and a set of criteria can provide this need (Walsh & Downe, 2006). In this context, the term 'criterion' refers to observable indicators that help determine if a study's findings are valid and valuable. These criteria often relate to the procedures used in conducting the research, with the implied assumption that these

procedures influence the validity of the findings (Hammersley, 2007). This research is based on the well-regarded system of quality criteria for qualitative research developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They propose five key concepts to assess the quality and validity of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In qualitative research, validity is framed from the researcher's perspective, as opposed to the traditional quantitative approach. The researcher's interpretive worldview introduces validity procedures that emphasises trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness as previously mentioned, encompasses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Authenticity, on the other hand, includes the aspects of fairness, improving personal constructions, fostering, a better understanding of others' contributions, stimulating action, and empowering participants (Creswell & Miller. 2000). This classic criterion by Lincoln and Guba (1985) assists in providing a framework for assessing the trustworthiness and authenticity of qualitative studies (Treharne & Riggs, 2015)

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the first criterion of credibility is internal validity, which determines the truth value of the research. Credibility assesses whether the findings and interpretations can be trusted and the extent to which they reflect the reality of the phenomenon inquired (Nassaji, 2020). Therefore, the objective is to establish confidence that the results from the perspective of the participants are true, credible, and believable. As a result, authentic and credible data through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The researcher performed a thorough literature review and utilised snowball sampling until data saturation was reached. During data collection, an interview guide ensured that consistent questions were asked, with adjustments made based on participants' responses. Data consistency and discrepancies were rigorously examined, and transcriptions were distributed to all participants for member checking. This allowed participants to review the data, provide feedback or corrections for any anomalies or errors and edit as needed. Member checking allowed participants to not only inquire about authenticity but also enhance its richness and depth. This technique strengthened the researcher's credibility by fostering trust and rapport with the participants, hence validating the accuracy of the research findings (Enworo, 2023; Treharne & Riggs, 2015)

The second criterion of trustworthiness is transferability, which is synonymous with generalisability or external validity. The fundamental goal is to increase the extent to which the findings of a qualitative inquiry can be applied or transferred to different contexts, circumstances, populations, or settings (Enworo, 2023). However, because qualitative research is interpretive and often uses a small, non-representative sample, the results cannot be generalised in the same way that quantitative research can. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), while phenomena are intimately tied to the times and contexts in which they appear, transferability can still occur due to certain similarities between contexts. The goal of transferability is not for the researcher to make generalisable claims, but to provide enough detail to allow readers to judge whether the findings can be applied to other contexts (Nassaji, 2020).

Transferability is established by presenting readers with evidence that the findings from this study can be transferred elsewhere (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research has ensured this, as the researcher has provided a thick description that enables readers making a transfer to draw a

conclusion and make a judgement about the possible transferability to another context. This research achieves transferability by offering thick descriptions to allow readers to assess and judge the possible transferability to various contexts (Kubacki & Rundle-Thiele, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A rich and detailed description of the research context is provided, including participants, setting, and nuances. This allows readers to fully understand the study's characteristics, making it easier to assess its relevance and applicability to various contexts.

The third criterion, dependability, asks whether the study and the research process have been continuous and consistent across time. This is critical since socio-cultural events can influence people's perceptions and experiences, and it is preferable to eliminate any potential historical repercussions (Kubacki & Rundle-Thiele, 2016). In qualitative research, this principle states that the study should be reported in such a way that others could yield similar interpretations if it were to be replicated (Nassaji, 2020). To achieve this, the process should be rational and transparent; data collection should be auditable and tracible, ensuring consistency across methods and outcomes (Enworo, 2023). This study meets the dependability criteria by maintaining easily accessible records throughout the research process. An audit trail was established by meticulously recording all writing during the literature review, data collection, notes, and final report drafts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, the researcher handled each interview systematically, making appropriate use of the interview guide (Kubacki & Rundle-Thiele, 2016).

The fourth criterion, confirmability, ensures that the findings and interpretations drawn from the study are logical, reasonable, and bias-free (Enworo, 2023; Kubacki & Rundle-Thiele, 2016). Confirmability in this qualitative research was obtained by repeatedly checking and rechecking the data during collection and analysis to ensure replicability. This process is evidenced through an audit trail, which offers a detailed account of the research processes used throughout data collation. This allows readers to verify whether the data analysis procedures were carried out appropriately (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017) The researcher employed purposive sampling to select interviewees who could best address the research problems. The interview settings were organised in conjunction with participants, and the data was managed and displayed using NVivo. The raw data was assigned to the given codes and themes, and a clear coding schema assisted in identifying the codes and patterns in the analysis.

3.6 Research Ethical Considerations

Obtaining ethics approval before data collection and maintaining high ethical standards throughout a research project is essential for effective research governance. This is equally important in social research as it is in clinical trials (Broom, 2006). In social sciences, it is important to recognise that study subjects are human beings with the right to be safeguarded from any risks. Thus, the primary goal of research ethics is to protect participants from any potential harm caused by the research procedure (Weinhardt, 2020). Before initiating the research, researchers must obtain formal ethics approval from the appropriate local ethics committee, as required by the university (Broom, 2006).

The ethical status of this research was thoroughly discussed with supervisors in order to assess risk factors by the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research Teaching and Evaluation Involving Human Participants. This study was reviewed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee and classified to be a low-risk research project (see Appendix E). According to Broom (2006), the well-being of the

participants and the researcher should always be put before the success of the research project. Ethical considerations continue throughout the research process and in particular are crucial when data are being collected. Although the most cited ethical concerns are confidentiality and informed consent, the way a researcher interacts with participants and the collection of data is also important in terms of doing ethical research. The ways the researcher has addressed ethical concerns are discussed below.

Safeguarding participants' well-being entails adherence to standard ethical norms such as respect for participant autonomy, protection from harm, confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary involvement, all of which have been adhered to in this research (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). In terms of informed consent, participants were informed about the nature and aims of the research in advance. They were given a full information sheet and a consent form as an invitation to participate in the research. Those who expressed willingness at the time initiated the first contact. The consent form explicitly described participants' rights, including the right to withdraw from the study, decline answers to any specific question, ask questions or express doubts, allow or prohibit the use of a digital recorder, and the right to be notified about publication details. Participants had plenty of time to consider their participation and ask questions between the initial contact and the arranged interview time.

There are important ethical considerations when writing up and disseminating data. To protect confidentiality, the identities of participants and organisations involved in the study were securely stored, and accessible only to the researcher, thereby preventing any unauthorised disclosure (Broom, 2006). All transcripts, recordings, field notes, and analysed data were labelled with participant numbers to ensure anonymity. These records will be securely maintained and subsequently destroyed five years after collection.

3.7 Conclusion

In summary, a phenomenological study was chosen as the most suitable approach to respond to the research question: how do employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being? This allowed the researcher to capture the lived experiences of individuals grappling with job insecurity in the higher education sector, before thematically analysing data to offer valuable insights into this complex phenomenon. This chapter outlined the philosophical-methodological direction of the study, which aims to expand our understanding of how job insecurity impacts the well-being of employees. It established that the study adheres to an interpretivist paradigm and discussed the reasons for adopting a qualitative approach. The study methodologies were thoroughly explained, including the empirical methodology, the use of SSIs, purposive and snowball sampling for data gathering, and thematic analysis using grounded theory techniques. The data analysis was facilitated by NVivo software, using coding to help develop themes. The themes are in alignment with the theoretical frameworks being used and the research questions, followed by a discussion of research quality and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the SSIs, highlighting three main themes and twelve sub-themes that contribute to answering the primary research question and its related sub-questions. 17 valid interviews were conducted, lasting between 16 and 45 minutes, with an average of 30 minutes, which served as the foundation for the findings presented in this chapter. Through the process of conducting SSIs key themes emerged and were identified. Following data collection and analysis, noticeable patterns and themes emerged, underpinned by existing theoretical knowledge, which provide valuable insights into answering the research questions.

The chapter opens with an overview of the interview approach utilised to investigate the research question and sub-questions. It provides insights into the demographic information of the participants, as well as the challenges faced during data collecting. Furthermore, the chapter delves into thematic analysis, highlighting the main themes and sub-themes (using NVivo 2020) to better understand the impact of job insecurity on perceived well-being. To highlight the identified themes and interpret the findings, descriptions of the main themes and sub-themes will be provided, reflecting the context in which the data originated. Lastly, reflections are presented on the difficulties encountered during the research, notably in navigating the sensitivities inherent in the subject matter.

This chapter presents the research findings and provides a summary of main themes and sub-themes derived from the data using NVivo. It begins with an overview of participant details, followed by a table identifying the data collection results. Each theme is then described in detail to define its meaning. The last section concludes the chapter, setting the stage for the subsequent analysis.

4.2 Participant Details

Table 1 presents the background profiles and demographic details of the interviewees, who were either academic staff or professional staff. Obtaining demographic information during the SSIs helped to provide a better understanding of the sample under study and to help ease participants into the interviews. The researcher acknowledges that while assessing the collected data, characteristics such as participant gender, age, service area, and length of service may become useful factors to consider. Each participant met the criterion of being employed by a HE institution and experiencing varying degrees of job insecurity, whether through confirmed or perceived changes to their roles.

In adherence to ethical standards, participant names have been anonymised in the presentation of findings (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). All interviews were recorded and transcribed using digital software Riverside, an AI-powered transcribing software. Each transcript was subsequently reviewed by the interviewer before sending to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy. As stated in Chapter 3 Methodology, a total of 17 participants met the selection criteria, and their interview transcripts were utilised in the analysis of this study.

Table 1. Participants' profile and organisational roles

Participant	Participant Gender	Participant Age (years)	Interview Length (minutes)	Area of Service	Length of Service (years)
Participant 1	Female	55-64	30	Professional	16
Participant 2	Female	55-64	21	Professional	2
Participant 3	Male	33-44	28	Professional	3
Participant 4	Male	55-64	38	Academic	8
Participant 5	Female	55-64	16	Academic	8
Participant 6	Female	25-34	44	Professional	4
Participant 7	Female	35-44	33	Academic	8
Participant 8	Other	45-54	32	Academic	19
Participant 9	Female	35-44	29	Academic	13
Participant 10	Male	55-64	20	Professional	13
Participant 11	Female	35-44	22	Professional	6
Participant 12	Female	45-54	35	Professional	4
Participant 13	Female	45-54	35	Academic	7
Participant 14	Female	35-44	30	Academic	10
Participant 15	Female	35-44	34	Academic	2
Participant 16	Male	45-54	28	Academic	7
Participant 17	Female	55-64	25	Academic	7

Participants are categorised by their area of service based on their area of service as either professional or academic staff. Table 2 provides definitions of these roles in the context of this research, offering insight into the extent of their job insecurity experiences across different roles.

Table 2. Participant role definitions

Role	Definition
Professional Staff	Professional staff members refer to individuals whose roles are substantively non-teaching positions within a HE institution. They are professionals in their respective fields who provide specialised expertise to support the organisation's operations. These individuals can be administrators, technicians, managers, team leaders, and directors. These individuals can represent all levels of employees, and they support functions that are essential for operations of the institutions.
Academic Staff	Academic staff members refer to individuals engaged in teaching, research, and scholarly activities within a HE institution. While position terminology varies by institution, these individuals can be called lecturers, tutors, researchers, or professors; they deliver curriculum and engage in research to contribute to the academic and intellectual development of students and the institution.

4.3 Themes

The interviews were structured around three main sections designed to address specific research sub-questions. These sections focused on identifying the stressors associated with job insecurity, exploring their impact on employee well-being, and understanding the various responses individuals adopt in dealing with these challenges. Participants were invited to articulate their perceptions of the stressors linked to job insecurity, share personal experiences of how these stressors affect their well-being, and discuss strategies they employ to cope with these impacts. This approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of the how job insecurity impacts the perceived well-being of employees providing rich qualitative data for analysis. During the analysis process, main themes and sub-themes were developed. The main theme captured significant concepts within the dataset in relation to the research question and sub-research questions and represented a pattern or meaning with the dataset. Sub-themes shared the same idea as the theme but focused on one notable aspect (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

At the end of the interviews, participants were invited to share their perspectives on their future within the organisation given their experiences with job insecurity. Many expressed uncertainties about remaining in their current sector, with some indicating they do not see a future in it at all. This sentiment stems directly from the stressors they have endured during this uncertain period. For those profoundly affected psychologically and physically, prioritising their health has become their main concern, leading them to prioritise stability over continuing in a sector that has significantly impacted their well-being. Participants have responded in various ways, employing coping mechanisms, yet some have chosen to disengage altogether, feeling that the toll is too great. Although the responses have been analysed and presented within themes, the diversity of experiences and responses to job insecurity was particularly notable revealing a wide range of eye-opening perspectives and findings.

The following section provides an overview of the main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes are presented in Table 3, in order of how the main theme responds to the sub research questions, illustrating the key findings and will be further explored in Chapter 5 Discussion.

Table 3. Overview of themes, code frequency and code mentions

Themes	Number of Interviews Mentioned	Number of Total References Mentioned
Stressors	17	85
Financial Pressure	14	30
Shift in Workplace Dynamics	13	36
Underemployment and Job Dissatisfaction	6	11
Job Embeddedness	8	11
Effects on Well-being	17	157

Themes	Number of Interviews Mentioned	Number of Total References Mentioned
Mental Health	16	50
Physical Health	15	40
Intrinsic Motivation	14	25
Self-perception	10	24
Domino Effect	10	22
Daily Life and Relationships	8	19
Behavioral and Attitudinal Responses	16	64
Coping Mechanisms	16	32
Putting Life on Hold	9	19

4.4 Description of Themes

This section provides explanations of the main themes and sub-themes derived from the analysis of this study. The analysis of these themes is underpinned in an understanding of the existing literature, and the description provided are supported by prior research and explanations of similar themes.

4.4.1 Main Theme: Stressors

In the context of this study, the main theme *stressors* refer to any circumstances or conditions that contribute to job insecurity among employees in HE institutions. Interviewees explained that financial demands, changes in workplace dynamics, attachment to their job, and underemployment all contributed to their perception of job insecurity and a detrimental impact on their well-being. Job barriers and challenges contribute to a better understanding of stressors. While individual's perceptions of stressors vary, meta-analyses and reviews have revealed that certain stressors are consistently seen as challenging or hindering. These challenges are difficult to overcome and cause significant stress for individuals (De Witte & Van Hootegem, 2021).

As shown in Table 3, stressors were identified across both domains of service, professional and academic, However, the researcher discovered that the types of stresses can vary depending on the employment level or type. For instance, a professor with more discretion and autonomy may experience job insecurity differently than a clerical worker in a professional role (Narayanan et al., 1999). According to this study, academic employees experience job insecurity more intensely compared to professional employees, as they are more conscious of the precarity of their positions and the instability in the sector they work in. Importantly, stressors are defined as the types of stresses that arise from job insecurity that may have an impact on the perceived well-being of employees. Based on the data analysis, these various types of stressors are expanded on below as the sub-themes to the main theme of stressors.

Financial Stressor

This sub-theme addresses the financial challenges and economic strain employees, and their families experience as a result of high job insecurity. As identified in the data analysis, individuals expressed concerns about meeting financial obligations for themselves and their households, such as meeting basic needs, paying bills, covering healthcare costs, paying mortgages, and supporting dependents. Within this sub-theme, interviewees highlighted their concerns about their financial security as a consequence of confirmed or perceived job loss (Elshaer, et al., 2022). When individuals have distressing thoughts about paying household expenses, they generally feel worried, anxious, and concerned about their ability to maintain their existing way of life. This can negatively impact both psychological and physiological well-being, since the negative effect of job insecurity on perceived health worsens when the individual is over-in debt or has non-mortgage debts such as bank cards, loans, or medical expenses (Alcover et al., 2020). Considering various terms outlined in existing literature such as financial stress, financial concerns, financial threats, and financial distress that describe the financial challenges when one experiences job insecurity (Alcover et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020; Giannetti et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2020), the data analysis for this study revealed a sentiment of financial pressure as the sub-theme, as this was found to be a significant stressor contributing to the experience of job insecurity, affecting employees' perceived well-being.

Job Embeddedness

This sub-theme includes employee feelings regarding the various factors that keep them in their job or make it difficult to leave them, causing anxiety and stress throughout the period of job insecurity (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). The three dimensions concerning job embeddedness identified by Mitchell and Lee (as cited in Murphy et al., 2013), include fit, links, and sacrifice, were recognised in the data analysis. Participants defined fit as their perceived compatibility with the job and organisation, links as the number of informal and formal connections they have within the organisation and sacrifice as the perceived costs they may incur when leaving the job. When reviewing the data, it was discovered that job embeddedness includes employees considering both internal and external factors, such as social connections, sense of compatibility and comfort with the job, and the perceived cost of leaving, which influence an employee's decision to stay or leave (Safavi & Karatepe, 2019). According to Frone et al.'s research (as cited in Probst, 2000), highly involved employees reported more health concerns and higher degrees of psychological anguish when their jobs were threatened. It is also important to note that the mentioned embedded forces impede withdrawal processes by making employees in this study feel stuck, inert, or biased towards the status quo, making it a predominant stressor resulting in greater job insecurity (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2024).

Shift in Workplace Dynamics

This sub-theme applies to changes in the social and cultural aspects of a HE institution workplace that contribute to employees' feelings of job insecurity. Participants in the study noted factors such as shifts in collaboration, relationships, culture, morale, and the general work environment. Cultural values and norms have a substantial impact on employees' attitudes towards job insecurity, particularly how they perceive and respond to the prospect of involuntary job loss (Sender et al., 2017). As noted by interviewees, when employees experienced significant changes in workplace culture and norms, or workplace dynamics, due to job insecurity, their stress level is elevated (Vásquez et al., 2020). Job insecurity effectively violates the employee's psychological contract, leading to a loss of trust in management and less cooperative behaviour at work. This strain may lead

employees to withdraw from the job and organisation (De Witte et al., 2010). Furthermore, heightened job insecurity increases psychological stress and sensitivity, lowering cooperation among colleagues in terms of sharing information, expertise, and skills (Liu, 2011). The shift in workplace dynamics encountered by participants in this study was a significant stressor, contributing to job insecurity and influencing employees' perceived well-being.

Underemployment and Job Dissatisfaction

This sub-theme was developed based on participants' experiences with organisational restructuring or downsizing, which resulted in a pause in employee responsibilities and job requirements. As a result of organisational changes, employees were unable to complete the tasks outlined in their job descriptions, leaving them feeling underemployed. According to interviewees, these circumstances led them to feel dissatisfied, as they were not challenged and were unable to engage in the work, they initially signed up for (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010). As the analysis found, underemployment not only reflects job conditions, but also a mismatch between these conditions and employees' preferences. Interviewees stated that this form of underemployment is caused by their particular needs rather than their choices (Kim & Park, 2006). For example, participants suggested that being unable to perform their customary duties can be disheartening and stressful for them, especially during an already difficult period. This increases the stress associated with job insecurity.

4.4.2 Main Theme: Effects on Well-being

In the context of this study, the main theme of *effects on well-being* refers to the strain reactions that occurs as a result of stressors related with job insecurity among employees in the HE sector. Job uncertainty and its associated stressors can have a negative impact on an individual's well-being, and quality of life, resulting in stress reactions. In other words, job insecurity is often mentioned in previous studies as detrimental consequences on well-being (Hellgren et al., 1999). These reactions can be broadly characterised as effects on well-being, which include the overall consequences of job insecurity (Witte, 1999).

As revealed by the data analysis, the stressors of job insecurity are demanding and have negative impact on individual employees' somatic health and psychological well-being. Participants described their experiences with job insecurity, which they felt were associated with lower mental well-being and physical health concerns. These were consistent with the literature on job insecurity and impaired employee well-being, as they were both on a general level (e.g., anxiety, depression, changes in diet) and a work-related level (e.g., reduced motivation, decreased self-esteem) and associated with both physical health issues and mental distress (De Witte et al., 2015; Hellgren et al., 1999). It has been proposed that anticipating a stressful event may be just as harmful to individual outcomes as the event itself (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010). In this study, the effects on well-being are defined as the strain reactions caused by the stressors of job insecurity. This underscores the stressful nature of job insecurity and the negative effects of uncertainty about one's employment future, and the effect this experience has on employees' overall perceived well-being.

Mental Health

This sub-theme focuses on the psychological well-being of individual employees as a perceived consequence of job insecurity. Participants offered examples of how job insecurity had affected their mental health, such as psychosomatic symptoms, psychological distress, heightened feelings of

anxiety or depression, and minor psychiatric symptoms (Nella et al., 2015; Russo & Terraneo, 2020). They highlighted negative mental symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, and distress, as being most apparent during periods of uncertainty in the workplace. Further, because employment offers valuable experiences, social interactions, and opportunities for personal development and skill utilisation, participants acknowledged that the actual or potential loss of these psychologically important factors significantly reduced their individual well-being. Consequently, perceived threats of job loss are likely to generate mental frustration and psychological distress for employees working in the HE sector (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010). Interviewees in this study considered that job insecurity was associated with poor mental health. This is consistent with the concept that increased psychological distress can erode an individual's mental health and decrease their overall well-being (Watson & Osberg, 2018). This study examines the key strain reactions that employees had felt during periods of job insecurity in order to better understand the effects of employees' perceived well-being.

Physical Health

This sub-theme is concerned with the physical well-being of individual employees as a perceived consequence of job insecurity. In terms of physical health, Nella et al. (2015) found that job insecurity is associated with increased morbidity, poorer levels of self-reported health, increased incidence rates of hypertension, coronary heart disease, and myocardial death. This has certainly been the case for participants, as some highlighting the deteriorating health conditions. In addition, interviewees reported that the anticipation of redundancy has affected health behaviours such as exercise, dietary habits, sleep, and increased receptiveness for infections such as colds and flu (De Witte et al., 2015). Moreover, as indicated by both literature and participants in this study, job insecurity is associated with increased use of healthcare services, increased sickness and increased absenteeism due to job insecurity caused by restructure processes (De Witte et al., 2015' Nella et al., 2015). In this study, physical health is a strain reaction to the stressors of job insecurity, therefore helps to understand one of the many aspects that affects perceived well-being of employees.

Intrinsic Motivation

This sub-theme depicts the negative impact job insecurity has on intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the inherent drive to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacity to explore, and to learn. Job insecurity reduces intrinsic motivation; employees in this study reported experiencing threats to their existing lifestyle both inside and outside of work, as well as their fiscal condition and ability to meet job requirements, all of which are stressors. In other words, intrinsic motivation, while present in many individuals, can be disrupted in the absence of conditions that allow it to flourish (Mahmoud et al., 2021). When these employees face increasing job insecurity, they perceive their efforts as meaningless and feel a lack of control, which diminishes their intrinsic motivation and negatively impacts their job performance and outputs (Tase & Kustiawan, 2023). Job insecurity undermines intrinsic motivation, which is the drive to seek out challenges and exercise one's capcity, because these employees are stressed, have lost autonomy, and are struggling with the responsibilities of retaining their jobs (Mahmoud et al., 2021). In this study, intrinsic motivation is examined as a critical aspect of well-being that is affected by the stressors of job insecurity.

Self-perception

This sub-theme describes the negative impact on an employee's self-perception of how they see themselves, including their social identity, self-esteem, and self-deprecating thoughts. Job insecurity is stressful and jeopardises one's status as an employed person, which is an important part of one's social identity. An individual's self-perception reflects the degree to which they regard themselves as competent and capable of satisfying their needs. Participants in this study demonstrated that diminished self-perception could lead to an inability to handle frustration, resist peer pressure, attempt new tasks and challenges, regulate positive and negative emotions, and help others (Adekiya, 2018). This was a key concept among the interviewees, where they stated that being employed gave them a sense of belonging and identity (Selenko et al., 2017). However, personality traits have been proven to mitigate the adverse effects of stressors on strain-related outcomes. Self-esteem, one of the most extensively researched personal resources in the workplace, has been shown in existing literature to be altered by stressors (Callea et al., 2019). Accordingly, in line with these conceptualisations, interviewees' experiences indicate that career setback can lead to guilt, self-doubt, and despair, resulting in decreased well-being (De Witte, 1999). In this study, self-perception, or how an individual perceives oneself, is recognised as a negative strain reaction that impacts the well-being of employees facing job insecurity.

Domino Effect

This sub-theme explores the idea that one negative event leads to another, illustrating how the initial stress of job insecurity can trigger a cascade of detrimental impacts on various aspects of employee well-being. The data reveal a domino effect, with participants' experiences indicating that mental and physical health conditions are often interrelated. For example, participants have demonstrated that depression and anxiety related to job insecurity can lead to physical ailments such as a lack of exercise, insomnia, and changes in diet. These physical health issues, in turn, decreased intrinsic motivation and reduced self-perception. This diminished self-perception can then strain personal relationships and daily life activities, as individuals may become more withdrawn or irritable, ultimately causing a downward spiral of deteriorating well-being. Thus, participants suggest that experiencing confirmed or perceived job loss rarely affects just one area of life; rather, it triggers a chain reaction of adverse outcomes. This interconnected chain of negative outcomes underscores the profound and multifaceted impact of job insecurity on employees' lives, while also making a significant theoretical contribution to the existing literature.

Daily Life and Relationships

This sub-theme emphasises that the effects of job insecurity are not limited to the individual, its spillover effects have even affected their family members. Interviewees reported that it also present significant challenges to their daily lives and relationships, as uncertainty around employment influences family life and interferes with work-home balance. According to Haar (2013) work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage multiple roles in their life, such as work, family and other major responsibilities. As highlighted by the participants, job insecurity is associated with work-family conflicts, burnout that can be passed on to the partner, one may withdraw from fulfilling responsibility, and thus affect martial life (De Witte et al., 2015; Gupta & Dhar, 2024). As a result, the study's participants indicated that job insecurity has an impact on their everyday lives, family relationships, and even social contacts outside of the family (Blom et al., 2020; Griep et al., 2016). Participants agreed that job insecurity causes work-family conflict for them, which has been

linked to numerous negative outcomes (Haar & Brougham, 2022b). They specifically noted decreasing marital satisfaction, disruption of daily structure, diminishing social interactions, and negative overall family relationships. Aligning with existing literature, individuals are less pleased with their marital relationships when they are concerned about their job security (Blom et al., 2020). In this study, daily life and relationships are identified as a negative strain reaction that impacts the well-being of employees experiencing job insecurity.

4.4.3 Main Theme: Behavioural and Attitudinal Responses

In the context of this study, the main theme *behavioural and attitudinal responses* refer to the actions and attitudes that employees adopt in response to job insecurity in a HE institution. Job insecurity can result in a variety of consequences, reflecting the tensions inherent in individuals' responses (Shoss, 2017). These responses as demonstrated by the participants, may manifest in a variety of ways, including adopting coping strategies, making changes to life decisions, and a shift in view towards the job, organisation, and the plan on their futures (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010).

Employees' behavioural responses describe the actions employees take in response to the potential of job loss, such as increased absenteeism and job-seeking activities. Attitudinal responses, on the other hand, encompass involve their inner feelings and outlook on the circumstance, which may be negative or positive. This theme aims to capture the wide range of ways in which employees have expressed their emotions to the implications of job insecurity, highlighting how these reactions can have an impact their overall well-being and professional life (Callea et al., 2019; Hellgren et al., 1999). For example, some participants have developed coping methods to help them comprehend and adapt to the circumstance, such as prioritising what is important to them, making a plan, studying, and diverting their focus. Alternatively, they may have to pause and postpone certain aspects of their lives, such as marriage, home ownership, and other large purchases. Others have chosen to embrace the situation and develop a growth mentality, viewing the difficult as an opportunity to grow and improve themselves. In this study, understanding these evaluative responses to the experience of job insecurity helps to provide a clearer picture of how different aspects of job insecurity relate to the outcomes (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010).

Coping Mechanisms

This sub-theme refers to the evolving cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage demands and conflicts that exceed an individual's ability to alleviate stress (Giunchi et al., 2019). Interviewees in this study claimed that employing various coping mechanisms, whether active or passive, helps to address or reduce the threat, almost like as if were guarding themselves from plunging farther into the deep end. Participants highlighted that job insecurity negatively affects their views on life, their career, and their overall well-being, making coping strategies critical in mitigating these effects (Astarlioglu et al., 2011). In this study, coping mechanisms are categorised into problem-focused and emotion-focused styles. Many of the participants have developed problem-focused coping strategies, which include behaviours that directly address the stressor, such as active coping, planning, and seeking instrumental social support. Emotion-focused as noted by only a few participants, entails controlling negative emotions and cognitions related to the stressor, such as seeking emotional social support, reinterpretation, redefining, acceptance, or denial (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Additionally, as shown by the participants, emotion-focused coping behaviours with potentially negative outcomes include denying or avoiding the situation, whether problem-focused or emotion-focused,

resulting in reactive rather than proactive behaviours (Astarlioglu et al., 2011). This study examines the various coping mechanisms individuals employ as a behavioural and attitudinal response to job insecurity.

Putting Life on Hold

This sub-theme explores the life decisions that employees are compelled to make due to job insecurity, effectively putting their lives on hold. Participants reported making considerable sacrifices, such as postponing expensive purchases. These purchases may include buying a house or a car and delaying major life events and life cycle such as getting married and having children (Lozza et al., 2013). Participants perceive these broader long-term life projects, as being increasingly unaffordable, with increased feelings of job insecurity and life uncertainty leading to lower consumption intentions and a decreased propensity to undertake major life projects. Given the circumstances, a few participants have indicated that they have put off making challenging life investments such as marriage, having children, purchasing a house, or obtaining a bank loan (Chirumbolo et al., 2021). This study examines the ways employees have put their life on hold, by postponing important life projects as a behavioural and attitudinal response to job insecurity.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the data findings of this study, including tables and detailed descriptions of the key findings related to the research questions, existing literature, and theories used in this study. The topics were constructed using the data collected from participants in order to better understand the stressors of work insecurity, how they affect well-being, and the responses of job insecurity. During this process, three major themes emerged: stresses, effects on well-being, and behavioural and attitudinal reactions. Each main theme is further divided into 12 sub-themes for more detailed understanding of how they contribute to addressing the research questions. The following chapter examines each of these themes, while drawing parallels to literature.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, the data findings from Chapter 4 will be analysed utilising the applicable theoretical frameworks from Chapter 2 to comprehensively address the research questions. This study aims to improve our understanding of how job insecurity impacts employees' perceived well-being. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on and analyse the empirical findings using the theoretical frameworks that were used. This will demonstrate how they are consistent with the theories and provide insight into how job uncertainty impacts employees' reported well-being.

The discussion is underpinned by the theoretical frameworks of Stress Theory and COR Theory. The themes that emerged can be analysed through Stress Theory, which explores how individuals assess stress when they perceive threats to their well-being. The themes can also be analysed using the COR Theory, which offers insight into how stress undermines an employee's ability to acquire or maintain resources, directly impacting physiological and psychological outcomes, as well as how they manage this stress. Each section will include connections between themes outlined in the previous chapter (Table 3) and how they relate to the research questions. Additionally, the findings will be interpreted within the theoretical frameworks and in light of existing literature on stressors and the effects of job insecurity.

While both theoretical frameworks will be utilised to explore the impact of job insecurity on employees' perceived well-being, this discussion will be guided by key concepts such as stressors, effects on well-being, and behavioural and attitudinal responses. Stressors, both internal and external, create stress in employees, and identifying these stressors through Stress Theory and COR Theory helps explain why employees experience stress, laying the groundwork for a better understanding of their overall impact. Effects on well-being include both physical and psychological components that indicate the consequences of the identified stressors. Understanding the effects on well-being is imperative for determining the broader implications of job insecurity. Behavioural and attitudinal responses are coping mechanisms that demonstrate how employees react to stressors and how their attitudes and behaviours are influenced by the consequences of job insecurity. By integrating the theory with these findings, the study aims to gain a better understanding of the profound and multifaceted impact of job insecurity on employees' perceived well-being, from the initial stressors to the resulting effects on well-being, and subsequent behavioural and attitudinal responses.

This chapter is organised as follows: Section 5.2 examines the main theme of stressors and its associated sub-themes. Section 5.3 examines the main theme of effects on well-being and the related sub-themes. Section 5.4 examines the main theme of behavioural and attitudinal responses and its associated sub-themes. Section 5.5 integrates the discussions of the previous sections with the theoretical framework to answer the research questions which concludes the chapter. The findings show that these themes and sub-themes provide insight into the extent to which job insecurity affects employee's well-being.

5.2 Stressors

This section examines *stressors* as the main theme, and associated sub-themes, that emerged from the data analysis. This main theme of *stressors* helps respond to the first two research sub-questions:

- What are the stressors that arise from job insecurity?
- How do the stressors of job insecurity impact the well-being of employees?

In accordance with Stress Theory and COR Theory, all 17 participants identified specific stressors associated with job insecurity that significantly contributed to their stress, providing insights into the challenges employees have encountered. As a result, the subsequent discussion of these sub-themes describes the various effects these stressors have had on their overall well-being. Four sub-themes emerged from the participants' responses: *financial pressure, job embeddedness, a shift in workplace dynamics, and underemployment and job dissatisfaction,* which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

When these stressors are explored through Stress Theory, the impact of these stressors becomes evident as real or perceived threats to participants' well-being (Greenberg al., 2002; Mazzola et al., 2011). Participants' experiences of emotional anxiety and physical effects underscore the theory's assertion that stressors elicit both physiological and psychological responses. The chronic nature of these stressors, as exemplified by Participant 10's feeling of having the "rug pulled out from under them" highlights the loss of control and predictability central to Stress Theory, illustrating how job insecurity can lead to profound and enduring impacts on well-being.

When examined through COR Theory, stressors are understood as threats to valued resources, such as time, energy, social support which is likely to result in negative outcomes (Debus & Unger, 2017; Hobfoll, 1989). According to COR Theory, stress occurs when individuals perceive that their resources are threatened, lost, or insufficient to meet the demands imposed upon them (Cheng et al., 2014). In the context of job insecurity, stressors deplete important resources, exacerbating stress and negatively affecting well-being. As indicated by the participants of this study, the threat of job loss depletes their valued resources. The uncertainty surrounding the future of their roles in the institution and the continuity of their employment creates significant stress.

These findings are consistent with stressors identified in the existing literature. Financial pressure emerged prominently as a key stressor, which is compounded by job insecurity, leading to increased financial stress as a result of confirmed or perceived job loss (Elshaer et al., 2022). On the other hands, job embeddedness has been found in the literature to be a significant stressor, with higher embeddedness levels resulting in greater intensity of perceived loss and lower belief in the possibilities of changing the situation (Probst, 2000). It is also worth noting that shifts in workplace dynamics, as documented in the literature, indicate that organisational culture changes such as management transitions, team restructuring, or changes in communication channels can cause stress among employees who are insecure about their roles within the organisation, resulting in negative effects on their well-being (Adiguzel and Kucukoglu, 2019). Furthermore, participants in the interviews expressed serious concerns about feeling underemployed and dissatisfied caused by job uncertainty. Many employees are unable to fulfil the responsibilities indicated in their job descriptions as part of consultations in organisational restructures, resulting in less work and a sense of underemployment and dissatisfaction. These sensations have been found to cause distress in

individuals, reducing their psychological and physiological well-being (Witte, 1999). Overall, the study's findings align with previously established stressors in the literature, while also revealing novel insights that will be investigated further in the analysis of each sub-theme.

This section aims to develop a theoretical understanding of job insecurity and its effects on perceived well-being by incorporating Stress Theory and COR Theory into the empirical data. The discussion of the sub-themes will answer sub-question RQ1 by identifying specific stressors experienced by employees, and sub-question RQ2 by examining their effects on overall well-being.

5.2.1 Financial Pressure

The first sub-theme to emerge from data analysis was *financial pressure.* 14 out of 17 participants shared their experiences and concerns regarding financial pressures resulting from perceived or confirmed job insecurity, emphasising the significant pressures their financial situation had put them in, or could potentially put on their livelihoods. For example, Participant 5, noted the need to restrain unnecessary spending, especially weekend activities with extended family. They highlighted the cost of taking their grandchildren out and the added stress of having to decide what activities they could afford and what they had to forgo owing to financial constraints.

Participant 3 raised an interesting point: the financial burden is particularly pronounced for migrants in New Zealand, who already face substantial costs and ongoing expenses associated with migrating, underlining the need to work past the conventional retirement age due to financial pressures. Compounding this stress, they noted that the more frequently restructure proposals were announced, the more insecure they felt about their job security, and the greater the financial pressure. The institution’s restructure initiatives led to additional stress and required careful consideration of how these factors would affect their financial security, asset accumulation, and retirement plans. This view aligns with the perspective that during economic downturns and rising unemployment, immigrants are the first to suffer from deteriorating economic conditions. They are often compelled to accept low-paid, precarious occupations (Danzer & Dietz, 2018).

To further illustrate this point, Participant 6, an immigrant, elaborated on their analogous experience since immigrating to New Zealand. They expressed concerns about feeling "at the bottom of the food chain" noting that while they were a manager in their home country, they "can't even get there" in New Zealand. Despite extensive work experience, qualifications, and proficiency in English, their salary is significantly lower than what they earned overseas, so they are reluctant to spend significant amounts of money given the uncertainty of their job security.

The experiences of Participants 3 and 6 underscore the vulnerability of immigrants as an employee group. This aligns with the literature, which indicates that immigrants often face occupational segregation into relatively low-skilled and low-paying jobs. Immigrants experience a sense of powerlessness in the face of job insecurity and bureaucratic difficulties. Despite possessing human capital such as advanced degrees, credentials, certifications, skills, and work experience, these are often not recognised as equivalent to local qualifications. Consequently, immigrants are unable to reap the purported benefits of their investments (Bazzoli & Probst, (2023).

Nonetheless, Participant 8, a fixed-term academic, also shared that a continuous cycle of financial stress that culminated over the years has led to their current situation, in which they have lost friendships, as they were unable to "keep up with them financially" when responding to social opportunities. This participant experienced a disconnect between their desire to be a productive and viable member of society and the judgment or criticism from their former social circle for being mindful of conserving money, especially given the absence of permanent work. When asked about their stressors, the participant stated that feeling judged as a result of financial pressures is their greatest stressor in the world:

> Moving back in with my elderly parents and relocating them to my town means I now have caregiving duties, adding to my financial responsibilities. It's crucial for me to maintain the appearance of being employed and competent. As these pressures mount financially, I face judgment from others in my social circle. Living at home with my parents at 45 is seen as a failure.

The above comment supports an understanding of the profound social and financial impact of job insecurity, particularly among fixed-term academic staff. There is no stable income when employees do not know if their contracts will be renewed for the next term. It emphasises how precarious employment can lead to economic strain, severe social stigma, and distress, all of which have an impact on individual's well-being (Alcover et al., 2020).

The participant went on to explain that the precarious nature of their teaching career prevented them from entering the housing market earlier. Due to financial pressures, "living is another issue." They feel fortunate to have inherited enough to live with their parents, as living independently would be impossible. They stated, "the only way I know I'm okay is to live with them." For this participant, financial pressure is not a choice, but a constant and unavoidable reality that comes with job insecurity, affecting every aspect of their life.

In a similar vein, Participant 17, a fixed-term academic, emphasised the importance of prioritising savings after learning about the potential job loss if student enrolment numbers remain low for the upcoming semester. The participant not only highlighted the importance of saving money due to job insecurity but also addressed the life changing consequences of insufficient funds for living expenses:

> One day you have a job, and you can afford groceries, pay all the bills in your house, buy petrol, and manage all other expenses. Then, the next minute, you don't have a job, and there's no way of paying bills. So, you're faced with the possibility of having to sell your house, downsize, or make other significant changes.

The comment highlights that job insecurity puts employees in a vulnerable financial situation, forcing them to make drastic significant adjustments and decisions. The abrupt transition from financial stability to uncertainty underscores the volatility and stress associated with potential job loss. This situation not only affects their ability to meet basic living expenses, but also has broader implications on their overall quality of life, including the potential need to sell their home or downsize. This perspective aligns with previous studies showing that increased financial pressure are associated with declining well-being, particularly mental health, due to uncertainty about future financial

outcomes (Wilson et al., 2020). Participant 17's experience exemplifies financial pressures as a significant stressor of job insecurity that has immediate impact on an individual's well-being and the broader, more profound consequences it can have on an individual's life.

In addition, Participant 5 acknowledged the financial pressures that weigh heavily on them as a result of job insecurity. They discussed the stress of being the sole breadwinner in the household, responsible for mortgage payments and groceries. They added, "job insecurity is everything to living," as financial pressures raise questions like, "How do I pay the mortgage? How do I buy groceries?" With no additional income source, the participant is concerned with maintaining their livelihood and meeting daily expenses. This supports the fundamental problem of job loss, which is the risk of losing the main source of income and the associated financial pressures (Berglund et al., 2014).

A similar situation to financial pressures was indicated by Participant 15, an academic who expressed their enjoyment of their job made the emotional impact of the sudden news of redundancy even harder. They said, "How can I afford to help keep a roof over our heads?" While they have the option to return to frontline work, they are also concerned about managing childcare, asking, "How am I going to manage childcare?" This experience highlights another form of stress related to the risk of losing the primary source of income poses and the associated financial pressures, particularly when coupled with family-care responsibilities (Choi et al., 2020).

However, the extent of anxiety varies based on financial stability; individuals who are the breadwinner of a larger household with significant expenses experience greater anxiety compared to those in smaller, more financially stable households (Berglund et al., 2014). For instance, Participant 5 indicated they are privileged, considering they do not have children, are two adults with two incomes, and do not have a mortgage to pay. Although job loss would affect them by losing a certain amount of income, it is not their primary concern, therefore they feel "in a very privileged situation."

It is interesting to note that Participant 12 recently purchased a house and mentioned that they did not foresee job insecurity at the time. In hindsight, remarked, "I most probably would have said it's not the right time to buy a house, better wait and see what's happening" To illustrate their point, the participant went on to highlight the broader concerns they faced:

> It's not just stress about the job, it's also out of the job in your personal life. Will I be to continue to provide? We have a big mortgage, and we need to maintain and sustain that

This demonstrates how financial decisions, such as purchasing a home, are inextricably linked with job security. The unpredictable nature of job instability adds significant stress, affecting both the professional and personal aspects of individuals' lives (Alcover et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020).

Despite the prevalence of job insecurity, obtaining financial assistance from banks often exacerbated individuals' anxiety. This lack of eligibility for financial support underscores the urgency of securing stable employment. For example, participants expressed that "it's hard to plan ahead when you're uncertain about your future workload or income" (Participant 9), a frustration compounded by discovering that "when you reach out to support services and find that you're not eligible for a lot"

(Participant 2). These sentiments illustrate the impact job insecurity on the financial pressures and the added stress it generates, as financial pressures “constantly weighs heavily in the back of your mind” (Participant 9). In other words, the combination of job insecurity and the financial pressures creates a persistent and heavy burden on individuals' mental and emotional well-being.

5.2.2 Job Embeddedness

The second sub-theme in relation to stressors emerged from eight participants as *job embeddedness.* For instance, Participant 16, a long-term academic and full-time professor, serving seven years, exhibits the fit dimension in Mitchell and Lee’s (2001) model. They argue that their extensive experience and expertise in their profession, honed through multiple stressful environments, has enabled them to raise above the parapet in ways that are not available to younger, less experienced colleagues. They view their fit in the role as part of their ethical responsibility, which they take quite seriously. Their views suggest that it’s their perceived compatibility with the job and organisation that motivates them to stay in their role as long as possible, above everything else, even in the face of potential job loss (Murphy et al., 2023).

Similarly, Participant 14 a long-serving academic lecturer of ten years, indicated that the stress of job loss extends beyond financial pressures. They expressed heartfelt disappointment at losing a job they enjoyed and excelled at, highlighting the emotional impact of job insecurity beyond monetary concerns, but rather their attachment to their career:

> I used to enjoy my job, it’s the only thing I know how to do. I lived and breathed teaching freshman chemistry, that's what I do. Now...what do I do?

The above comment demonstrates that the emotional toll of job loss can be profound, particularly when the job is closely tied to one's identity and passion. For Participant 14, teaching was more than simply a job; it was an integral part of their identity and life’s purpose. Losing this role not only threatened their financial stability but also their sense of self and fulfilment. This situation exemplifies all three dimensions of the job embeddedness model: fit, links, and sacrifice. The individual’s sense of compatibility and attachment to their employment had a substantial impact on their decision to remain in the position for a decade, exacerbating the impact felt when they were made redundant. Individuals who are deeply embedded in the organisations for which they work perceive themselves as a good fit, have a network of relationships, and understand the major personal sacrifices associated with leaving (Rafiq & Chin, 2019; Safavi & Karatepe, 2019). This is evident in the experiences shared by participants in this study.

This comment highlights the on-going dilemma in which employees feel overly attached their roles and neglects the necessity to explore other opportunities. Further studies indicates that job embeddedness can lead to work and family conflict, and highly embedded employees may feel demotivated to improve their abilities or pursue other possibilities (Ghosh, 2017). According to one perspective, attachment stems from a perceived fit between personal values and the job itself (Safavi & Karatepe, 2019). However, this attachment may discourage employees from seeking for alternative career opportunities in order to mitigate potential job loss. For instance, Participant 5 described their circumstance in which they are so invested in their current work that they refuse to look for another until they leave, leaving them unprepared:

> I haven't looked for other job opportunities because I'm one of those people who likes to stay in my current job. I really enjoy my job. To me, that's how I was brought up; that's my work ethic… I don't look for a job until I finish with this one.

Furthermore, some participants in this study reported attachment to their jobs, mostly due to the sacrifice dimension of the job embeddedness model. Participant 3 highlighted that while they are confident in their abilities to secure a job outside of their current region, they are reluctant to relocate. They ask themselves "Am I prepared to move to another city?" They relocated to their current small city for a more relaxed lifestyle, knowing that they could find work in larger cities, even if it meant stepping down from a senior to an intermediate position. Despite obtaining a job offer, they would rather stay in their current position to avoid the difficulty of climbing back up the career ladder. It is a greater sacrifice to leave their job title and relocate to another city, therefore they will "keep their current position as long as I can."

Similarly, Participant 15, a new mother, values the flexibility that comes with working in HE, which includes a stable Monday to Friday nine-to-five schedule and being able to work from home. This flexibility enables them to attend to their baby's needs while working from anywhere without being micromanaged. The prospect of losing their job and returning to front-line clinical work is concerning since it would mean losing flexibility, losing time with their baby, affecting with their partner's work, and significantly altering their family routine.

The experiences of both Participants 3 and 15 highlight that living in a different environment would require sacrifices such as moving to another city, making changes to their family's schedule (Safavi & Karatepe, 2019). This is consistent with the concept that job embeddedness has been linked to an individual's overall well-being (Rafiq & Chin, 2019).

Another perspective was acknowledged by Participant 10, who emphasised the importance of pursuing one's true interests. They noted that a job is a platform for them to pursue their real interest. According to Participant 10, people feel more fulfilled when they genuinely enjoy their work. They strongly conveyed their negative view of job insecurity, stating:

> One works in order to live, not the other way around. So, once you take that away, you've taken away almost the entirety of their existence. So, I do not see anything positive about job insecurity.

The above comment highlight that a job should be viewed as a primary way of pursuing one's interests, rather than working to make a living. When job insecurity arises, it undermines this fundamental aspect of existence, thereby having a deeply negative impact. The participant noted that job insecurity affects one's sense of stability and purpose, leaving them feeling as if a crucial part of their life has been taken away. They expressed strong negative view of job insecurity, seeing no positive aspects to it. The sentiment reinforces that job embeddedness can be a significant stressor. According to Participant 10, when individuals are passionately engaged to their jobs because they are pursuing their interests and purpose, job insecurity can be stressful. This is because it destroys the balance and meaning they derive from their jobs, leading to substantial psychological and emotional distress (Probst, 2000).

Interestingly, Participant 9 elaborated on the importance job embeddedness is for women working in the sector. The participant stated that, it is more pronounced for women to experience job insecurity and particularly for women with families or young children.

> I believe that, particularly for those with young children, there's often a trade-off between job security and flexibility. Many people choose not to pursue full-time positions that offer greater job security because they need the flexibility to spend more time with their children. This can create a sort of trap where individuals accept less job security to manage both their family responsibilities and work. In essence, people often prioritise jobs that offer flexible hours over full-time roles with more security, balancing the need for family time with the necessity to pay the bills.

The above comment aligns with existing research, which highlights how job embeddedness can be a major stressor, particularly for women when it comes to gender. According to studies, women are more likely to engage in flexible, temporary, or part-time employment, which can contribute to higher job insecurity (Menéndez-Espina et al., 2020). Participant 9's response implies that the desire for job flexibility, which allows better management of family responsibilities, often leads to the selection of positions with less job security. This trade-off reflects the stressor aspect of job embeddedness, in which the deeper the attachment to a role due to its flexibility, the more stuck and withdrawn they are, and the greater the stress when faced job insecurity (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2024).

5.2.3 Shift in Workplace Dynamics

This third sub-theme that emerged from the data was related to the *shift in workplace dynamics.* 13 out of 17 participants reported changes in communication, collaboration, and overall work environment. For instance, the uncertainty, which reduced team cohesion and trust among colleagues. Some participants noted increase competition and a decrease desire to share information or collaborate as everyone became more focused on securing their own positions. This shift created a more stressful and less supportive work environment, further exacerbating the negative effects of job insecurity on employees' well-being. Participant 10 stated that the increase job insecurity has an impact on workplace cooperation and morale:

> Job insecurity affects the work atmosphere, significantly impacting the overall setting and morale. It becomes a pervasive concern that dominates your thoughts, leading to a downward spiral where negativity among colleagues feeds off each other, becoming a major stressor.

The participant went on to say that relationships had deteriorated, with tensions developing among colleagues with whom they had previously worked well. People are now frequently gossiping in the corridors, exchanging anecdotes about recent events at the university. "Have you heard the latest rumour?" It has become less dynamic and collaborative, instead shifting towards an atmosphere filled with secrets, rumours, and gossip (Liu, 2011).

Participant 12 agreed, as they noted a similar observation, when they have also noticed a decline in social events on campus. They noticed fewer people sitting under the trees for lunch or gathering in

the dining halls or cafeterias for coffee and conversation. The pervasive stress has caused people to withdraw and alienate themselves from others, preferring to stay in their own spaces. This is a sign of withdrawal as indicated in the literature (De Witte et al., 2010). This shift demonstrates how job uncertainty has a substantial impact on the organisation's culture and social behaviours, implying that employees are not as sociable or happy as they once were, which is problematic (Vásquez et al., 2020).

The comment above illustrates a major shift in workplace dynamics, including noticeable changes in culture and relationships among colleagues. The environment is no longer the same as it was before organisational changes and job insecurity became prevalent, particularly for those in high-risk positions facing prospective job losses. Gossip and rumours have become common, reflecting that social stressors often emerge during uncertain times. According to other studies on social stressors, interactions with co-workers, supervisors, and customers are a regular part of almost all employees' life, and they can have both positive and negative effects on their well-being. While these encounters can promote social companionship, relatedness, competence, and self-esteem, they can also be viewed as stressful. Social stressors such as animosities, disputes with co-workers and superiors, unjust behaviour, and a bad work environment can considerably increase stress among employees struggling with job insecurity (Vásquez et al., 2020). Thus, the results show that, while employees continue to perform their duties and conduct as usual, the working dynamic is far from what it was and has evolved significantly, putting a greater strain on them. Consequently, morale is low.

In addition, Participant 11, a marketing manager, described how they had to let go of some of the fun in their office. Their team is exhausted and no longer engages in team-building activities that they used to enjoy. Part of it is due to the early departures of some team members which has altered the team culture. On the other hand, Participant 13 showed the greater extent in workplace dynamics, explaining that morale in their university was so low that they had not seen some colleagues in over a year, since the announcement of proposed changes. They delivered their lectures, but never went to the office, or only went when they knew no one was going to see them, such as weekends or late at night, to print or prepare material “so it was really grim.” People worked from the library, cafeteria or at home; they “stopped having meetings and the office was like a desert.”

Participant 13 went on to explain the shift in workplace dynamics, and the unexpected feeling that they no longer have a support network:

> I was mostly working with my office door closed. It felt like a mini lockdown again. I didn’t want to hear any gossip, yelling, or insults from colleagues who were more stressed than I was or not coping well. I needed to shield myself and work behind closed doors. Even though I eventually found out I was keeping my job, the entire year of not knowing and worrying became increasingly stressful and tense. The hallway was often empty, and people stopped coming to the office. There were moments when I could work with the door open because there was no one around—nobody.

In other words, a once lively work environment full of collaborative activities and conversations has suddenly become a ghost town. People preferred to work from home, away from others. "It’s become a zombie university. Very few students, very few staff, empty buildings, empty offices. It’s an

appalling place to be at the moment," said Participant 16. Similarly, Participant 3 stated that they felt more energised working from home, questioning why they should drive an hour to work only to be drained by the negativity in the workplace. They wanted to stay at home where they could maintain their optimistic attitude, as the pervasive negativity in the office environment was influencing their own outlook.

These scenarios outlined by the above participants is an instance in which they chose to withdraw from their jobs and organisation. They have removed themselves from the situation, not necessarily by quitting and moving on, but by avoiding the people and working from resulting in the lowest possible morale at the universities (De Witte et al., 2010).

As described by Participant 6 everyone is dealing with the same issues: a shift in workplace dynamics that includes the way people communicate, and the atmosphere in the office. Everything has changed, as much as businesses as usual, it is not straightforward because the impact is there. Some employees have resigned early after receiving redundancy letters, which puts loath onto participants among those who chose to stay and their teams. Going from a full office to one person showing up changing the dynamic, the way people work and manage each other “Like how much of the team’s energy affects yours, how much your energy affects the others.” There has been a significant increase in stress, which has affected both mental and physical well-being.

To a deeper extent, during these uncertain times, several participants also reported seeing their colleagues as competitors. Participant 8 added that their colleagues avoided interacting with them due to their low status at the university. There was an implicit battle among colleagues as they vied to renew their fixed-term contracts: "a hierarchy has been established, and everyone sort of unofficially knows. It feels like no one knows what to say to each other anymore." The sense of competition among colleagues and the evolving hierarchy contribute to a fragmented and tense work environment, further exacerbating feelings of isolation and stress.

To a deeper extent, during these uncertain times, several participants also reported seeing their colleagues as competitors. Participant 3 asked "What’s the point of motivation to start with?" This question arose from the belief that increased motivation might put the limelight on them and become a competitor for others. They used the Japanese saying, "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down," to express their preference for remaining quiet and coasting through the uncertainty. Participant 8 added that their colleagues avoided interacting with them due to their low status at the university. There was an implicit battle among colleagues as they vied to renew their fixed-term contracts: "a hierarchy has been established, and everyone sort of unofficially knows. It feels like no one knows what to say to each other anymore." The sense of competition among colleagues and the evolving hierarchy contribute to a fragmented and tense work environment, further exacerbating feelings of isolation and stress.

These comments indicate that the participants are grappling with a profound shift in workplace dynamics, which has intensified stress and affected their well-being. The transition from a collaborative and full office environment to one marked by reduced staff and heightened uncertainty has created a challenging atmosphere. Through culturally defined social structures, roles, norms, and values, cultures develop specific contexts that define the scope of valued resources, and determines

the level of one's stress (Hobfoll, 1989). This broader cultural perspective underscores the need to consider cultural influences when examining the impact of job insecurity on employee well-being (Sender et al., 2016). The constant cycle of compromise, where participants must choose between personal peace and professional interactions, highlights a key stressor: the impact of job insecurity on both mental and physical health. Overall, these comments reveal a complex interplay of factors that significantly influence the participants' job satisfaction and emotional well-being.

5.2.4 Underemployment and Job Dissatisfaction

The fourth sub-theme that emerged from the data was related to *underemployment and job dissatisfaction.* During the interviews, participants expressed frustration with not working to their full potential and not completing responsibilities outlined in their job descriptions as a result of stalled projects and restrictions during the organisation's restructuring. Many participants reported their dissatisfaction with feeling underemployed. For instance, Participant 3, a senior brand designer, stated that in recent months, they felt more like a meta operator than a designer. They described doing repetitious work and only ten percent of their job's regular responsibilities, with no chance for creativity or decision-making. The restructure has rendered them unable to work as they once did, leading to a sense of being on a "halfway holiday"—physically present but mentally checked out. This position has become extremely stressful for the participant, as they would prefer to fully engage in their role and apply their skills for what they are qualified for, rather than feeling underemployed and dissatisfied with their reduced workload (Kim & Park, 2006).

Similarly, Participant 11 highlighted that their marketing team has become more reactive than proactive due to the inability to prepare ahead. They said that the team has been unable to engage in the level and scale of planning that is generally expected in their roles, leaving them feeling untethered. This situation has persisted longer than they would care to admit, leading to frustration (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010). As a result, team members have found themselves frequently checking their phones during work hours, as there is not much work to be done unless it is reactive. Unfortunately, the uncertainty produced by the organisational restructuring has left them with nothing to proactively plan for.

On the contrary, Participant 14, an academic, feels underemployed and dissatisfied after being made redundant. Despite having an end date, they want to continue working until then; however, their organisation has stripped them of their responsibilities:

> So, we're supposed to be working, but we've got nothing to work on. It feels horrible for someone like me who is an extroverted, hyperactive person. Having work to do makes me feel good, and doing nothing is killing some of us. They actively locked us out, being dismissed from things that we would normally be involved in.

The comments above demonstrates the emotional and psychological toll of underemployment, emphasising how being denied of meaningful work can elicit emotions of worthlessness, frustration, and discontent, particularly for individuals who thrive on activity and engagement. This discovery echoes previous research findings that long-term job insecurity significantly reduces job satisfaction, with the impacts intensifying over time. The looming threat of underemployment exacerbates

frustration and compromises individual's basic requirements, making it an undesirable prospect for employees (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010; De Witte, 2010).

Likewise, Participant 7 emphasised heightened anxieties and disappointment about working in the HE sector after experiencing first-hand job uncertainty. They remarked, "The academy and HE is not what it appears to be when you're a student. So, it's a very disappointing experience to work in HE." This response indicates a disillusionment with working in HE, a stark contrast between their early perceptions of the academic world as a student and the reality they encountered as an employee. Nothing prepares employees in HE for the transition from a secure job doing what they enjoy to feeling insecure and unfulfilled. This upset in the balance of the employee-employer relationship leads to high levels of distress and frustration.

Aligning with literature, an organisation's failure to provide secure jobs can significantly alter employees' perceptions of their obligations to the organisation. Feelings of underemployment and job dissatisfaction stem from unmet work role obligations, such as failing to perform duties and responsibilities as specified by the organisation. Therefore, employees such as Participant 7, experience substantial stress as they consider if they have chosen the right career path (Lim, 1997). The rise of job insecurity in HE creates a sense of underemployment and dissatisfaction, which becomes a stressor that affects the well-being of employees (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010).

5.3 Effects on Well-being

This section reports the *effects on well-being* as the main theme, and associated sub-themes, that emerged from the data analysis. This main theme helps respond to the second research sub-question:

- How do the stressors of job insecurity impact the well-being of employees?

All 17 participants have identified several stressors that have impacted their well-being, highlighting the profound effect they have had on employees. Consisten with existing literature, this suggests such stressors reduce psychological and physiological well-being (De Witte, 2020), demonstrating the association between stressors and their impact on overall well-being. This study is unique in that it introduces the 'domino theory,' which illustrates how job insecurity sets off cascading effects among employees. The analysis uncovered six sub-themes: *mental health, physical health, intrinsic motivation, self-perception, domino effect, and daily life and relationships.* These themes will be developed further in following sections.

In the context of Stress Theory, the effects on well-being illustrate how stressors, such as job insecurity, impact an individual's overall health. Developed by Hans Selye (as cited in (Madazimova et al., 2023), this model states that stress occurs when there is a chronic imbalance between demands and the resources available to meet those demands. This perceived imbalance triggers a stress response, negatively impacting well-being. Participant 16 exemplifies this by saying "the stress from job insecurity is constant. You're never sure what's going to happen next," highlighting the never-ending nature of stress with job insecurity and its eventual psychological or physical consequences. This aligns with Stress Theory, demonstrating how job insecurity can lead to severe and enduring impacts on well-being (Mazzola et al., 2011). For instance, Participant 13 described how their well-

being was severely impacted, stating that they "cannot eat properly, cannot sleep properly, they are constantly tired, anxious, worried, and cannot stop thinking about every single possible outcome from bad to worse." This underscores the profound effects of job insecurity. The stressors identified in section 5.2 can have detrimental effects on one's well-being, even extending to negatively affect one's overall quality of life (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020).

Responding to the second sub-question, the findings in this main theme can also be considered through the lens of COR theory, which Hobfoll (2002) delves deeper into the negative consequences of job insecurity. According to COR theory, job security is a valued resource that ensures access to other essential resources, such as salary, in order to meet economic needs. As noted by participants and highlighted in this theme, when these valuable resources are threatened or lost, anxiety and stress arise. Individuals become stressed when they fail to invest resources essential for their aspirations. The threat or actual loss of a job, as experienced by the interviewees in this study, presents a significant threat to valuable resources, leading to decreased well-being (Saeed et al., 2023). The threat of job insecurity may result in reduced perceived control over the work situation, which in turn may negatively affect employee well-being and hence may evoke resource loss (Vander Elst et al., 2014). Participant 7 demonstrated these implications on well-being by stating that their “futures are unknown and uncertain, and it is really bad on well-being, things like mental health," indicating persistent stress that often leads to profound and enduring impacts on well-being.

These findings are consistent with the effects on employee well-being reported in existing literature. Notably, all participants have primarily bought to attention the significant mental and physical health challenges they face as a result of confirmed or perceived job loss (Cheng & Chan, 2008; De Witte et al., 1999; De Witte et al., 2015; Hellgren et al., 1999; Richter & Näswall, 2019; Selenko et al., 2017). In addition, participants' intrinsic motivation has been revealed to decrease when they struggle to stay motivated after experiencing firsthand job uncertainty (Mahmoud et al.,2021). It is also worth noting that previous research has found that job-related stressors associated with the threat of job loss have an impact on one's identity, which may help to explain the findings of this study, in which participants reported a decrease in self-esteem and self-confidence, both of which are important aspects of well-being. The domino effect is an intriguing and previously less explored subject in which one consequence leads to another. As evidenced by the sub-theme within this study, participants repeatedly highlighted this concept, which contributes to the expanding body of literature on job insecurity. Finally, participants identified negative effects on their daily routines and relationships as a major effect of job insecurity and its stressors. This is consistent with the literature that highlights the growing tension in daily life and relationships as managing life becomes extremely difficult (Blom et al., 2020; De Witte et al., 2015; Griep et al., 2016; Haar, 2013).

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previously identified effects on well-being in the literature, while also offering novel insights that will be further explored in the sub-theme analyses. This section seeks to develop a theoretical understanding of the impact of job insecurity on perceived well-being by integrating Stress Theory and COR Theory with the empirical data. The analysis of the main themes and sub-themes of effects on well-being will specifically address sub-question RQ2, exploring how these factors influence overall well-being of employees experiencing job insecurity and working in the HE sector.

5.3.1 Mental Health

A prominent sub-theme that emerged from the data was *mental health*. 16 participants provided examples of situations where job insecurity has negatively impacted their mental health. All but one participant mentioned that their mental health was compromised during periods of precarity, consultation, or other organisational measures that threatened job security. For instance, Participant 16, a manager, observed that their colleagues and employees on short-term contracts requested stress relief indicating that "psychological, emotional, mental, and spiritual health has been compromised by various pressures associated with job insecurity." This shows that job insecurity has a variety of repercussions on one's mental health, including increased withdrawal behaviours and higher absenteeism and turnover intentions (Staufenbiel and Köing, 2010).

The participant went on to explain that they knew of two individuals who had recently resigned from their roles, even before their contracts were terminated by the university, due to the immense pressure, as they felt this was "the price they had to pay to protect their mental well-being." This comment shows the psychological distress that employees face, with some deciding to resign early to alleviate the persistent mental health struggles. This is in line with Emberland and Rundmo's (2010) findings that job insecurity undermines mental health and conflicts with overall well-being. Nella et al. (2015) similarly note that the stressors associated with job insecurity can severely induce a range of mental disorders, and minor psychiatric symptoms, eroding one's mental health.

Similarly, Participant 15 described job insecurity as a very unsettling experience for them, as it affects their mental health in terms of their outlook in life. They noted significant negative changes compared to their normal personality:

> I tend to find silver linings and rely on them, even on my down days. I can push aside negative feelings by focusing on other things. There's a certain degree of uncertainty I don't mind dealing with because I know not everything is neatly laid out or expected, and I'm usually pretty flexible. However, this job insecurity feels like a sword dangling above me. I keep wondering, will it drop? Will it disappear? Or will it just drop a little further but not all the way? I don't know and its very unsettling.

This metaphor the participant used in the above comment of a "dangling sword" vividly captures the heightened anxiety and distress caused by job insecurity. The ongoing ambiguity regarding their job status is a significant source of anxiety, which emphasises the profound psychological cost of not knowing what the future holds (Nella et al., 2015; Russo & Terraneo, 2020).

It is important to note that it is common for individuals to feel overwhelmed when confronted with unforeseen events such as job insecurity, which threatens the loss of resources. 16 participants were able to articulate how their mental health had been depleted, including some participants that noted they had experienced withdrawal, which led to anxiety and depression. Several participants (Participants 8, 14, 13, 12, and 16) reported having experienced depression over the course of finding out their confirmed or potential loss in their jobs, indicating the rise in mental health disorders in face of job insecurity Participant 12 stated that they withdrew, and although they were not clinically dragonised with depression, they were adamant that they were suffering from it:

> It was scary, one because I was withdrawing myself from important information. I was cutting everything out and shutting down. It was dangerous… I was that person who was really struggling with depression every day and didn't know how to go about it.

This comment highlights the severe mental health impacts of job insecurity, illustrating how it can lead to withdrawal, depression, and a sense of isolation. The individual's experience of shutting down and cutting themselves off from important information underscores the dangerous consequences of prolonged stress. In the workplace, depressive symptoms may manifest as a lack of enthusiasm, frequent complaining, reduced productivity, aggressive behaviour, decreased career interest, and absenteeism (Roche et al., 2014). Their struggle with depression and the ongoing battle to manage it internally emphasises the profound and lasting effects on well-being that job insecurity can cause. According to the literature, when employees are subjected to stressful work conditions, their risk of depression, anxiety, and emotional weariness increases, which are early symptoms of burnout (Roche et al., 2014). For these participants, they perceived they were suffering from burnout as a result of job insecurity.

A similar experience to depression was indicated by Participant 13 who shared that they had experienced a depressive episode as a result of the stress associated with job insecurity. They had previously overcome depression through counselling and medication but found themselves needing medication again to maintain stability during this period of uncertainty in the university they work for. They compared job insecurity to an "earthquake, 8 on the Richter scale, or even more," illustrating its devastating impact on their life. To cope, they constantly keep a rescue remedy in their purse. Although they have not used it in months, having it gives them a peace of mind knowing that help is available if required. Anxiety and persistent worry have proved devastating for participants in these circumstances. For example, this participant expressed feeling restless and having constant thoughts, noting "You feel anxious and worried, and your head cannot stop thinking about every single possible outcome from bad to worse." Employees constantly live with the insecurities in their minds, known as high mental arousal, and thus a 'racing mind' due to fears of job loss which makes mental illness at work fundamentally critical to consider (Haar & Brougham, 2022a).

Furthermore, Participant 14 highlighted the complex layers of cognitive emotions that has contributed to the deterioration of their mental health as a result of job insecurity. They noted, "The first feeling is fear." The second question is, "Are you being singled out?" This led them to think of the concept "You versus them, and them versus you" which emphasised the emotions of isolation and exclusion that can accompany a loss of self-esteem that links with the self-perception sub-theme in section 5.3.4 (Adekiya, 2018). Following fear, they experienced anxiety and then hatred, which was described as "just utter contempt." Finally, depression set in, which they related to grief: "You get angry, worried, sad, then you just want to crawl into bed."

This comment above indicates the significant psychological impact of job insecurity on mental health. It depicts a chain of emotions that begins with fear and progresses to feelings of isolation, anxiety, hatred, and eventually depression. The participant's experience reveals how job insecurity can damage self-esteem and generate a sense of exclusion, ultimately leading to considerable emotional distress (Roche et al., 2014). While depression was a prominent mental health disorder that was

bought to attention by those affected, others have reported the worry and emotional exhaustion side to mental health.

With regards to being a manager, Participant 4 articulated their experiences slightly differently, emphasising the emotional strain they felt when they acknowledged that it takes more effort to be professional and positive with their employees. It takes more energy for them to project positivity, which can be draining. The participant stated “The effort you put into your job becomes more focused and exhausting over time,” indicating the exhaustion of needing to look out for their team and the weight they bear to uplift their team while dealing with something that impacts everyone differently. Hence, managers are taking strain as well.

In other words, employees are exhausted, anxious, and less enthusiastic about coming to work—key indicators of burnout (Haar, 2022). Participant 4 encapsulated this concern by noting that their mood, mental stability, and emotional well-being have led to heightened anxiety. They have difficulty sleeping and are biting their nails more often, both of which are evident indicators of anxiety (Joubert, 1993). Similarly, Participant 7 mentions being constantly anxious and in a defensive mode to fight for their job. They note this mental exhaustion is relentless and unending and describe the experience of job insecurity as not being carefree or feeling they have the luxury to pick and choose jobs, but as a much deeper and unsettling sense of instability.

It was disheartening to learn that Participant 8 has not attempted to relieve their mental health; rather than an increase in absenteeism, they have made consistent efforts to attend work every day. However, they have neglected their mental health since they are constantly concerned that their colleagues have more to offer than they have. The participant expressed the belief that their only contribution is their availability, thus they have never taken a sick day. Even despite personal hardships, such as the passing of their mother, they continued to show up to work, noting “it feels like I’m the one who cannot afford to take time off.” While most people would take the time off to grieve, and feel particularly distanced from work, some, such as Participant 8, have compromised their mental health in order to secure their job at the university, illustrating the serious mental health consequences of job insecurity.

Participants' experiences indicated the emotional exhaustion and anxiety that job insecurity induces, severely impacting employees' well-being. This is in line with the findings that emotional exhaustion, caused by excessive and prolonged stressors, is an early indicator of burnout, which correlates with lower job satisfaction and performance and increased turnover. Such exhaustion is supporting the notion that employees' effectiveness and well-being deteriorate, but anxiety can also lead to acute psychological disorders, including hypersensitivity, chronic worry, and diminished capacity for concentration, memory, perception, and sleep. The findings reveal a wide range of behaviours that cause mental health concerns for employees (Roche et al., 2014).

5.3.2 Physical Health

The second sub-theme which emerged was *physical health.* 15 participants explicitly mentioned descriptions of instances where their physical health had been impacted due to job insecurity with 11 participants reporting sleeplessness, identifying it was a key symptom of their stress. For example, Participant 1 experienced sleeplessness, staying awake late at night worrying about the letter they

received indicating potential job loss during their organisation's staff consultation period. Participant 17 mentioned going without sleep for two to three weeks, while Participant 15 elaborated that while they do not feel stressed during the day, tension hits them at night, causing them to wake up in the middle of the night and be unable to physically sleep, thinking, "Well, my job is still not secure."

This pattern of sleeplessness among participants is consistent with previous studies on the effects of sleep on employees' health outcomes (De Witte et al., 2015). Sleep is a critical health indicator, that is increasingly being examined by physicians and public health academics for its relationship to overall quality of life. Work-related stress is frequently associated with negative somatic health outcomes; employees who sense a threat to their job security are more likely to experience poor sleep (Kim et al., 2021). As such, poor sleep patterns noted by participants in this study can be considered a major symptom that affects physical health. Participants offered their perceptions that poor sleep quality is closely related to their physical health complaints. For instance, Participant 6 reported a lack of sleep, increased bodily tension, and general discomfort while trying to sleep, while Participant 10 struggled to sleep, suggesting it "was a symptom of stress."

Another negative impact on physical health due to job insecurity is the compromised immune system of employees. Several participants (Participants 6, 8, 12, 13, and 15) reported more frequent illnesses or worsening of pre-existing health conditions, implying that stress may increase vulnerability to infections as evidenced in prior studies (Nella et al., 2015). For example, Participant 15 provided a detailed account of their struggles, noting that dwelling on the stresses of their situation and the uncertainty of what might happen next had a severe impact on their physical health. They described the symptoms they faced during this time:

> When I get stressed, I also experience uncomfortable gastric symptoms like nausea, urgency to use the bathroom, and feeling physically ill. Job insecurity really hits me in these ways.

Similarly, Participant 6, a manager, saw that their team has been becoming sick more often, with coughing and visual signs of illness, and wondering that "maybe stress also makes you more vulnerable to infections." These remarks show that participants experienced an increase in illnesses because stress affects not only their mental well-being but also manifests in physical symptoms, weakening their immune systems and making them more vulnerable to infections and other health problems. This aligns with literature on the prevalence of common infections among employees with job insecurity, such as the common cold, flu-like illnesses, and gastroenteritis. Research suggests there is a high prevalence of these health concerns among employees who report job uncertainty, indicating a significant influence on their overall health (Mohren et al., 2003).

An interesting, unexpected, and striking remark about the severity of manifested health conditions comes from Participant 8. They chose to risk their lives and sacrifice their well-being in order to look their best for an upcoming job interview. As an academic on a fixed-term contract, they must regularly reapply for their position after when each contract term ends, competing with other team members. Lacking confidence in their body and living with gallstones, they have chosen not to undergo surgery for their current biggest physical health challenge. Based on experiences within their current place of employment, this participant believes the inadvertent symptoms of their

disease might afford them a higher chance of future employment based on assumptions of physical appearance influencing hiring:

> Because of my job insecurity, I'm delaying the removal of my gallbladder. Ironically, my gallbladder disease is helping me lose weight, and I'm really hoping that by the time I have to re-interview for my job, I'll be thin enough to compete with the other employees. My weight has been a barrier to employment… I know I have to delay this surgery and lose as much weight as possible to stand a chance against the other applicants.

The above comment exemplifies how job insecurity can exacerbate pre-existing health conditions. Although job insecurity is not the underlying cause of the participant's chronic disease, it has worsened their condition because they are not prioritising their health. Instead, they are focusing on increasing their chances for a successful job interview. This demonstrates the severe impact of job insecurity, as individuals may risk their lives to improve their employment prospects. It underscores the importance of job security in an individual's life and the impact it has on their well-being.

The preceding comment demonstrates how job uncertainty might exacerbate pre-existing health issues. Although employment insecurity is not the underlying cause of the participant's chronic disease, it has exacerbated their condition because they are not prioritising their health. Instead, they are concentrating on increasing their chances of a successful job interview. This demonstrates the severe impact of job instability, as individuals may risk their lives to improve their career prospects. This emphasises the importance of work stability in people's life, despite the fact people are willing to neglect their bodies and their physical health in order to give themselves a fighting of keeping their jobs (De Witte et al., 2015).

In addition to sleep loss and increased illnesses, participants reported that job insecurity had a significant impact their physical health by causing low energy levels and lifestyle changes such as decreased exercise and poor diet. Participant 13 summarised their experience, noting that they had no energy and had stopped going to the gym. The intense stress kept them awake at night, leaving them exhausted during the day. Their diet changed drastically, stating that "At work, I was exhausted and had difficulty eating—opting for comfort foods like chocolate and biscuits instead of nutritious meals." They gained weight as a result of eating snacks instead of proper meals. At one point, they cooked a meal but could not bring themselves to swallow, so they turned it all into soup "It was a scary time; my throat felt like it was closing up," the participant recalled.

Participants have struggled to stick to a balanced diet, frequently turning to comfort foods. 11 of the 17 individuals reported a change in their diet. For example, Participant 17 reported eating more chocolate than usual. Participant 7 described an "over-reliance on caffeine and energy drinks." Due to their precarious financial situation, low-income participants struggle to access and afford nutritious food. Financial pressures being a stressor has impacted their physical well-being, as it has prompted participants to choose less nutritious, cheaper alternatives. Despite their extensive studies and hard effort in becoming academic tutors, they continue to have difficulty acquiring quality groceries, which they resent. While Participant 4 clearly noted a difference in their body after restructuring plans emerged in the organisation they work for, noting "weight gain, as well as becoming less fit."

Participant 11 further elaborated the effects on physical health, having recalled experiencing a bizarre skin reaction at one point, and their manager saying, “it’s because you’re stressed,” to which they responded, “you’re absolutely right, poor diet has certainty done it.”

In contrast, while some individuals may gain weight due to unhealthy eating habits, while others may experience weight loss due to a lack of appetite. Participant 14 recalled their struggle with not eating or sleeping, feeling hungry but physically unable to consume food, which has affected their entire digestive system. When asked about the impact of job insecurity on their physical health, they shared their challenging experience:

> I've lost 20 kilos. I don't eat. I can't eat. I cry. It's absolutely mentally devastating. I have to go to hospitals to keep feeding. Look at me, I'm a skeleton—I wasn't like this a year ago, until they started threatening my job. I don't eat, and when I do, I vomit from the stress. Whenever my phone pings with an email, I panic. No sleeping, no eating.

The above comment shows that job insecurity has had a severe impact not only on the participant's mental health but also on their physical health, leading to significant weight loss, inability to eat, and constant stress. It emphasises the devastating effects of job threats on overall well-being and the intrusion of work stress into personal time, further exacerbating their physical state. This is consistent with the literature, which shows that job insecurity has a variety of physical health consequences, such as hormonal dysregulation, autoimmune disorders, certain cancers, metabolic syndrome, and increased cardiovascular morbidity and mortality (Khubchandani & Price, 2017).

5.3.3 Intrinsic Motivation

The third sub-theme that emerged is *intrinsic motivation.* 14 partiicpants indicated that the potential or confirmed loss of their jobs leads to a lack of motivation and negatively affects their work performance. Employees facing potential job loss are in a state of limbo; they lack confirmation to seek new employment yet must continue working as if it's business as usual. Those with confirmed job loss know they will leave soon but must work until their end date or until redundancy packages are available. During these times, it is challenging for employees to find the intrinsic motivation to continue working and focus on their tasks. As Participant 10 highlighted, there’s an atmosphere of insecurity in the workplace “making you feel undervalued.” The participant further explained that if one is not valued, there is no motivation to work hard at their jobs.

Furthermore, Participant 12 noted that a lack of interest, concentration, and focus all began to creep up when job insecurity became a factor. Their thoughts are constantly preoccupied with questions like, "Is it coming? Is the next target our university? Could it be my department?" Although they continue to work, there is a persistent distraction that keeps them slightly off course. These comments highlight the impact of job insecurity on employees' mindsets. According to Mahmoud et al. (2021), intrinsically motivated individuals are driven by self-satisfaction and are typically content to meet organisational standards. However, when employees perceive a threat to their job security, their job satisfaction decreases, challenging their intrinsic motivation.

In this study, participants expressed significant dissatisfaction. Participant 6 recalled their whole department being disestablished, leading them to feel that their efforts are useless: “What’s the point? It doesn’t matter, I’m going to leave anyway. They’re kicking me out.” This sentiment highlights their lack of motivation due to their roles being disestablished. Similarly, Participant 13 shared that their motivation levels were “completely underground, not even ground level—buried.” As an academic researcher, they had planned their year, including the number of articles to write and submit. However, during the period of instability and insecurity, they could not achieve any of those goals. “Anything outside the bare minimum, which is teaching in my case, was zero.” Additionally, Participant 9 expressed that they just do a basic job of everything instead of doing a really good job on something. The experiences of Participants 6, 13, and 9 indicate how job insecurity can drastically diminish motivation, leading employees to abandon their goals and focus solely on the bare minimum required tasks.

Participant 3 described the experience as “definitely negative, because I’m not motivated in my job anymore.” They mentioned that they used to go above and beyond their responsibilities, but now they simply say no. There are things they would like to improve, but they feel powerless to make changes. “It’s not within my power to do anything... my work has become wait and see,” they explained. This lack of job satisfaction leads them to question, “what’s the point of motivation to start with?” Participant 3 went deeper into reasons why they would prefer to lay low, and stay unmotivated, offering a proverb:

> It’s like the Japanese proverb: ‘The nail that sticks up gets hammered.’, So, why be the nail that sticks out? You are better off to stay quiet, just cruise through until the time comes. Keep your head down, do the job, and hope no one notices you until they need to.

This comment above indicates that being highly motivated and visible in the workplace can make one a target, especially in a competitive environment. It reflects a strategy of self-preservation where employees choose to remain inconspicuous, doing only what is necessary to avoid drawing attention and potential negative consequences. This approach underscores the fear and uncertainty prevalent among employees facing job insecurity. Considering COR theory, the participant here is trying to protect their resources with an avoidance strategy. It adds another layer to understanding how an employee’s lack of intrinsic motivation impacts their overall well-being.

Participant 5 also discussed how their attitudes and behaviours have changed. Their lack of motivation manifests in slacking off, arriving late, and leaving early—actions they never would have considered five years ago, adding that they are "just at the end of their tether." They described their current state as having a “whole lethargic attitude towards work.”

To illustrate more of this lethargic attitude, Participant 11 shared instances where they would check their phone instead of focusing on work. There is a saying in their team, “don’t be careless, just care less, just do it.” This reflects their diminished attention and focus on tasks; they are merely going through the motions because they must, without any real motivation. This feeling stems from a lack of control over their work environment and the direction of the organisation. Participant 11 mentioned that they have not been able to maintain their previous level of commitment or “mana”

in their work. As a manager, she acknowledges that standards have slipped, and tasks are completed out of necessity rather than dedication, which is disheartening.

The above comments reinforce the literature, which shows a negative relationship between job insecurity and intrinsic motivation, as well as positive relationships between intrinsic motivation and job performance (Shin et al., 2019). In this study, participants reported a decrease in motivation for work; they did the work but did not fully commit to it, leading to reduced job performance. There is no "mana" in their work, no sense of purpose, preventing them from performing at a high standard. Therefore, intrinsic motivation is critical for job performance, highlighting the strong positive association proposed by Shin et al. (2019.)

Another employee further explained a stark difference between their intrinsic motivation at a time when they felt they had job security and when they did not have job security:

> I went from one hundred percent to zero. When I first started, there wasn't a student on this planet that I wasn't trying to attract. There wasn't an undergraduate, I didn't want to succeed. Everything was one hundred percent all the time, and now my motivation is zero.

The above comment suggests a significant drop in drive and engagement. Initially, the participant was completely committed to attracting and supporting every student and assuring their success with every effort. However, their motivation has now plummeted to zero. This demonstrates the devastating effect of job instability on intrinsic motivation and job performance.

5.3.4 Self-Perception

A fourth sub-theme emerged in relation to *self-perception.* 10 participants reported experiencing a decline in self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-identity due to job insecurity. All 10 participants have shared moments where they doubted themselves, and questioned their identity, which indicates how closely tied one's job can be to their sense of self. Consequently, losing their job could significantly change their self-perception. For instance, Participant 2 argued that job insecurity has made them doubt their own abilities. They emphasised the importance of remembering that "you are good at what you do, and you have skills to offer that you've developed through experiences in different jobs that have brought you to where you are today." However, at times it can be challenging especially when they feel they are not good at promoting themselves. This response suggests that job insecurity can lead to self-doubt and reduced self-esteem.

This comment supports the idea that the sense of powerlessness and heightened threat intensity from job insecurity applies pressures to one's ability to self-regulate. When an individual is deeply invested in their role, they use emotional defences to cope with threatening situations. The powerlessness or intense threat associated with job insecurity impairs their self-regulation, leading to increased worry, diminished self-esteem, and an overwhelming influx of negative emotions. This disruption in emotional stability can negatively affect cognitive functioning and cause individuals to view themselves in a more negative light (Knežević & Krstić, 2020).

Likewise, Participant 8 exemplifies the literature on the inability to self-regulate, emphasising the imperativeness of job security in shaping their sense of identity:

> It's security and identity. …. I know that eventually I will have to [get another job], but because of my identify and [personal] struggles, I don't get much acceptance. Within academia, I have been able to work to have some type of niche. So, the threat of always losing my job is very personal and it is a threat of losing who I am, and the opportunity to be that person.

The comment above underscores the profound link between personal identity and professional stability. For the employee, their job is not only a means of financial support but is deeply intertwined with their sense of self and acceptance. The fear of losing their job represents a fear of losing a fundamental part of who they are and the validation they receive within their academic niche. This threat extends beyond financial instability, it is about losing a space where they have found acceptance and a sense of belonging. This situation illustrates the signific of academic roles play in shaping one's identity and sense of security.

According to the view of social identity, employment can be described as a social group membership that is integral to an individual's self-concept, defining their place in society. For the participant, they have become part of a social group, they have found a place for them to exist with their identity. When job insecurity arises, individuals fear becoming unemployed and losing their connection to this social group, which threatens their sense of belonging and identity. As a result, they may experience a weakened social identity and heightened emotional and psychological distress in their well-being (Selenko et al., 2017). This can be seen in Participant 4, who described their experience with job insecurity a blow to their dignity and status in their field. They elaborated that this loss drained their resilience and undermined their ability to view themselves positively. They recalled how their personal security was deeply affected, saying, "who you were was suddenly just questioned." As emerged from the data, participants highlighted that it is intensely personal and challenging not to take it to heart when your job is at stake.

Participant 9 reported a decline in self-esteem and self-worth as a consequence of job insecurity. This situation led to increased self-doubt and a conflict between their personal identity and professional stability. They felt their work was undervalued and believed that their contributions were not enough for job security, which they perceived as reserved for more capable individuals. Experiencing redundancy or job loss can give affected employees the impression that they are not worth holding onto, significantly impacting their self-perception and confidence. This aligns with the views that an individual with low self-esteem is more likely to perceive an insecure work situation as threatening, whereas those with high self-esteem see it as a challenge rather than a threat, helping them avoid the negative effects of job insecurity. Research indicates that job-related stressors reduce self-esteem, suggesting that previously identified stressors in this study are likely to influence the self-esteem of these participants (Kinnunen et al., 2003).

Similarly, Participant 14 asserted that they have experienced a profound change, feeling disconnected from the person they once were:

> I used to be incredibly confident, almost to the point of super arrogant. …. But now, I can't even look at my students in the eye anymore. That self-confidence and self-awareness had

> when I earned my PhD, which made me feel like I embodied the subject, has been taken away from me. Now I find myself questioning my competence every single day.

This comment reflects the deep impact job insecurity can have on an individual's self-perception and identity, which is line with the view that although employees have weaknesses both physically and psychologically, fulfilment of self-esteem will result in an optimistic and condiment attitude (Soelton et al., 2020). If self-esteem needs are not met, as seen with Participant 14, it can lead to negative behaviours. As a result, individuals may experience increased a pervasive sense of inadequacy, which can further impact their performance and interactions both personally and professionally.

5.3.5 Domino Effect

A fifth sub-theme emerged in relation to the *domino effect.* This theme was not explicitly stated by most participants but rather implied and foreshadowed through their experiences. While it has not been a prominent theme in literature, it remained a sub-theme after all iterations because it captures the cascading impact that occurred for participants when faced with job insecurity. Several employees described situations where one issue led to another, creating a cascading effect. Participant 14 specifically mentioned the domino effect when explaining the stress caused by late-night emails, describing them as “dropping bombs outside of work hours when people are trying to relax.” These sudden emails triggered a series of reactions: inability to eat, leading to sleeplessness, and a racing mind filled with thoughts like, "Is there anything I can be doing to help this situation? This anxiety then prompts them to text and reach out to other teachers, spreading concern among their colleagues as well. They described it as a "domino effect," which has also been reflected in the experiences of many other participants.

Participant 14, who already suffers from a heart condition and a brain tumour, has experienced additional health scares, with recent blood tests revealing issues with their liver. Although they acknowledged that their earlier chronic illnesses were not due to job insecurity, they believe that job insecurity has exacerbated these conditions. The underlying domino effect is evident, as poor mental health has contributed to a decline in their physical health, which in turn has affected their self-perception. This cascading impact shows how one issue leads to another, creating a compounded effect on their overall well-being:

> I have a couple of underlying conditions—a heart condition and a brain tumour that have been stable for ages. But when I lost a lot of weight and couldn't sleep, I went to my GP. They ran some blood tests and found that my liver was in trouble. Now they're looking at everything holistically, including my mental health. It seems like it all starts there, affecting everything else and mentally draining me.

When asked if there are any additional thoughts or experiences related to job insecurity and its effects on their well-being that they would like to share, the participant stated:

> My mental and physical ability to even try to do my job is gone. If they gave it back to me today, I don't think I could manage. I can't stand on my feet for three hours, let alone run a lab. They've worn me down completely.

The comments above highlight the association between mental and physical health, illustrating how a poor mental state can exacerbate underlying conditions over time. As previously discussed, mental health concerns can affect diet and sleep, leading to weight loss and physical weakness, which ultimately deteriorates underlying physical health conditions. This exemplifies the domino effect, evident in Participant 14's experience. Their mental health has triggered a chain reaction of problems, progressively worsened their physical health and led to a compounded decline in overall well-being. The domino effect continues with them unable to perform their job duties effectively, resulting in a loss of self-confidence and self-perception, disruption of normal routines, and significantly diminished overall well-being.

Participant 4 also emphasised the link between mental and physical health, highlighting the serious repercussions of diminishing mental well-being. They saw weight gain as a result of decreased mental resilience, which indicated a reduction in their regular activity levels due to persistent concern and stress. This exemplifies the domino effect, in which poor mental health contributes to decreasing physical health.

Many participants in this study demonstrated a domino effect, in which mental health difficulties had led to adverse effects on physical health. These findings contribute to the expanding literature on job insecurity by highlighting the domino effect and its role in connecting job insecurity to overall well-being. This study mirrors previous research on the relationship between job insecurity and physical and psychological well-being (De Witte et al., 2016; Hellgren et al., 1999; Kalil et al., 2010). Extending previous research, the discovery of the domino effect is a novel finding that reveals the cascading effects of job insecurity, a phenomenon that has received very little attention in the literature.

5.3.6 Daily Life and Relationships

The sixth sub-theme which emerged is *daily life and relationships.* 8 out of 17 participants indicated changes in their daily routines and increased relationship conflicts, particularly with family. For instance, Participant 10 explained how job insecurity affects their mood and relationships with others, especially close family and friends. It has made them short-tempered, as they prefer to focus completely on their professional difficulties, making them less relaxed and open to outside influences. They acknowledged "no doubt, it does affect your relationships with people you're closest to."

Participant 12 elaborated on this effect, stating that job insecurity cause stress not only at work but spills over into home life, resulting in an imbalance. They highlighted how ongoing discussions about the institution's potential threats and uncertainties, while initially an intended to help share the burden, eventually become unhealthy. Although their partner understands them, the constant conversations put strain on the relationship. They described the dilemma of realising that they no longer want to hear about the concerns, while still feeling compelling to share and let out their anxieties. While the employee viewed this as a means to lift the weight off their shoulders, they also acknowledged an emerging conflict in the relationship:

> It influenced us significantly; we stopped going for walks and instead just came home, had dinner, and watched TV. The dynamics we had before disappeared because we were

> constantly talking about the institution, I work in… it's definitely always on my mind which became overwhelming, ongoing discussions about my work.

The above comment demonstrates that job insecurity followed the participant home, affecting their relationship with their partner. The employee emphasised that it was always on their mind, disrupting previous daily routines. This created a persistent sense of imbalance in their life, aligning with the view that emotions and behaviours at work spill over into the personal domain. Experiences at work, such as stressors of job insecurity, can impact family life, leading to marital dissatisfaction. This perspective suggests lower satisfaction with work-family balance (Gupta & Dharl, 2024; Mauno et al., 2017).

For this employee, the differing perspectives between themselves and their partner on job insecurity caused tension in their relationship, leading to conflicts and periods of strain. As they reflected:

> We had quite a few differences over it. My partner's advice was very matter of fact, like, 'An organisation has to do what it must to survive,' which clashed with my emotional experience of the situation. Tension increased when job insecurity crept in with suggestions like, 'Just make sure you're doing your best to keep your job.' Of course, I was already doing that, but the insecurity still affected me.

The conflict between the participant and their partner has been influenced by the participant's insecure situation at work. Their differing perspectives regarding the matter has caused unnecessary tension in the relationship which aligns with the view that job insecurity is associated with poorer marital role quality, including marital dissatisfaction, tension, and adjustment issues (Mauno et al., 2017). It reflects the concept of work-family conflicts, where burnout related to job insecurity can be bought home and transferred to the partner, which complicates marital life (De Witte et al., 2015),

Another employee elaborated on the effects of job insecurity on their daily routine and time spent with their partner, highlighting how it affected their approach to everything, even a game of pool. They described it as "affecting our relationship because what was super happy, super fun, is now depressing and inward," arguing that the institution they work for "has turned me inside out." This indicates that job insecurity can profoundly transform a person's emotional state and outlook, turning enjoyable activities into sources of stress and negatively impacting personal relationships. This concurrent link between job insecurity and its impact on relationships may explain why Participant 8 shared this view:

> I really wish I wasn't so rude or short with my father sometimes, but the reality is …I'm not capable of anything else. I am fearful any time relatives come to visit because I can't give them the attention they want, and I can't be friendly to them because my job always comes first.

The above comments highlight that the consequences of job insecurity extend to family life, preventing individuals from fulfilling their family roles. In this situation, the participant struggles to perform their role as a daughter and cannot spend time with their family as they would like. This aligns with the view that workplace stressors compromise individuals' ability to enjoy personal life

and perform family roles. The spillover effects, such as withdrawing from fulfilling responsibilities, showing aggression, and ignorance towards family members is a significant effect of job insecurity, as the effects are no longer confined to individuals (Gupta & Dharl, 2024). The interaction of work and family domains often leads to conflict, impacting health and well-being. Prolonged exposure to these stressors, which disrupt daily routines and relationships, can result in health deterioration (Bandeira et al., 2021).

Participant 15 also noted the impact of job insecurity on their interactions with colleagues. They stated, " I think it is impacting the way I handle some of my interpersonal relationships at work." This participant suggested that job insecurity has influenced their relationships with colleagues, driving them to seek support from colleagues who share similar concerns while distancing themselves from those who appear indifferent.

With regard to changes in daily routines, several participants found it increasingly difficult to work and communicate with colleagues who had become more pessimistic. Participant 3 stated that they would rather stay at home and do their work there, querying "Why do I even want to be in a negative space?" implying that they would prefer spend time at home and be in a positive space than in the office, where the negative is. They can continue to work without feeling down.

As a result, they now work less in the office and have requested to work from home, spending less time with their colleagues. This comment indicates the strain on working relationships, as many prefer to remove themselves from those who are also dealing with the same insecurities. It is interesting to note that when jobs are threatened, it is often expected that people on the same boat will support and be in it together, but it appears that in some work groups, there is less camaraderie, and people tend to focus more on themselves rather than leaning in for one another.

5.4 Behavioural and Attitudinal Responses

This section reports the *behavioural and attitudinal responses* as the main theme and associated sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. This main theme helps to answer the third research sub-question:

- How do employees respond to the challenges posed by job insecurity?

In line with Stress Theory and COR Theory, 16 of 17 participants reported specific methods, strategies, or tools they employed in response to the effects of job uncertainty on their well-being. This section of the study delves into sub-themes that show how employees respond to the challenges of job insecurity, with an emphasis on their efforts to protect themselves and their overall well-being from further negative consequences. The literature has focused on understanding how employees respond to job insecurity, particularly in formerly secure roles, and how they perceive control in these situations (Shoss, 2017). The data analysis revealed three sub-themes: *coping mechanisms, and putting life on hold.* The sub-sections that follow go into greater detail on each theme.

In the framework of Stress Theory, the behavioural and attitudinal responses refer to how individuals actively manage their stress through behaviours, actions, and mindset adjustments in an effort to

persevere in the face of job insecurity (Shoss et al., 2023). This involves coping strategies such as increased work effort or future-orientated behaviours, as well as changes in attitudes such as bringing in more positivity and perseverance to the situation. These responses reflect how employees respond to perceived threats and challenges, which affects overall well-being and performance. This is because based on Folkman & Lazarus 1985 (as cited in Shoss, 2017) indicates that stress theory posits that situational control will reduce stress-related effects

Alternatively, in the context of COR Theory, behavioural and attitudinal responses are based on efforts to conserve, protect, or regain resources in response to stressors. While COR Theory has been used to study the impact of resource loss due to job insecurity and its effects on employee well-being, this section focuses on individual behaviour in the face of potential resource loss (Shoss et al., 2023). COR Theory is a motivational framework that explains human behaviour using the evolutionary urge to acquire and conserve resources for survival, which is important to behavioural genetics (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Under insecure conditions, COR Theory suggests that individuals will focus their efforts on acquiring valued resources, investing time and energy to secure further or better resources (Shoss et al., 2023). Consequently, employees seek additional support, shift work habits to conserve energy, or change attitudes to mitigate perceived threats (Emberland & Rundmo, 2010). These responses aim to protect against resource loss, preserve job stability, and enhance overall well-being by effectively managing the stressor's demands (Shoss, 2017).

These results are consistent with the behavioural and attitudinal reactions described in the literature. Coping mechanisms are critical for reducing the effects of work insecurity and managing the risk of job loss (Astarlioglu et al., 2011). Participants reported that people' ability to cope with environmental problems represents the fight-or-flight reaction and plays an important role in adjusting to change and planning for future job loss (Hartley, 1999; Shoss, 2017; Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2015). Furthermore, the concept of putting life on hold refers to a certain set of behaviours that occur when pressures develop. Many participants used a future-oriented approach, which challenges established conceptions of coping and is based on Bourdieu's (1998) work on planning constraints. This coping style for the participants in this study involved reducing daily consumption and delaying major life decisions, such as marriage, having children, or buying a house, to protect financial resources (Helbling & Kanji, 2018; Lozza et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previously established behavioural and attitudinal responses, while also providing unique insights into each sub-theme. This section delves into the sub-themes that emerged from the data, contributing to a better understanding of the influence of job insecurity on perceived well-being by combining Stress Theory and COR Theory with empirical results. The examination of the major sub-themes of behavioural and attitudinal reactions will focus on sub-question RQ3, which investigates how employees actively respond to the challenges posed by job insecurity.

5.4.1 Coping Mechanisms

This sub-theme *coping mechanisms* elaborates on the various methods, strategies, and tools employees utilised to conserve, protect and regain resources, as outlined in COR Theory. When asked about their coping strategies in response to job insecurity, participants reported a range of approaches. 16 out of 17 participants mentioned specific methods, aligning with existing literature.

For instance, according to Participant 10, there is value of living in the moment and embracing feelings of anger. They noted “paradoxically, holding onto your anger can be useful because your anger is justified. You shouldn’t let it go.” This participant suggested that maintaining a reason for their anger, rather than masking it with false emotions, allows them to stay true to themselves and “try and lift your head up and see the big picture.” This approach helps in processing information and adjusting to the situation. Interestingly, anger, though unexpected, can serve as a tool for acceptance and adaptation, offering a unique and insightful response to job insecurity.

For managers, addressing how their team copes with job insecurity are a significant concern. Participant 11 emphasised the importance of high transparency to ensure the team is aware of risks, challenges, and future directions. Recognising that lack of information can contribute to insecurity, this manager prioritised sharing all permissible information with their team. They highlighted the role of building "a high level of trust within my own team and communication with them" as crucial in implementing coping mechanisms against job insecurity.

The participant also mentioned focusing on maintaining productivity by avoiding overthinking and sticking to the tasks at hand. They highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for some enjoyment and outlets, such as through professional development or other activities, to help manage the stress associated with job insecurity.

Participant 15 highlighted that having a well-thought-out plan and a fallback strategy is the most effective approach. As a mother to a 10-month-old baby, she has developed a newfound resilience. She views job insecurity with a sense of perspective, acknowledging that while it would be a significant disappointment and upsetting, it’s not the end of the world. Embracing a positive attitude and accepting that some processes are beyond control can help manage the situation better.

Similarly, Participant 3 spoke about personal growth during periods of job insecurity. Although there are a few participants that saw the bright side of job insecurity, there are employees within the data that have embraced a sense of positivity and developed a growth mindset. Over the past year, they have focused on advancing their education by training and studying to earn their Master’s degree:

> I have spent more time on my personal growth… I’ve shifted my focus to something else, such as networking and enhancing my skills for potential jobs in the future. A bit more pre-networking, and anything that will improve my job opportunities when it comes to that time to look for a job.

When asked to explain further what upskilling and networking looked like to them, the participant went on to state that:

> I’m investing time in upskilling, building new relationships, and polishing my portfolio. By preparing ahead of time, once the need arises, at least I have everything there, I’m not scrambling to catch up, as I will have a well-documented trail of my progress and skill development. This proactive approach is more beneficial for my career than reacting to job insecurity at the last minute. It is about setting a new goal to chase and planning ahead

> instead of dwelling on work that's no longer there or matter. Like I say, I'm good at self-regulating.

In line with this experience, Participant 4 also stated they have been upskilling in response to job insecurity. While continuing their role, they have also started studying post-graduate diploma in hope to proactively prepare themselves in case changes are coming their way. An effective way to divert their focus to something productive without having to overthink their insecurities.

These comments indicate a proactive problem-focused approach to personal growth and professional development during periods of job insecurity. Participant 3 has turned their focus toward advancing their education, networking, and improving their abilities to better position themselves for future job opportunities. By spending time in upskilling, building new relationships, and preparing a well-documented portfolio, they aim to mitigate the effects of job insecurity. This approach exemplifies resilience and foresight, as the participant emphasises the importance of planning ahead and setting new goals rather than dwelling on uncertainties. Their ability to self-regulate and adapt to changing circumstances demonstrates a response to the challenges posed by job insecurity. This is an instance where an employee has adopted a positive attitude towards job insecurity instead of a negative attitude (Lee et al., 2023). As indicated by the participant there are resources out there that can help employees deal in a more positive manner with job insecurity (Costa & Neves, 2017).

In addition, Participant 3 went on to add casual walks with their dog helps, and talking with family goes a long way. It is about "valuing what you have and looking for changes that you could do yourself because nobody else is going to anything for you in that context." This comment indicates a proactive approach to managing stress and job insecurity. By engaging in self-care activities and maintaining strong personal relationships, Participant 3 underscores the value of taking personal responsibility for one's mental and health. This proactive attitude highlights the significance of self-initiated actions and mindset shifts in coping with the challenges posed by job insecurity to alleviate stress (Giunchi et al., 2019).

In line with this comment, for Participant 2, the key lies in their attitudinal response to change. They reflected on how, despite previously believing they disliked change, they have realised they had effectively navigated several changes. They clarified, "It's just a matter of having it explained in a way that I understand the picture, and I can see myself as part of it, and then adjusting," highlighting that "change is constant." This perspective underscores the importance of understanding and integrating oneself into the change process. It implies that effective communication and a clear vision of one's role in the evolving environment can facilitate adaptation and help cope with change. This is a sign of optimism, and optimism helps alleviate the negative effects of job insecurity because optimistic people see future occurrences with hope and positive expectations (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). This attitudinal shift indicates resilience and the ability to thrive amidst uncertainty, highlighting the importance of mentality in responding to job insecurity and organisational transitions.

The importance of communication has been a significant revelation in coping with job insecurity. It is a behavioural response, as individuals need to open up to those around them to alleviate stress. Participants 1, 5, 7, and 9 indicated that discussing their concerns has made it easier to cope.

Participant 1 noted, “While in the process of talking about it, feelings might come up, but after talking about it, anxiety is less, so it’s helpful to talk about it even though it may be difficult.” In some instances, employees have relied on colleagues who are going through similar experiences. Participant 5 shared, “Our office has always been good at looking out for one another; we always talk about it.”

Many have found that emotion-focused strategies, such as seeking emotional social support, reinterpretation, redefining, acceptance, or denial, are effective ways to respond to the stresses of job insecurity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Participant 9 emphasised, “It is about re-prioritizing and making sure that family time is not sacrificed; it is about keeping things in perspective.” These strategies are seen as effective in preventing a plunge into negativity (Astarlioglu et al., 2011).

5.4.2 Putting Life on Hold

The second sub-theme that emerged is *putting life on hold.* Individuals have responded to job instability by reducing their everyday consumption and delaying significant life decisions. Financial stressors frequently cause insecure employees to suspend purchases of goods and services and postpone key decisions such as getting married, having children, or purchasing a home (Lozza et al., 2013). More than half of the participants in this study (9 out of 17) reported putting their lives on hold in various ways. As one example, Participant 6 recounted how, when they received receiving a letter of potential job loss, they responded on what they could control and planned their next actions, ultimately delaying big life decisions. The participant went on to state their actions in response to financial pressures:

> I’m not blind to the situation; I know there’s a possibility I might lose my job. So, I’ve decided to hold off big decisions—we've postponed our wedding to next year to give ourselves more time, we’re pausing on getting a mortgage, and we’ve cancelled our next trip… I’ve also made personal choices to focus on what I can do for my next step.

This comment underscores the significant impact of job insecurity on personal life decisions. It highlights how uncertainty in employment may cause individuals to postpone major life decisions and focus on immediate, controllable aspects of their lives. This perspective is consistent with previous research by Castiglioni et al. (2019) in the Slovak Republic, which echoes findings from earlier studies in the Italian context (Lozza et al., 2013; Lozza et al., 2017). According to both the replication and original studies, job instability has a large impact on key life decisions, more so than day-to-day consumption, which is necessary, less flexible, and cannot completely avoided.

Many participants in this study acknowledged having to put their life on hold as a response to job insecurity. For example, Participant 3 described their predicament as postponing holidays, upgrading their car, or purchasing a home, stating, "It's putting a pause on your life." This highlights an attitudinal shift, where the uncertainty of job security changes their mindset and outlook on future plans (Astarlioglu et al., 2011). Participant 3, who is the only interviewee that did not report any mental health concerns, argued that they had always been adept at self-regulating their emotions and maintaining happiness, thus safeguarding their mental health. This perspective is particularly interesting as it is consistent with existing literature, which suggests that individuals’ well-being improves when they perceive they have control over their environment. Being positive and proactive

can promote well-being when dealing with resource loss and the complexities, uncertainties, and instabilities of situations such as job loss (Giunchi et al., 2019).

Funamentally Participant 5 underlined the difficulties of planning for the future, saying, "You don't really plan for the future because you don't know how long the job is going to last." This sentiment reflects a behavioural response, as it directly impacts their actions and decisions regarding life events and investments (Astarlioglu et al., 2011). Therefore, they have chosen to drop the idea of planning for the future, when anything can happen to their jobs.

Moreover, Participant 15 highlighted the "difficulty in making future plans." They are about to begin studying for a doctorate, but the ongoing job insecurity and the additional stresses of research make this prospect extremely stressful. This uncertainty makes them question whether to proceed with their studies, as they are unsure if they will still have their job in the near future. They expressed this dilemma by asking, "How could I make that work?" Their response to job insecurity to move forward with their studies or not will have a significant impact on their future.

5.5 Theoretical Interpretations

In this study, job insecurity in the HE sector is explored through the lenses of stress theory and COR theory to better understand its impact on employees' perceived well-being. Stress theory, particularly Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress (as cited in Vander Elst et al., 2014), holds that stressors are external demands or challenges that exceed an individual's capacity to cope effectively, resulting in stress. This framework is applicable to employees experiencing job insecurity, where stressors like financial pressures, changes in workplace dynamics, job embeddedness, underemployment, and job dissatisfaction create significant challenges.

These stressors, when perceived as overwhelming or threatening, can significantly affect mental and physical well-being, manifesting in conditions such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and chronic illness. Stress theory also outlines various responses to stressors, including both behavioural responses like seeking social support or engaging in problem-solving, and emotional responses including emotions of powerlessness. Effective coping methods, whether problem-focused (addressing the stressor) or emotion-focused (controlling emotional responses), are critical for minimising the negative impacts of stressors and preserving overall well-being.

In contrast, COR theory, established by Hobfoll (1989), provides a framework for analysing the influence of stressors on well-being by emphasising resource depletion and conservation. COR theory states that stress emerges when people perceive a threat to or actual loss of valuable resources such as time, energy, or social support. Job insecurity-related stressors, as indicated in the study's data and thematic analysis, deplete these vital resources, resulting in negative effects for mental health, physical health, intrinsic motivation, daily life and relationships, and most importantly triggering a cascading effect in which all of these effects can occur one after another. When resources are depleted, individuals feel more stress, anxiety, and may experience a deterioration in health.

According to COR theory, responses to stressors are determined by an individual's ability to conserve and replenish their resources. For instance, coping mechanisms and the tendency to put future plans on hold are viewed as techniques for resource recovery and protection. Maintaining and managing

resources is critical for mitigating the negative impacts of stressors and cultivating resilience and overall well-being, which is supported by literature.

The stress theory and COR theory support existing literature that employee experiences with job insecurity relate to perceived well-being. The responses from participants indicate that the stressors of job insecurity, significantly impact their overall well-being. These stressors lead to increased anxiety, depression, a domino effect where it declines in overall well-being. The depletion of resources, as highlighted by COR theory, exacerbates these effects, revealing that as employees face job insecurity, their ability to cope effectively is compromised, further affecting their overall health.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of job insecurity and its relation to employees' perceived well-being. It investigated the stressors associated with job insecurity, their impact on well-being, and how employees have responded to these challenges. The findings reveal that job insecurity within New Zealand's HE sector significantly affects employees' overall well-being. With universities facing ongoing financial challenges post-COVID-19, redundancies and layoffs are likely to persist as cost-cutting measures. This highlights the importance of this research in understanding the effects of job insecurity on employees.

The study makes both theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature, emphasising the need to improve and manage job insecurity in higher education. These insights provide valuable knowledge that can guide practical interventions and support strategies for addressing job insecurity in the sector. This chapter will summarise the key points discussed and address how the research questions have been answered. It will also cover the study's limitations and suggest directions for future research

6.1 Overview

The research aimed to investigate the lived experiences of job insecurity and its relationship with employees' perceived well-being. A phenomenological qualitative design was employed to explore how job insecurity impacts well-being. Data were gathered through SSIs with 17 valid participants. Following data collection, thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo and Riverside transcription software. This analysis resulted in the identification of 3 main themes, with 12 sub-themes emerging under these overarching categories.

The study utilised stress theory and COR theory to investigate how job insecurity affects employee well-being. The stress theory and COR model provided a lens for a deeper understanding of the questions. Stress Theory examines the ways in which job insecurity acts as a stressor, impacting employees' mental and physical health through increased anxiety, burnout, and other negative outcomes. It focuses on how the perception of job insecurity can lead to psychological strain, physical health concerns, and impact overall well-being (Cox et al., 2000; Mazzola et al., 2011).

COR Theory, on the other hand, explores how job insecurity depletes employees' resources and hinders their ability to cope effectively. According to COR Theory, job insecurity not only diminishes essential resources such as job stability and social support but also creates a deficit that exacerbates stress and affects well-being. This theory emphasises the role of resource loss and its impact on employees' capacity to manage stressors related to job insecurity (Cheng et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). Both frameworks demonstrate how job insecuity relates to the well-being of employees.

6.2 Key Findings

The research findings both align with existing literature and introduce a novel concept, referred to as the 'domino theory'. Overall, job insecurity has been shown to significantly impact employees' well-being. Key stressors associated with job insecurity, including financial pressures, shifts in workplace dynamics, job embeddedness, and underemployment, were identified. These stressors are closely linked to negative effects on well-being such as mental health, physical health, intrinsic motivation,

self-perception, daily life and relationships, and ultimately domino effect where one effect leads to another. The findings indicate that these stressors also prompt employees to respond either behaviourally or attitudinally, often requiring coping strategies to manage their stress. This underscores the profound influence of job insecurity on employee well-being and highlights the need for effective coping mechanisms.

The impact of stressors on employees' well-being is evident in how the combination of job insecurity and financial pressures creates a persistent and significant burden on individuals' mental and emotional health. A major shift in workplace dynamics—such as noticeable changes in organisational culture and relationships among colleagues—leaves employees in a less supportive environment. For those in high-risk positions facing potential job losses, these shifts exacerbate feelings of insecurity. Rumors and uncertainty amplify social stressors, further straining employees' mental and physical well-being and diminishing their intrinsic motivation as they adapt to a more stressful and less supportive work setting.

Job embeddedness, where employees feel deeply attached to their roles, adds another layer of stress. This strong attachment makes it difficult for employees to detach from their jobs when faced with insecurity, heightening their emotional distress and making it harder to seek new opportunities. Additionally, underemployment and job dissatisfaction present significant stressors. Underemployment, where employees feel their skills and abilities are underutilszed, and job dissatisfaction, stemming from dissatisfaction with their roles, further contribute to the overall strain. Together, these factors create a challenging environment that impacts employees' overall well-being.

In other words, employees experiencing job insecurity often arrive at work feeling exhausted, anxious, and disengaged, which are key signs of burnout. The stressors associated with job insecurity negatively impact mental health, leading to increased anxiety and depression, and extend to physical health issues such as sleep disturbances, poor eating habits, weight fluctuations, and exacerbation of pre-existing conditions. The findings also show a decline in intrinsic motivation, with employees losing their drive to work, coupled with diminished self-esteem and self-confidence. This erosion of self-perception affects their daily lives and relationships with family and friends, illustrating a clear example of the domino theory. This theory suggests a cascading effect, where one issue leads to another in a sequence, compounding the overall impact of job insecurity.

Lastly, the findings reveal that when employees face the threat of job loss, they respond with both behavioral and attitudinal strategies. These responses include various coping mechanisms, which can be either positive or negative, as participants seek ways to manage the challenges they encounter. Additionally, employees often adjust their future plans as a reaction to financial pressures, opting to delay or reconsider their personal and professional aspirations in response to the uncertainty surrounding their job security.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

In this study, three key limitations related to the methodology may affect the interpretation of the findings. Firstly, the study faced a challenge with the limited number of participants willing to be interviewed. Notably, there were no participants from some of the eight universities in New Zealand, leading to geographical bias in the data collection process. Despite this limitation, the analytical

generalisability of the findings is considered robust because the experiences and perspectives shared by participants were quite similar across the sample. The reluctance of some employees to participate may stem from job insecurity and its effects on well-being being a personal topic, which may make some to feel discomfort about discussing job insecurity, which is understandable.

Secondly, the period in which study was conducted may have influenced participant willingness. The prevalence of job cuts during this period may have contributed to the low response rate, as potential participants might have been particularly reluctant to discuss their job insecurity. Conversely, conducting the study during a period with fewer job cuts might have led to higher participation rates but could have introduced the limitation of not capturing the experiences of those currently facing job insecurity.

Thirdly, while in-person interviews would have provided greater insights participants' experiences, geographic distances necessitated the use of Zoom for interviews. This remote approach limited physical interaction but had various benefits. Zoom interviews, as described in the technique section, facilitated accurate transcriptions and provided a visual connection with participants. Given that most individuals working in this sector are accustomed to using digital conferencing tools, this method effectively enabled meaningful data collection and thematic analysis.

These limitations highlight the need for future research to address these challenges, possibly by exploring alternative methods or timing to capture a broader and more representative sample:

1. Expanding the Domino Effect: This study only briefly touched upon the concept of the domino theory, which suggests that job insecurity may lead to a cascading effect of negative outcomes. Future studies could provide a more comprehensive analysis of this theory, investigating how job insecurity and its stressors triggers a series of effects on employees' lived experiences in greater detail.

2. Cross-Sector Comparisons: Job insecurity is not limited to academia; it affects various sectors worldwide. Future research could compare the impact of job insecurity across different industries, such as healthcare, technology, or public service. This comparative approach could reveal sector-specific challenges and coping strategies, offering a broader perspective on how job insecurity manifests and is managed in diverse contexts.

3. Exploring Coping Strategies: Another valuable avenue for future research is a deeper examination of coping strategies employed by employees facing job insecurity. Investigating which strategies are most effective could provide insights into how employees can enhance their resilience and adaptability. Understanding these mechanisms could help develop targeted support and interventions to better assist those dealing with job insecurity.

These directions could enrich literature through the exploration of job insecurity and its broader implications, leading to more effective strategies for managing this issue across various sectors.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction [10 mins]

Welcome and Purpose

- Introduce myself and thank the interviewee(s) for taking part in the research.
- Advise confidentiality, ethical consideration, voluntary nature of participation and duration.
- Obtain consent to record the interview
- Explain the purpose of the study and research objective.

Background Information

- Background Information Sheet is given to the interviewee:
    - What gender do you identify yourself as?
    - In which age group do you currently fall?
    - In the list given, what role would you identify yourself with?
    - How long have you been employed in your current role, and have you had previous roles within the sector?

Theme 1: Perceptions of Job Insecurity [20 mins]

Experience of Job Insecurity

- In a broad sense, what does job insecurity mean to you?
- Please share your personal experiences with job insecurity in your current role or in your current institution.
    - Prompt if necessary: Can you describe a specific incident or period that heightened your job insecurity?
    - Extend if necessary: Is it fear of potentially losing your job, or is it the certainty of job loss that concerns you?

Stressors

- What do you identify as stressors you have experienced due to job insecurity?
- In your perspective, how do you view job insecurity? Do you see it more positively or negatively?
    - Prompt if necessary: Please share your perspective and provide context for your opinion.

Theme 2: Impact on Well-being [20 mins]

Physical Well-being

- Have you noticed any physical health-related changes or symptoms that you associate with job insecurity?

    - Prompt if necessary: Can you share any specific examples of health-related changes or symptoms you noticed (e.g., sleep patterns, diet, headaches)?
- How do the stressors from job insecurity manifest in your daily routine and overall physical health?
    - Prompt if necessary: Can you elaborate on specific ways job insecurity has been impacting your daily routine and everyday life?

Mental Well-being

- Can you describe how the stress you've experienced from job insecurity has affected your mental or psychological well-being?
    - Prompt if necessary: Can you describe any changes in your stress levels, anxiety, or mood?
    - Extend if necessary: Can you elaborate on how this has been affecting your work performance and your personal lifestyle at home?

Theme 3: Responses [10-15 mins]

Coping Mechanisms

- What are some of your personal responses to job insecurity?
- Can you provide examples of methods or strategies that have helped you cope with the feelings of job insecurity?
    - Prompt if necessary: Look for alternative job opportunities, discuss concerns with your manager, or take action to secure employment, etc.

General Questions

If time allows:

- Do you think that your stressors would intensify or diminish if it was confirmed job loss or perceived loss?
- Looking ahead based on your experiences. How do you envision the future?
    - Do you believe job insecurity will continue to be a significant concern in the higher education sector?

Conclusion [5 mis]

Closing Remarks

- Are there any additional thoughts or experiences related to job insecurity and its effects on your well-being that you would like to share?
- Thank the participant for their time and valuable insights.
- Advise the transcript will be emailed for participants to check after it has been transcribed.
- Ask for any participant recommendations.

Appendix B: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction
I am Gigi Wong, a Post-Graduate student pursuing a Master of Business (Management) at Massey University. This document provides information about my 120-credit thesis research project:

Exploring the Impact of Job Insecurity on Employees' Well-being: A Phenomenological Study in the New Zealand Higher Education Sector

Project Description
The primary objective of this research is to investigate the lived experiences of current employees who are experiencing job insecurity and understand how this is related to their perceived well-being within the higher education sector of New Zealand.

The following is the primary research question:

How do employees' lived experiences of job insecurity relate to their perceived well-being in the New Zealand higher education sector?

The following are the sub-questions that help answer the primary research question:

1. What are the stressors that arise from job insecurity?
2. How do the stressors of job insecurity impact the well-being of employees?
3. How do employees respond to the challenges posed by job insecurity?

Participant Recruitment
To be eligible for participation in this study, participants must be currently employed by a higher education institution, and they should be experiencing job insecurity. Job insecurity does not mean they have been advised of changes to their job; they might also feel this because of perceived potential changes to their job or workplace.

Invitation to Participate
You are invited to be part of this study to share your lived experiences, perceptions and views on job insecurity and how it has affected your overall well-being. I am interested in hearing about your experiences with job insecurity working in the sector.

The information presented below offers comprehensive details about the study and the procedure involved. If you express an interest in participating, I will thoroughly review this information to ensure that you fully understand your rights as a research participant, are comfortable with the process, and can complete a consent form before the interview session.

Research Process
In this study, it will involve a one-on-one semi-structured interview that is expected to last between 30-45 minutes. These interviews will be conducted either in person or through an online conferencing software such as Zoom, depending on the participants' geographical location.

Data Management
The interviews will be recorded, then transcribed verbatim and returned to you for checking and editing if you choose. At the beginning of the semi-structured interviews, I will request and confirm your consent to audio record our interview session. After the interview is completed, I will transcribe the recording for analysis, and provide you with an electronic copy to review for accuracy.

The data obtained will be reported in my Master's 120 credit thesis. The privacy of participants will be rigorously upheld by ensuring all participants remain unidentifiable in any reports or publications. Quotes may be used anonymously as part of the final report, without the names of the university or yourself. The only information included is the demographic information that will be asked during the start of the interviews. The thesis will be available for participants to view after it has been submitted to the university. Additionally, this data may also be used in future projects, such as conference presentations or scholarly journal articles,

Transcripts and audio recordings of the interview sessions will be kept in a secure location, with exclusive access granted only to me as the researcher. With your consent, I will archive the data for potential use in future research endeavours. Should you choose not to allow data from your interview session to be archived, it will be systematically and ethically destroyed after 7 years in compliance with the research's best ethical practices.

Your Rights as a Participant
You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study (including during the interview)
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;

Benefits of The Study
A benefit of participating in this study offers you a valuable opportunity to share your experiences of job insecurity and be able to reflect on how it has impacted your well-being. Your participation allows you to freely express your insights, views, and perspectives; this can also provide you with a chance to reflect on your own learning and understanding. An additional advantage is that the information you share will provide researchers with insights into the employees' perspective, which could help guide institutions in making informed decisions to support their employee's well-being. Your input will contribute to a deeper understanding of how job insecurity influences the higher education sector, ultimately enriching the existing body of literature and research in this field.

Ethical Conduct

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and classified to be a low-risk research project. Additionally, the project has undergone peer review by the researchers mentioned in the contacts.

If you have any questions or reservations regarding the ethical conduct of this research, please contact Patsy Broad, Team Leader at the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. You can reach her via telephone at +64 6 356 9099 (extension 83840) or by emailing humanethics@massey.ac.nz

Study Contacts
Should you have any inquiries or require further information regarding this study, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my supervisors:

Gigi Wong
Master's Student
Massey Business School
[redacted]

Dr Jennifer Scott
Primary Supervisor
School of Management
Massey University
J.Scott2@massey.ac.nz

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Secondary Supervisor
School of Management
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Ngā mihi nui,

[redacted]

Gigi Wong

Appendix C: Consent Form

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Gigi Wong

Exploring the Impact of Job Insecurity on Employees' Well-being: A Phenomenological Study in the New Zealand Higher Education Sector

I have read the Information Sheet and received an explanation of the study details. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions or clarifications at any time.

I willingly grant permission for the interview to be recorded, with the clear understanding that my responses will remain confidential to the researcher, and any summarised information will be anonymised in any publications.

By providing your physical or electronic signature below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the conditions outlined in the Information Sheet, and you voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

Full Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I voluntarily consent to participant in the research study.

Appendix D: Background Information Sheet

INTERVIEW BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET

This information is collected to enhance our understanding of the data and will be treated confidentially.

What gender do you identify yourself as?

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

In which age group do you currently fall?

- 18-24 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65 years and older

In the list provided below, what role would you identify yourself with?

Job Roles:

- Senior Manager
- Middle Manager
- Lower-Level Employee
- Academic Staff
- Administrative Staff
- Research Staff
- Support Staff
- Teaching Staff
- Student Services
- Librarians and Archivists

- IT and Technical Staff
- Other (please specify) _____

Appendix E: Low Risk Ethics Approval

30/10/2023

Dear: Gigi Wong

Re: Low Risk Notification - 4000028270 - Job Insecurity Experiences and Personal Well-being in the New Zealand Higher Education Sector

Thank you for submitting a low risk notification for your research/teaching/evaluation.

This email is to acknowledge receipt of the low risk notification and to inform you that the details of your project have been recorded in our database for inclusion in the annual reports to the Health Research Council Ethics Committee (HRCEC) and the Massey University Research Committee (URC).

You may proceed with your research, though it is advisable to provide a couple of weeks before commencing, as all low risk notifications are checked for completeness and clarity by a Research Ethics Advisor. You may be contacted if your application is incomplete and/or further clarification is required.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis.

If a sponsoring organisation, funding authority (e.g., the Health Research Council) or a journal require evidence of ethical approval from a Human Ethics Committee (with an approval number), you need to complete a full Massey University Human Ethics application to be reviewed and approved by one of our Human Ethics Committees. Applications must be submitted and approved prior to the commencement of the research.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Research Ethics Office, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz. "

Please include the following statement on all public documents (e.g., information sheet, consent form) related to your project:

> ***This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.***
>
> ***If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Massey University Human Ethics by email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz.***

I wish you all the best in your research, teaching or evaluation activities and appreciate your thoughtful consideration of ethics principles and practices.

Ngā mihi nui,

Professor Tracy Riley
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Chair's Committee

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