

The mediating role of persecutory ideation on the effect of vulnerable narcissism and organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity

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ABSTRACT

The study of narcissism has largely focused on grandiose narcissism, neglecting vulnerable narcissism and its mediating role in predicting workplace behavior. This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of persecutory ideation on the influence of vulnerable narcissism and organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity among employees of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. A cross-sectional survey of 291 employees was conducted, with 59.21% of participants aged 25-34 years old, and 51.2% males and 47.8% females. The results revealed that narcissism positively predicts job insecurity ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$) and persecutory ideation ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$), while organizational hypocrisy also predicts job insecurity ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$) and persecutory ideation ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.05$). The analysis showed that narcissism and persecutory ideation have a significant joint influence on job insecurity ($R = 0.48$, $R^2 = 0.23$, $F(2, 290) = 43.59$, $p < 0.05$), with a partial mediating role for persecutory ideation in the relationship between narcissism and job insecurity ($Z = 4.92$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, persecutory ideation was found to significantly mediate the relationship between organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity ($Z = -5.204$, $p < 0.05$). By promoting transparency and ethical behavior, organization can mitigate organizational hypocrisy and reduce the likelihood of triggering persecutory beliefs among employees.

KEYWORDS

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Introduction

Globalization has created a competitive landscape for manufacturing industries, forcing firms to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and innovate to stay ahead. Human resources play a crucial role in adapting to these changes. However, the integration of AI technology has raised concerns about job security. While some jobs may be lost due to automation, new roles will emerge. Nevertheless, the transition can be challenging for workers who lack the necessary skills or education face the threat of automation and displacement leading to anxiety and stress among employees in all sectors. According to the International Labor Organization (2019), 1.2 billion workers worldwide are concerned about job insecurity [1]. In the European Union, 1 in 6 workers and in the United States, 1 in 10 workers are worried about losing their job in the next six months. Many employed individuals in Africa, South East Asia, and the Pacific face insecure, low-paid, and unprotected arrangements [1].

The threat of job insecurity looms large for both academic and non-academic staff in universities. Firstly, budgetary constraints and a competitive higher education landscape put pressure on universities to operate more efficiently. Secondly, Technological advancements like online learning platforms have raised concerns about job displacement, teaching effectiveness, and physical/mental issues like pain, stress, and loneliness, exacerbating job insecurity [2].

Drawing on Kinnunen et al. (2014), job uncertainty encompasses the perceived risk of being laid off against your

will, or of losing valued aspects of your current job [3]. Job insecurity is a subjective feeling of powerlessness and anxiety employees experience due to the perceived threat of losing their jobs [4,5]. It can manifest as a loss of control over one's work or emotional distress [4,5]. While some define it solely as the risk of termination, others emphasize the discrepancy between an employee's desired and perceived job security [6,7]. While scholars define job insecurity differently, common themes emerge, including its subjective nature and reliance on individual perceptions of the work environment. In this work, Job insecurity is the stressful feeling of potential job loss, diminished work prospects, and a lack of control over one's future employment. This prolonged feeling of anxiety and uncertainty takes a toll on workers, unlike the clear-cut event of job loss. Ironically, job loss itself can even be a relief, offering a resolution to the constant worry about losing the job [7,8].

Wilson et al. (2020) found that job insecurity due to COVID increased depressive symptoms among employees [9]. Choi et al. (2020) investigated the links between job insecurity and financial stress and reported that job insecurity was related to financial stress through financial well-being [10]. Research by Shin et al. (2019) explored the psychological effects of job insecurity, discovering that it can lead to hindrance stressors, which can cause anxiety, decreased focus, and ultimately lower performance and motivation [11]. Additionally Lawrence et al. (2021), Olugbenga et al. (2020), and Eze et al. (2020) found that job insecurity is a noteworthy

predictor of workplace deviance behaviors, indicating that job insecurity can negatively impact employee behavior in the workplace [12,13,14].

This study examines narcissism, a self-centered personality style characterized by excessive self-preoccupation and a focus on one's own needs (APA, 2021) [15]. Two primary expressions of narcissism have been identified: grandiose and vulnerable. Grandiose narcissism is categorized by confidence, exhibitionism, and devious behavior, while susceptible narcissism is marked by shyness, vindictiveness, and neediness [16]. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism may struggle to believe in their abilities and worth, (Khawaja, et al. 2023) which can hinder their job performance [17]. This lack of confidence can lead to underperformance, missed opportunities for growth, and ultimately job insecurity as they may not meet the expectations of their role. Individuals high in narcissism are more likely to engage in counterproductive behavior that harms organizations or others [16]. Additionally, they may perceive the behaviors of others as abusive and threatening, leading to aggressive behavior [16]. Narcissists with fragile self-esteem need external validation for their self-esteem [18]. When this expectation is not forthcoming, they may feel insecure about their job.

Even though there is paucity of studies on the link between narcissism and job insecurity, research has consistently suggested a link between vulnerable narcissists, who crave external validation to maintain their self-esteem, may find themselves particularly vulnerable to job insecurity [18]. This is because a lack of recognition at work can be perceived as a direct threat to their sense of worth. They may also engage in self-centered behavior, stealing credit or taking credit for others' work, causing resentment and mistrust. Narcissists often struggle with inauthenticity, and fears of being exposed as a fraud leading to feelings of insecurity and anxiety [19].

Given the significant associations between narcissism and job insecurity, it becomes necessary to determine the pathways through which these associations occur. People who are narcissistic have a higher chance of experiencing workplace incivility, as well as engaging in it themselves [20]. For instance, Liu et al. (2020) found that narcissists react more violently to incivility at work which can lead to feelings of paranoia as they become increasingly anxious and suspicious of others' intentions, ultimately contributing to job insecurity [21,22].

Individuals with vulnerable narcissism may encounter significant emotional distress and struggle to regulate their emotions when confronted with perceived threats [23]. They may exhibit emotional volatility and difficulty recovering from negative emotional encounters. This compromised emotional awareness can lead to heightened emotional reactivity and dysregulation additionally, their hypersensitivity to criticism and perceived threats can lead to paranoia, mistrust, and suspicion, creating anxiety and jeopardizing job security [24].

On the other hand, organizational hypocrisy is another variable of this research, of which it's a vital factor and a worthy variable in organizational research. According to Brunsson (1986), OH is a loosely coupled connection between words and actions and refers to the gap between an organization's proclaimed values and its actual practices [25]. A discrepancy between perceived and implemented fundamental beliefs, values, and norms may indicate this phenomenon. According to

Zeb et al. (2023), OH can be described as a voluntary behavior that does not comply with the organization's values and expectations [26]. OH can also be seen as a single norm system proclaimed by the organization, but in reality, a multiple norm system is practiced since variation involves contradictory statements, decisions, and actions, leaders have a significant role to play in identifying and eliminating inconsistencies within organizations. The actions and decisions of leaders need to be consistent with moral standards, values, and moral values.

Failure to do so can have far-reaching consequences, for employee morale and motivation. Several studies have shown a positive correlation between hypocrisy and distrust [27]. When employees perceive hypocrisy in their supervisors, they believe their leaders are not committed to the organization's values and principles, leading to cynicism [28]. This can lead to increased job insecurity, as employees question the stability of their roles and worry about the potential consequences of job loss or downsizing. Furthermore, employees who experience hypocrisy may be more likely to seek new employment opportunities, which can exacerbate job insecurity and lead to turnover [29].

While organizational hypocrisy can be linked to job insecurity among employees, the underlying cognitive mechanisms that mediate this relationship are not yet fully understood. This study proposes that persecutory ideation, may show an important interceding role in the influence of organizational hypocrisy on job uncertainty. According to Freeman et al. (2016) cognitive model, negative emotions like anxiety can trigger a search for explanations in external events [30]. Organizational inconsistency can create a toxic environment, fueling negative emotions and potentially leading to persecutory ideation, employees might experience anxiety due to the perceived unfairness or dishonesty within the organization. This anxiety can then lead to biased interpretations of events [31]. Employees might perceive seemingly neutral actions as evidence of malicious intent or threats from the organization or colleagues. For example, a restructuring plan could be seen as a targeted attack on a specific department, even if the actual reason is financial constraints. Organizational inconsistency can have a profound impact on an employee's job security by reinforcing pre-existing negative beliefs and leading to the development of persecutory ideation, ultimately resulting in a decline in job security as the employee becomes increasingly anxious and vigilant, anticipating potential harm or mistreatment.

The mediating role of persecutory ideation is supported by previous research, which has shown that individuals with high levels of persecutory ideation suspicious thoughts and behaviors can lead to intentional punitive reactions from others over time, causing them to become a burden on social interactions and ultimately being excluded and ignored [32]. As a result, suspicious behaviors like monitoring colleagues or invading privacy often leads to exclusion and even negative reactions from others who feel disturbed by the interaction, including self-defensive social behaviors, such as social rejection, which is This social isolation can further exacerbate feelings of insecurity consistent with victim precipitation theory.

According to Wirtz and Rigotti [2020], structural investigators have intensive on grandiose narcissism, while vulnerable narcissism has been mostly unnoticed [33]. The role of vulnerable narcissism in job insecurity has received little

attention, the recent study aims to investigate the under-researched individual-level variable of narcissism/organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity with the mediating role of paranoid.

Considering the links among persecutory ideation, narcissism, organizational hypocrisy and job security. This study aims to examine the individual and the successively mediating roles of persecutory ideation in the narcissism-organizational hypocrisy and job-insecurity. Hence, we hypothesized that the associations of narcissism and organizational hypocrisy with job insecurity will be individually and successively mediated by persecutory ideation.

The following hypotheses were derived from the literature review:

1. Narcissism will knowingly expect persecutory ideation, organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity
2. Organizational hypocrisy will significantly predict persecutory ideation, and job insecurity
3. Narcissism and persecutory ideation will together and significantly predict job insecurity
4. Organizational hypocrisy and persecutory ideation will jointly and significantly predict job insecurity
5. Persecutory ideation will mainly intermediate the association between narcissism and job insecurity
6. Persecutory ideation will significantly mediate the relationship organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity.

Outcomes will broaden the existing knowledge on the mechanism through which personality and organizational factors influence job insecurity by considering the mediating roles of persecutory ideation.

Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to gather information from a large number of respondents at Nassarawa State University Keffi. The population consisted of both male and female workers, with estimated staff strength of 1185. A sample size of 291 was calculated using the Raosoft sample size calculator. Questionnaires were distributed randomly to both academic and non-academic staff.

Stratified sampling was used to ensure a fair representation of participants from both groups. The sociodemographic features of the contributors are shown below in the tables. Most participants (59.21%) were 25-34 years old, while 25.1% were 35-44 years old. There were slightly more males (51.2%) than females (47.8%). Most participants were single (57.4%) and junior staff (55.3%), while fewer were senior staff (44.7%).

The questionnaire used for data collection consisted of sociodemographic questions and four standardized scales. The PIQ, developed by McKay, et al. (2007), measures persecutory ideation with a 5-point Likert scale [34]. The PIQ has excellent convergent validity, great reliability, and criterion validity. Internal consistency was recorded at 0.88 in Nigeria [35].

This self-report scale assesses hypersensitive narcissism on ten items questionnaire that assesses vulnerable narcissism [36]. It consists of questions ranging from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more hypersensitive narcissistic traits. The HSNS has moderate internal consistency (0.72-0.75) and concurrent validity, showing a positive correlation with covert narcissism

and negative correlation with self-esteem. The Nigerian study stated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.68 [39].

The Perceived Corporate Hypocrisy Scale was used to assess perceived structural hypocrisy [40]. A 5-point Likert scale (1-5) with 9 questions was used, and the average score was calculated by summing answers and dividing by 9. The scale had high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93) and a single-factor structure. It was negatively correlated with attitude towards corporation and positively correlated with employees' turnover intentions and positively correlated with employees' turnover intentions ($r = 0.56$). A pilot study reached a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

The Job Insecurity Scale (JIS) was used to measure job insecurity. The four items, originally developed by De Witte (2000), were rated on a 5-point Likert scale [41]. The author reported an alpha coefficient of 0.85, while Ugwu and Asogwa (2017) obtained a Cronbach Alpha of 0.80 [42]. A pilot study among 84 staff of Federal Polytechnique Lafia reached a Cronbach's alpha of 0.66.

The study utilized self-reported questionnaires for cost-effective distribution to a large sample. After obtaining ethical approval, a letter was sent to relevant authorities. Participants were assured of confidentiality and encouraged to provide unbiased responses. Random sampling was used. Participation was voluntary and results used solely for academic purpose.

The researcher obtained approval from the management to allow them to use students for data collection. Informed consent was obtained before the administration of the questionnaires. Two research assistants were trained in the administration of the psychological instrument. Confidentiality was ensured by instructing respondents not to identify themselves in any way to guarantee their anonymity. The participants were also informed that the exercise was for research/academic purposes only and that the results of the research would not be released in any individually identifiable way but be given to the authorities of the university. Participation was voluntary and no participants were forced to take part, d. They were informed that they would not be at any disadvantage if they did not take part.

Results

Hypothesis 1

An analysis of regression was performed for the test of the first hypothesis. In (Table 1), the results are presented. Results of the simple regression analysis reveals that narcissism positively predicts job insecurity [$\beta = 0.07$, $p < .05$]. It also, positively persecutory ideation [$\beta = 0.26$, $p < .05$] with the inference that narcissism increases job insecurity and persecutory ideation. It is distinguished that narcissism clarified a significant 14% alteration in job insecurity ($R^2 = 0.14$), 16% variance in persecutory ideation ($R^2 = 0.16$). Thus, the findings support hypothesis 1, according to which narcissism significantly predicts both persecutory ideation and insecurity at work.

Hypothesis 2

Based on regression analysis, the second hypothesis was tested. The results were presented in (Table 2). Results of the simple regression analysis (path a1 path a2 and path c of mediation model) reveals that organisational hypocrisy positively predicts job insecurity [$\beta = 0.13$, $p < .05$]. It also, positively predict

persecutory ideation [$\beta = 0.60$, $p < .05$] with the inference that organizational hypocrisy increases job insecurity and persecutory ideation. It is noted that organizational hypocrisy explained a significant 14% variance in job insecurity ($R^2 =$

0.11), 20% variance in persecutory ideation ($R^2 = 0.20$). Thus, these results confirm hypothesis 2 which states that organizational hypocrisy will significantly predict the persecutory ideation, and job insecurity.

Table 1. Linear regression analyses showing perceived narcissism predicting mediating variables and dependent variables.

Narcissism	Variable	β	t	R	R^2	Df	F	P
	Job insecurity	0.07	6.82	0.372	0.14	290	46.54	0
	Persecutory ideation	0.26	7.46	0.402	0.16	290	52.63	0

Table 2. Linear regression analyses showing organismal hypocrisy predicting mediating variables and dependent variables

Organizational hypocrisy	Variable	β	t	R	R^2	Df	F	P
	Job insecurity	0.13	6.02	0.33	0.11	290	36.24	0
	Persecutory ideation	0.6	8.69	0.46	0.2	290	75.56	0.01

Hypothesis 3

As shown in (Table 3), narcissism and persecutory ideation exerted a significant joint influence on job insecurity [$R=0.48$, $R^2=.23$, $F(2,290) = 43.59$, $p<0.05$]. It is confirmed that the two variables contribute 23% variance in the stage of job insecurity. Based on this result hypothesis 3 was complete.

Hypothesis 4

As shown in (Table 4), narcissism and persecutory ideation exerted a significant joint influence on job insecurity [$R=.46$, $R^2=.21$, $F(2,290) = 38.02$, $p<0.05$]. It is noted that the two variables contribute 21% variance in the level of job insecurity. Based on this result hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis showing joint prediction of narcissism and persecutory ideation will jointly and significantly predict job insecurity.

Variable	β	t	R	R^2	Df	F	P
Narcissism	0.24	4.2	0.48	0.23	290	43.59	0
Persecutory ideation	0.33	5.9					

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis showing joint prediction of organizational hypocrisy and persecutory on job insecurity.

Variable	β	t	R	R^2	Df	F	P
Organizational hypocrisy	0.351	5.956	0.46	0.21	290	38.02	0
Persecutory ideation	0.174	2.959					

Hypothesis 5

In addition, the indirect effect of narcissism on job insecurity through persecutory ideation was significant ($\beta= 0.027$, $p<0.05$, CI [0.016, 0.038]). (Table 5) finding shows that persecutory ideation has a partial mediating role in the relationship between

narcissism on job insecurity ($Z= 4.92$, $p<.05$). The proportion of the total effect that is mediated was 40.7 indicating that 40.7% of the total effect of narcissism on job insecurity is mediated by persecutory ideation. Parallel to the direct and indirect effects, the path coefficient for the total effect between narcissism and job insecurity was also significant ($\beta= 0.068$, $p< .05$, CI [.048, .088]).

Table 5. Persecutory ideation will significantly mediate the influence of narcissism on job insecurity.

Mediation Estimates using Sobel Test							
95% Confidence Interval							
Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	Z	% Mediation
Indirect	a × b	0.027	0.016	0.038	4.92	< .05	40.7
Direct	c	0.04	0.019	0.061	3.85	< .05	59.3
Total	c + a × b	0.068	0.048	0.088	6.63	< .05	100

Hypothesis 6

The (Table 6) result showed that the effect of organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity is significant. Total effect of organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity ($b = 0.13$, $p < .05$). Second, direct effect of organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity is significant ($b = 0.06$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, the subsidiary outcome of organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity through persecutory ideation is also significant ($b =$

0.06, p). Result revealed that persecutory ideation significantly mediates the relationship between organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity ($Z= -5.204$, $p<.05$). The proportion of the total effect that is mediated was 51.4 indicating that 51.4% of the total effect of organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity is mediated by persecutory ideation Therefore, mediation result indicates that persecutory ideation is partially mediating the relationship between organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity.

Table 6. Persecutory ideation will significantly mediate the influence of organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity.

Mediation Estimates Using Sobel Test								
Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p	% Mediation
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	$a \times b$	0.06	0.01	0.04	0.09	5.2	< .05	51.4
Direct	c	0.06	0.02	0.019	0.11	2.8	< .05	48.6
Total	$c + a \times b$	0.13	0.02	0.087	0.17	6.05	< .05	100

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between vulnerable narcissism/organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity with a mediating role of persecutory ideation. Our study found that narcissism predicted job insecurity. Civically, individuals with high levels of narcissism were more likely to experience job insecurity. This confirms findings by (Wirtz & Rigotti, 2020) suggests that narcissistic individuals may be more prone to experiencing emotional exhaustion and burnout in their work environments [43]. This can ultimately lead to feelings of job insecurity, as individuals may feel overwhelmed, stressed, and uncertain about their job prospects.

Our study suggests that when employees perceive their organization as hypocritical, they may experience increased feelings of job insecurity. This is consistent with the findings of Kılıçoğlu and Yılmaz Kılıçoğlu (2020), which showed that as teachers' insights of hypocrisy rise, their perceptions of structural promise, motivation, organizational citizenship, and job satisfaction decrease [27].

Going by the prediction of the predictor's variables, results revealed that narcissism significantly predicted persecutory ideation. Narcissists' inflated self-worth makes them hypersensitive to perceived constructive criticism, interpreting them as deliberate attacks on their perceived greatness. The result is in agreement with Hepper et al. (2022) whose findings vulnerable narcissism correlated with paranoia via defensive strategies to protect them leading to paranoid about being targeted or excluded [44].

We also found that high levels organizational hypocrisy predicted higher levels of persecutory ideation, which is a key mediator in the study. This is in line with studies that showed that organizational hypocrisy can create a sense of uncertainty and mistrust among employees, leading to feelings of insecurity and anxiety. This study is in line with previous research (Kılıçoğlu, et al, 2020), demonstrating that hypocrisy in educational organizations leads to trust issues, impaired communication, increased rumors, decreased teacher motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, and performance [27].

Our study's significance lies in its integration of persecutory ideation as a mediator, which was confirmed through our mediation hypotheses. Specifically, we found that persecutory ideation partially mediated the relationship between narcissism and job insecurity. This means that high narcissism predicts increased persecutory ideation, which in turn influences job insecurity. Meaning, narcissist may not be feel insecure towards their job if they do not feel persecuted. Similarly, the partial mediation of persecutory ideation suggests that organizational hypocrisy can have a direct impact on job insecurity, but that this relationship is also influenced by the extent to which

employees perceive threats or conspiracies against them, persecutory ideation can serve as a cognitive mechanism that amplifies the negative effects of organizational hypocrisy on job insecurity. The amplification of negative effects of organizational hypocrisy/ narcissism on job insecurity through persecutory ideation is consistent with the theory of cognitive appraisal [44]. According to this theory, an individual's perception of a threat or stressor is influenced by their cognitive appraisal of the situation, including their attributions, expectancies, and self-efficacy.

Conclusions and Implication

Understanding the impact of narcissism on organizational behavior and emotions is crucial for effective management. This study examines the mediating role of persecutory ideation in the relationship between narcissism/organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity. Our findings suggest that persecutory ideation partially mediates this relationship, meaning that high levels of narcissism and organizational hypocrisy lead to increased persecutory ideation, which in turn influences job insecurity.

From a practical perspective, our study highlights the importance of recognizing the psychological mechanisms underlying narcissistic behavior and emotions. By understanding how narcissists process information and perceive threats, organizations can develop targeted strategies to mitigate the negative effects of narcissism on job insecurity. Our study suggests that rather than simply avoiding high narcissists from entering the organization, effective management should focus on understanding and addressing the psychological mechanisms underlying narcissistic behavior. For example, supervisors can provide support and resources to help narcissistic employees feel more secure and valued, which can reduce their levels of persecutory ideation.

The discoveries likewise prompt that workers who are more inclined to persecutory ideation might be more defenseless to the adverse consequences of authoritative deception. Therefore, organizations may benefit from identifying and addressing these individual differences in their employee populations. For example, organizations can provide training programs that promote critical thinking, emotional regulation, and effective communication skills to help employees manage their emotions and perceptions more effectively.

Furthermore, the study's findings have implications for theory development in the fields of organizational behavior and occupational psychology. The results provide support for the role of cognitive biases and psychological processes in shaping the relationship between organizational factors and employee outcomes. This highlights the importance of considering the psychological and cognitive dimensions of employee experiences in addition to traditional organizational factors.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity. The mediating role of persecutory ideation underscores the importance of considering the psychological processes underlying employee experiences and highlights the potential benefits of addressing these processes in organizational interventions. Future research can build upon these findings by exploring the generalizability of these results across different cultural contexts and industries, as well as investigating the mechanisms underlying the relationship between organizational hypocrisy and job insecurity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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