

Original Article

Who is safe at work? Problematizing employment volatility during the 2008-2018 Spanish socioeconomic crisis from a critical occupational perspective

Quem está seguro no trabalho? Problematizando a estabilidade no emprego durante a crise socioeconômica espanhola de 2008-2018 desde uma perspectiva ocupacional crítica

“¿Quién está seguro en el trabajo?” Problematizando la estabilidad laboral durante la crisis socioeconómica española 2008-2018 desde una perspectiva ocupacional crítica

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Abstract

Introduction: The Spanish socioeconomic crisis context has impacted on the population's work conditions, which generates instability and workers' fear of losing their job. Despite the recent research which addresses the work as an occupation in Critical Occupational Therapy and Science, little is known about the volatility of employment in relation to the job instability resulting from contextual changes. **Objectives:** To explore the relationship between employment volatility, participation in daily occupations, and the health and wellbeing of workers during the Spanish socioeconomic crisis. **Method:** A narrative qualitative methodology was conducted. Two open interviews and a personal diary were used as data generation methods. Two experiences were analyzed by adopting a thematic analysis. **Results:** Three thematic categories illustrate how workers orchestrate their occupations in a context of employment volatility and they situate the multidimensional context of work in such circumstances as restrictive of occupational opportunities. Uncertainty generates a normalized instability in the daily life of workers, which impact occupational choices, health, and wellbeing. In

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addition, participants reflect on future perspectives of work associated with precarity and resignation. **Conclusions:** The study of the employment volatility contributes to broadening the conceptualization of work as an occupation and contribute to the development of occupational justice-based practices.

Keywords: Occupational Therapy, Work, Socioeconomic Factors, Social Justice, Health.

Resumo

Introdução: O contexto de crise socioeconômica na Espanha tem impactado as condições de trabalho da população, gerando situações de incerteza e medo pelos trabalhadores de perder o emprego. Apesar das linhas de pesquisa emergentes que abordam o emprego como uma ocupação em Terapia Ocupacional e Ciências Ocupacionais Críticas, pouco se sabe sobre a volatilidade do emprego em relação à ameaça de perdê-lo derivada de mudanças contextuais. **Objetivos:** Explorar a relação entre a ameaça de perda de emprego, derivada de mudanças contextuais, e a participação nas ocupações diárias, saúde e bem-estar durante a crise socioeconômica na Espanha. **Método:** Foi realizado um estudo exploratório qualitativo com desenho narrativo. As técnicas de geração de dados foram duas entrevistas semiestruturadas em profundidade e um diário pessoal. As vivências de dois participantes foram analisadas por meio da análise temática. **Resultados:** Emergiram três categorias temáticas que ilustram como os trabalhadores orquestram suas ocupações em um contexto de emprego volátil e colocam o trabalho em um contexto multidimensional que restringe suas possibilidades ocupacionais. A insegurança no trabalho gera uma instabilidade normalizada no cotidiano que impacta nas escolhas ocupacionais, na saúde e no bem-estar dos trabalhadores. Os participantes refletem sobre suas perspectivas futuras de emprego associadas à precariedade e à demissão. **Conclusão:** O estudo da situação de ameaça de perda do emprego possibilita ampliar a conceituação do trabalho como ocupação e contribuir para o desenvolvimento de práticas pautadas na justiça ocupacional.

Palavras-chave: Terapia Ocupacional, Trabalho, Fatores Socioeconômicos, Justiça Social, Saúde.

Resumen

Introducción: El contexto de crisis socioeconómica en España ha repercutido en las condiciones laborales de la población, generando situaciones de incertidumbre y miedo a perder el empleo por parte de los/as trabajadores/as. A pesar de las emergentes líneas de investigación que abordan el empleo como ocupación en Terapia y Ciencia de la Ocupación crítica, poco se sabe sobre la volatilidad del empleo en relación a la amenaza de pérdida del mismo, derivada de cambios contextuales. **Objetivos:** Explorar la relación entre la amenaza de pérdida de empleo, derivada de cambios contextuales, y la participación en ocupaciones cotidianas, la salud y el bienestar durante la crisis socioeconómica en España. **Metodología:** Se llevó a cabo un estudio cualitativo exploratorio con diseño narrativo. Las técnicas de generación de datos fueron dos entrevistas semiestruturadas en profundidad y un diario personal. Se analizaron las experiencias de dos participantes mediante análisis temático. **Resultados:** Emergieron tres categorías temáticas que ilustran cómo los/as trabajadores/as

orquestan sus ocupaciones en un contexto de empleo volátil y sitúan el trabajo en un contexto multidimensional que restringe sus posibilidades ocupacionales. La inseguridad laboral genera una inestabilidad normalizada en la vida diaria, lo cual impacta en las elecciones ocupacionales, salud y bienestar de trabajadores/as. Los/as participantes reflexionan sobre sus perspectivas futuras de trabajo asociadas a la precariedad y resignación. **Conclusión:** El estudio de la situación de amenaza de pérdida de empleo permite ampliar la conceptualización del trabajo como ocupación y contribuir en el desarrollo de prácticas basadas en la justicia ocupacional.

Palabras clave: Terapia Ocupacional, Trabajo, Factores Socioeconómicos, Justicia Social, Salud.

Introduction

In the scientific literature, scholars have argued that Occupational Therapy (OT) is situated in a period of transition and identity change given the need to understand occupation as a “*social phenomenon*” (Laliberte-Rudman, 2018; Morrison et al., 2011; Simó-Algado, 2015). From this approach, we need to pay attention to how various socioeconomic, political, and cultural contextual factors influence people's occupations, health, and well-being (Galheigo, 2012; Simó-Algado, 2015; Laliberte-Rudman, 2018); challenging the practice focused on dysfunction and the individualistic approach that is historically based on the theoretical and practical development of the discipline (Laliberte-Rudman, 2018; Morrison et al., 2011; Rivas-Quarneti, 2016).

Currently, the critical social view of OT is gaining great relevance in the scientific community with new lines of research (Morrison et al., 2011). In 1972, community practices were already documented (Oyarzun et al., 2009) that were further developed in texts such as “Occupational Therapy without Borders”, which highlighted the importance of creating critical debates in the profession and working towards occupational justice (Kronenberg et al., 2007, 2011; Sakellariou & Pollard, 2016; Wilcock & Townsend, 2000). However, this critical stance is still incipient in Spain (Rivas-Quarneti, 2016) and this paper aims to contribute to the discussion of its development to address current occupational inequalities experienced by the Spanish population. From this critical-social position, the authors have problematized the reality experienced by workers who are in a situation of threatened job loss, derived from the sociopolitical and economic context characterized by job instability and uncertainty within the Spanish socioeconomic crisis. In her study, Rivas-Quarneti (2016) articulates for the first time the relevance of Critical Occupational Science (OS) in the discourse and professional practice of OT in Spain, and addresses how the social determinants of health impact the occupations. In this study, we use this theoretical angle of Rivas-Quarneti (2016) to approach the case of the threat of job loss from a critical occupational perspective. This introduction includes: 1) an exploration of the critical occupational perspective to approach work as an occupation from a rights perspective, 2) a contextualization of the situation of threatened job loss in Spain in association with the political, economic, and sociohistorical context and 3) research related to the

volatility of employment in OT and OS to situate the relevance of exploring the relationship between the threat of job loss, derived from contextual changes and participation in daily occupations, the health and well-being of workers during the socio-economic crisis in Spain, which will be approached from a narrative methodology (section 2). Subsequently, two more sections are presented: 3) the results, from the narratives of the participants protagonists; and 4) the discussion, reflecting on the phenomenon in dialogue with previous research from a critical occupational perspective and occupational justice.

Problematizing work as an occupation from Critical Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science

Hammell & Iwama (2012, p. 386) understand critical OT as:

[...] a committed practice that recognizes the impact of inequities such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, economics, age, ability, and sexuality, and that well-being cannot be achieved by only focusing on improving individual people's skills.

In this sense, critical OT understands that external factors to citizens, such as social, political, legal, or economic factors, determine the possibilities of people's participation, and therefore, their potential to achieve a good health (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004). This fact can impact on the occupational rights of people and the generation of occupational injustices, which are key concepts in critical OT. Then, this study articulates the usefulness of these concepts to approach the phenomenon of work: a) occupational justice states that people “[...] have equal opportunities to engage in varied and meaningful occupations to meet their basic needs and maximize their potential” (Durocher et al., 2014, p. 420); and b) Occupational rights are understood as “[...] the right of every person to engage in meaningful occupations that contribute positively to their well-being and the well-being of their communities” (Hammell, 2008, p. 61).

Thus, this research is based on these concepts as they are useful for understanding the impact of the Spanish socio-economic crisis on the occupational rights of workers. Considering that the access to the meaningful occupations that people want to do, need to do, and can do is a matter of justice and an occupational right (Durocher et al., 2014; Townsend & Wilcock, 2004; Hammell, 2008; Wilcock & Townsend, 2000), having a decent job that allows economic sustenance and opportunities for productive and satisfactory participation in capitalist societies would respond to the principles that articulate these concepts. Thus, the framework of occupational justice is relevant in this study since it allows problematizing how the phenomenon of job instability can lead to a restriction in the access to meaningful occupations, both in the workplace and in the other day-to-day occupations of people. Therefore, this exploratory narrative study on the phenomenon of labor instability or uncertainty highlights how workers can find their occupational rights compromised and find themselves in potential situations of occupational injustice.

Simultaneously, the OS discipline is committed to address the newly emerging social changes, what may facilitate the creation of new places of action in OT (Clark et al., 1991). This discipline not only studies the form, function, and meaning of occupations, but also those social factors that might influence occupations (Clark et al., 1991; Clark & Lawlor, 2011). For this reason, this work expects to generate scientific knowledge about the situations of job instability through the use of the critical occupational perspective, what allows us to generate knowledge to address current social challenges.

Work is a basic occupation of the human being that can be considered vital in some cultures, both as a meaningful occupation and as a tool that allows obtaining the economic means necessary for subsistence and the development of life (Galheigo, 2007; Harvey-Krefting, 1985). Several organizations have recognized work as a fundamental right, such as in the article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations Organization (Organización de las Naciones Unidas, 1948), in the Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, 2016) or Article 35 of the Spanish Constitution (España, 1978).

With this in mind, work is considered as an occupational right (Hammell, 2008). In the historical development of the profession, work has always been considered as central in the practice of occupational therapy because it is a fundamental occupation in the life of adults (Harvey-Krefting, 1985; King & Olson, 2011). Thus, from OT, participating in the occupation of work has been conceptualized as a health promoter since it supports survival (Dickie, 2003) and it is a means of personal gratification (Braveman & Page, 2011), which contributes to the identity of people (Dickie, 2003; Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO) states that work may have an impact on people's health and quality of life since it affects opportunities for development, protection, and social position or social relations (Organización Mundial de la Salud, 2017).

However, Veiga-Seijo et al. (2017, p. 673) argue that “[...] the approach to work throughout its history (of the profession) has been diverse but biased”. This study highlights the need to problematize and question the positive relationship between participation in occupations, such as employment, and health, which has been taken for granted throughout the history of OT. Their findings challenge the need for the traditional categorization of occupations as “healthy” or “unhealthy”, illustrating that the synergistic relationship between occupation and health is determined by the socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical context. This debate is gaining relevance in the OS and OT literature (Kiepek & Magalhães, 2011; Kiepek et al., 2014, 2019; Twinley, 2020; Stewart et al., 2016) creating concepts such as “[...] the dark side of the occupation” (Twinley, 2020) or “unsanctioned occupations” (Kiepek et al., 2019).

In Spain, the situation of threatened job loss may challenge the positive relationship between occupation and health, which would contribute to the conceptualization of work as an occupation and expand the debate about the relationship between occupations and health. The next section contextualizes the Spanish political-economic situation that led to situations of uncertainty among workers.

Political and economic changes during the Spanish economic crisis 2008-2014: where are the rights of workers?

The Spanish socioeconomic crisis had significant repercussions on the labor market at the beginning of 2008, such as the fiscal austerity policies approved by the government (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2011; Ortega & Peñalosa, 2012; Aramburu-Goicoechea, 2016; Fernández-Navarrete, 2016). The Labor Reform approved by the Royal Decree-Law 3/2012 of February 10 aimed “[...] stopping the destruction of employment and laying the foundations for the creation of stable and quality employment” (España, 2014, p. 3). However, some experts argue that these policies had the opposite effect on economic and labor activity, such as liberalizing the labor market or lowering the cost of dismissal (Rocha & Aragón, 2012; Aramburu-Goicoechea, 2016; Fernández-Navarrete, 2016).

This cheaper dismissal brought consequences such as the increase in Employment Regulation Files (ERF) or the ease of terminating indefinite contracts, which affected around 1.2 million workers (Bayona, 2017; España, 2017). The General Union of Workers (Unión General de Trabajadores, 2017) establishes that there were more than four million layoffs for indefinite contracts between 2010 and 2016.

During this period, Spain had the highest unemployment rate in the European Union (EU). In 2013, there were nearly 6 million unemployed, which implied more than 26% of the active population (Furió-Blasco & Alonso-Pérez, 2015). Spain has also presented an employment crisis with the increase in job insecurity for both quality and quantity (Unión General de Trabajadores, 2016, 2017). In 2017, 3500 workers were affected by collective dismissal procedures, contract suspension, or reduction in working hours (España, 2017).

These reforms have positioned the employer in a position of privilege over the workers, limiting their opportunities to negotiate their conditions (Unión General de Trabajadores, 2016, 2017), and bringing an exponential increase in unfair dismissals as consequence (Zufiaur, 2010). These quick changes in the context of work, unemployment rates, and growing job insecurity, lead workers to perceive their employment situation as unstable and insecure. Therefore, these policies increased the vulnerability of workers, their chances of being unemployed and having precarious employment (Rocha & Aragón, 2012; Unión General de Trabajadores, 2016, 2017). This situation generated an atmosphere of fear about the possible loss of employment (Maglio et al., 2010).

Although this study focuses on the context of the crisis before COVID-19, it is important to highlight that the current context of crisis derived from the pandemic has led to a significant deterioration of working conditions in Spain, which is generating significant inequalities in the population (Salas-Nicás et al., 2021). This situation can lead to the violation of the occupational rights of workers and lead to situations of occupational injustice.

Next, we present an approach to the scientific evidence on the phenomenon of employment from an occupational perspective.

Current scientific production and research question

Different studies have been found within the discipline focused on the phenomenon of unemployment and its negative impact in the health of workers (Scanlan & Beltran, 2007; Håkansson et al., 2003; Gallagher et al., 2015; Macías, 2015). Aldrich & Callanan (2011) articulate how unemployment situations affect participation in occupations, such as lack of access to food (Beagan, 2007) or housing (Macías, 2015). The authors analyzed that the impact on leisure as an occupation was more studied than others (Lobo, 1999; Scanlan et al., 2011; Scanlan & Beltran, 2007). Furthermore, Scanlan et al. (2011) highlight that unemployed people spend more time on domestic activities. Concurrently, the research conducted by Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich (2016) and Lo Bartolo & Sheahan (2009) explored how government policies, in Canada and Australia, respectively, restrict the occupational opportunities of people in situations of prolonged unemployment and job insecurity.

On the other hand, new lines of research in the Galician context address precarious employment from a critical occupational perspective (Ferreira-Marante et al., 2017; Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017; Rivas-Quarneti et al., 2018). These studies show how precarious employment affects people's access to occupations, which influences their health and well-being, highlighting possible situations of occupational injustice.

Thus, the theoretical approach to the diverse forms of employment from OT/OS is novel and underdeveloped, and there is a lack of knowledge about the phenomenon of threatened job loss. Thus, the research question of this study is: How do the socioeconomic and political changes derived from the socio-economic crisis impact the occupations, health, and well-being of workers who are in a situation of threatened job loss?

Thus, the general objective is to explore from a critical occupational perspective the relationship between the threat of job loss, derived from contextual changes, and participation in daily occupations, and the health and well-being of workers during the socio-economic crisis in Spain. The specific objectives are: a) to describe the context of the threat of dismissal during the socio-economic crisis in Spain; b) to describe the participation in daily occupations of workers and c) to explore the relationship between participation in daily occupations of workers and health and well-being.

Methodology

Study design

This study is a qualitative research since we intended to explore and understand in depth the phenomenon experienced by workers who are in a situation of the threat of job loss in the context of socio-economic crisis through the discourses of the workers (Sampieri et al., 2010). To obtain an in-depth understanding of this reality, we selected a narrative design, which allowed us to identify how power influence in the everyday life (Mumby, 2014, cited in Laliberte-Rudman &

Aldrich, 2017) according to a historical moment and specific socio-cultural context, such as the context of the Spanish socio-economic crisis (Cardona & Salgado, 2015). Thus, in this study, narrative research contributed to “[...] illuminate occupation as an in-situ phenomenon and identify lines of action to address occupational injustices” (Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2017, p. 472). The purpose of the study is to gain in-depth data from the narratives of the participants, rather than to generalize the findings (Cardona & Salgado, 2015).

Participant selection process and entry to the field

Participants were selected according to the intentional and convenient non-probabilistic sampling (Arantzamendi et al., 2012). The inclusion criteria were: a) workers who perceived their job as threatened and b) being a worker during the period of the Spanish socioeconomic crisis. The exclusion criteria were having difficulties for understanding or maintaining a conversation.

The entrance to the field was made through a gatekeeper who worked in an international company whose economic activity is carried out in Spain. This company has presented economic difficulties during the Spanish socioeconomic crisis. Therefore, the employer has adopted measures following the Royal Decree-Law 3/2012, which generated situations of the threat of job loss. This gatekeeper informed about the existence of this study to a group of colleagues. The contact details of the first author were provided to workers who met the selection criteria and wanted to participate. Subsequently, the researcher scheduled a meeting with the potential participants to provide relevant information about the study to them and the Information Sheet and Informed Consent. After the meeting, potential participants had time to decide if they wanted to participate or not.

Finally, 2 people participated in the study. The results do not show the reality of all the workers who experience these labor characteristics. However, this exploratory study aims to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the voice of the participants.

A group description of the participants through the pseudonyms Breogán and Arizona is provided to ensure their anonymity and guarantee data protection. Breogán and Arizona are Spanish between 44 and 34 years old. One of them is separated and lives with the current partner, the other alternates living with the parents and the partner. One of them has two children. Both have primary education and different training courses. Both have their previous professional experience in restaurants and bars. Currently, they work in an international company with both temporary and permanent contracts. They started in the company 13 and 11 years ago, respectively. Both have additional income at home provided by other relatives. One of them is financially responsible for the children.

Data generation methods

The data generation methods used were two in-depth interviews (Interview 1 [I1] and Interview 2 [I2]), and a personal diary [D]. The in-depth interview allowed the participants to express in-depth and freely their occupational

experiences (Tójar-Hurtado, 2006). The interviews included semi-open questions in which the meanings of work as an occupation were investigated (Arantzamendi et al., 2012; Janesick, 1998, cited in Sampieri et al., 2010). The daily personal documentary source allowed a deeper understanding of the study phenomenon through the writing of the workers (Albert-Gómez, 2007). The diary was delivered with instructions and guidelines to the participants at the end of the first interview. Participants wrote their personal diary at the times and places that they chose. This technique helped clarify the information from the first interview and was used to guide the second interview.

The researchers prepared the interview scripts and the personal diary. The first author conducted the interviews in the places selected by the participants, in one case in their home and another case in a cafeteria. The first interview lasted approximately 35 minutes and the second 25. In the case of the diary, at first, the participants delivered it by email/WhatsApp until the second interview, in which they delivered it personally to the first author. One of the diaries was written by hand and the other by computer. It is important to note that the original language of the verbatims was Galician.

Data analysis process

The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. A thematic analysis was carried out following the phases proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). In the first place, the first author made the literal transcription of the interviews and diaries, using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and eliminate all identifying data. The first author engaged in an ongoing listening and reading of the recordings and transcripts to immerse in the data. Later, she printed the transcripts on paper and continued reading and underlining the verbatims with different colors, establishing initial codes. Once this process was done, she cut out the pieces of the verbatims with each associated code. At this moment, she started to group the codes using cardboard of different colors. Through the grouping of codes, the initial themes of the analysis emerged. This first phase was discussed with the second and third authors, who carried out a parallel analysis process.

After a preliminary analysis of the first interviews, the first author conducted the second interview with the participants, in which Breogán and Arizona conducted the “member checking” or validation of the preliminary analysis of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Koelsch, 2013). This allowed them to reflect on their stories and provide new information. After the analysis of the second interview following the same procedure explained previously, the final themes were generated. In all the phases described, the authors participated in a process of reflection and constant discussion, which allowed triangulation among the researchers (Sampieri et al., 2010).

Ethical considerations

This research has followed the ethical principles of the Code of Ethics for Occupational Therapy (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2016). The participants received an Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants have been respected throughout the process, following the Organic Law 15/1999, of December 13, on the Protection of Personal Data (España, 1999). The General Data Protection Regulation (Unión Europea, 2016) has been also respected. The participants signed the informed consent form voluntarily.

Results

After the analysis, three thematic categories emerged.

“Routine and monotony as a way of life”: the context as a restrictor of occupational opportunities

The first category describes how the participants orchestrate their daily occupations in the context of threatened job loss. This category also presents an approach to the labor context influenced by the relationship between the employee and the worker but also by the complex interaction with the political-economic context characterized by the crisis. Thus, workers explain how their occupational choices are associated with the context of socio-economic crisis.

The workers explain their current employment situation as “*stormy*” (Breogán_I1), and feel that their employment situation worsens, as Arizona (I2) explains “[...] *we were much better than we are now*”. Thus, workers express how the labor reform impacted in their employment situation: “*The repercussion on us was that [...] there was a labor reform, that the working condition were changed and the layoffs were given to the companies, etc., etc.*” (Breogán_I2), “*Since the crisis started, well...the pressure is greater every time on the worker*” “*The labor reform was a chaos [...] You had quietness with the previous conditions but now you no longer have it* (Arizona_I1; Arizona_I2).

This situation caused a loss of power of the workers in comparison with the status and power gained by the employer in the decision-making process, which shaped to the employer-employee relationship: “[...] *the working class is who always loses more... the working class [...] lost a lot, a lot of power*” (Breogán_I1). In this sense, the workers consider that the employer uses his/her position of superiority to generate situations of repression, vulnerability, and constant uncertainty: “[...] *they take advantage of the situation (Arizona_I1) [...] the working class is always depending on these big companies*” (Breogán_I2), “[...] *you feel threatened all-day long [...] because now everything is easier for them, and they fire you without giving you any explanation [...] they have all the power*” (Arizona_I1). Thus, worker’s needs and rights are not being considered “*We have no rights [...] so we have lost more and more rights at our work [...] unlike employers, who earn more and more*

[rights]” (Breogán_I2), and the security situation of their job is also lost, which is increasingly unstable “*Now, who is safe at work?*” (Arizona_I1).

Arizona and Breogán agree that the fear of losing their job leads them to the need to save money due to the uncertainty of a future unstable economic situation, as Arizona (D) explains “[...] *you stop doing things [...] for fear of saving for what might happen*” or Breogán (I1) “*the economic issue is an uncertainty [...] you tighten your belt more, to put it in some way, right? When you find yourself in this situation, it affects your monthly expenditure because you have a fear that you didn't have before [...] you try (thoughtfully), you see the ears of the wolf and you try to cut costs*”. This fact makes participants prioritize which occupations to perform depending on the money they can spend, which directly structures their daily expenses destined to those most basic and essential occupations for life, such as clothing or food. Thus, participants have to think through which are the needs they can satisfy and how they distribute their income.

Well, you even cut back [on the shopping of] pants. If you have to buy them, then you wait [...] when the situation is complicated, you even consider cutting back on food, you go to the supermarket and spend less [money] because you become obsessed with saving money (Breogan_I1).

Thus, the participants put on the table the lack of opportunities to participate in satisfactory leisure occupations, as described by Breogán (I2): “*I have few leisure activities*”. When participants described their leisure occupations (for example, on the weekends or days off), they also showed a lack of meaning in their daily routine, which was evident not only in the verbal communication but also in the non-verbal communication.

[...] the general routine is to get up, go for a walk with my partner, have a coffee, go with the family, but... something very.. (sigh) [...] the day that you rest you take the opportunity to go for a walk, you go to the gym, I don't know, [...] not much else (Breogán_I1),

“*In the end, what you do is having a coffee or something, you don't do any more [...]*” (Arizona_I1). This is how the participants express how the situation affects their occupational desires and dreams, limiting the performance of occupations that they did previously, “*When you have job stability you think about changing cars [...] I don't know, you live with another peace of mind*” (Breogán_I1). In this way, a transition is evident in the right to participate in meaningful occupations, as mentioned by both participants: “*For example, the thing about traveling, because you used to go somewhere before [this employment situation], but now...*” (Arizona_I1), what also influences the opportunity to build a solid and stable network of social participation, “[...] *in the end, it even influences you in the relationship with other people, you know? When [...] you have a normal situation [in your work] [...] you go out, you socialize, you have a beer with your colleagues, you go out to dinner [...] but when these kinds of stories arrive...*” (Breogán_I1).

Thus, the participants express a situation characterized by monotony and routine “[...] *well, it is a routine, quite a routine (sigh) a very simple life [...] it is a life... quite, quite routine and monotonous*” (Breogán_I1), “*The day to day is routine, getting up, going to work and little else [...] a very simple life [...]*” (Arizona_I1; Arizona_D). The occupations referring to a day-to-day working day are mainly made up of carrying out self-care activities and those related to productivity: “*basically what you do is only work [...] I got up, had breakfast and went to work [...] when you finish the day you are tired, I took a nap and I just got up*”, (Breogán_I1) “[...] *a working day is very routine, I get up, [...] and then nothing [...] to work; [...] I go out, I go home, have dinner, watch TV and go to sleep*” (Arizona_I2; Arizona _ D). Thus, work is the backbone of their daily life “[...] *basically it is that... work-home...work and home*” (Arizona_I1), and therefore it constitutes the central occupation or epicenter from which other occupations are organized and performed, as Arizona (D) says “[...] ***we are always thinking about work***”.

The routine and monotony experienced on a working day extend to the days when they do not work. Thus, workers feel that they have the same habits in the non-working days, as Breogán (E2) mentions “[...] *a day that I do not work, well, it is practically more of the same*”, or Arizona (I1) “[...] *when you work you have less time, but in the end, you do the same*”, “[...] *you throw yourself on the sofa and you have a coffee from time to time, and little else*” (Breogán_I1).

Fear and uncertainty as determinants of occupation, health, and well-being

This category shows the uncertainty experienced during a situation of threatened job loss, and how this might affect the health, well-being, and quality of life of the workers, which impact on their other occupations.

The workers relate in their narratives that their day-to-day life is based on their “*stress and worry...(sigh)*” (Arizona_I1) since the economic crisis and the labor reforms started,

You always have that thinking in the head that the company closes tomorrow, that they are going to fire you, that you will be unemployed, that you do not have a job [...] it is worrying, it is a very worrying situation [...] a situation of distress”; “The concern, you know? The anguish, the worry, you have something inside your head [...]

as mentioned by Breogán (I1) and Arizona (I1) respectively. These feelings intensify as time progresses without any changes in the situation “[...] *and the concern is greater every day [...] it worries us, and a lot*” (Breogán_I2).

There is a feeling of constant fear caused by the situation of threatened job loss, “*The threat of losing your job conditions you a lot in your life, because in the end, [...] you lead a life, ...with fear*” (Breogán_I1), “*you are always afraid [...] now with the crisis, well, you are afraid that they will close everything, right? [...] that is the problem, that they scare you*” (Arizona_I1). This is how the narratives reveal how the situation of feeling threatened by their job affects their health and well-being

“When your situation is conditioned to the fact that a company is going to close, you feel more depressed” (Breogán_I2), “[...] you are always worried about work, wondering what will happen to my life if the company closes ... Things are not very good and it is impossible not to think about it” (Arizona_D), and quality of life “[...] lowers the quality of life” (Arizona_I1). It even affects basic needs “[...] if you worry a lot, you don't rest well at night, you don't feel well (Breogán_I1) [...] I'm not even hungry [...] falling asleep is an impossible mission” (Breogán_D), as well as motivation and performance at work “[...] you don't feel...I don't know, with motivation [...] it is impossible to focus on the work that corresponds to me, work performance is poorer than normal” (Breogán_I1).

Thus, it shows how this situation limits their choices and participation in occupations, since this constant state of “overwhelmed” and the emotional distress makes “[...] you stop doing things [...] or being worried and so, you don't even feel like it anymore, in the end, basically that, you don't feel like doing anything” (Arizona_I2), “[...] on a working day [...] well, sleep little, little leisure activity [...] in the end, a lot of sofas and I am overthinking [...] and one day no weekdays, the same thing [...] you continue with the uncertainty of what is going to happen” (Breogán_I2). With this, the workers show how their day-to-day life lacks meaning and how they have stopped carrying out occupations that they did previously. This feeling goes further and affects the future life plans “[...] this brings a lot of backlashes, for me yes, I think that this situation still has a tail [...] ugh, I think we still have to put up with [...] this brings a queue [consequences], it is not stopped, far from it” (Arizona_I1).

The future of work marked by precariousness, emigration, and resignation

The third category describes how the current labor market is characterized by job insecurity and precariousness. For this reason, workers have to look for new jobs and they think about their future work, conditioned by precariousness, emigration, or unemployment.

The fact of being in an insecurity job makes the workers think about their future job prospects: *“I spent the night thinking about my job future [...] as we always talk about life and the future that can wait for us” (Breogán_D), with dismissal as a possible and main consequence of the situation “I have noticed that my job was in danger [...] the feeling we had was that we were all going to be fired, and everyone for home” (Arizona_I1), “You go to work every day with the uncertainty of whether it will close tomorrow, or if it will close the day after” (Breogán_I1). This is undoubtedly the repercussion they are most afraid of, “The layoffs is the main fear that we have, what I told you before, layoffs” (Breogán_I2), even more so considering that productivity is the main occupation in the adult stage. It is also a consequence that they see more and more closely and clearly “Without a doubt, we can all be fired [...] we have it more and more clearly” (Breogán_I2).*

Thus, the participants express their fear of the current labor market, “[...] the country's labor situation during these years has changed a lot” (Breogán_I1), and specifically, of the difficulties in finding a new job, “[...] there is no more work, do you understand? [...] there was always something before [work], but now [...] you're

screwed” (Arizona_I1), “[...] *there's hardly a job opportunity, so, when you find yourself in a situation of this type [...], Well, you're screwed [...]* you think about the job opportunities we have or are going to have and you also worry” (Breogán_I1).

The participants find two main solutions to the labor market situation: emigration to other countries “[...] *we talk and we plan to leave and look for a new life*” (Breogán_D), “[...] *the solution is to emigrate, it is the only solution that I see [...], that is the problem [...]* what worries me the most is having to leave [the country]” (Arizona_I1). Thus, the participants feel obligated to accept other jobs characterized by precariousness, understood as jobs with intensive hours and low wages: “[...] *today, with the contracts and the job insecurity that we have [...], you feel very conditioned [...]* We all know that the labor situation in this country is quite precarious because the companies benefit a lot from the situation” (Breogán_I1_I2), “[...] *for four pesos, of course, for little money and many hours [...]* well, work long hours and get paid little [...] *the situation is screwed up everywhere, it does no matter how you look at it. What kind of jobs are there now? Miserable, totally miserable...*” (Arizona_I1). Thus, the participants face a complicated employment situation, as mentioned by Breogán (I2) “*Imagine what my future employment will be...quite, as you will understand, quite complicated*”.

For this reason, a feeling of resignation emerges regarding their future work “*Of course, if it has to be, then it has to be, better than nothing! [...]* we can't complain either, can we? *The way the world is [...]* we all accept what they give us in hardship” (Arizona_I1), “[...] *the situation is what it is*” (Breogán_I1). Their hopes fade as time goes by, since they are clear that the process is not going to be easy “*This, I see that there is no easy solution, because the company, the company is not willing to give, give or give up absolutely anything*” (Breogán_I2).

The participants are aware that they will end up accepting whatever is necessary to move on with their lives “*You always look for a job in whatever it is, to move forward, and in the last case you accept the most miserable thing there may be*” (Arizona_I1). Although, there is always a feeling of hope “*Let's hope we don't go so far and that everything goes well*” (Breogán_D), which allows them to move forward and has to do with resilience strategies to face their day-to-day.

Discussion

This research aimed to explore the relationship between the threat of job loss, derived from contextual changes, and participation in daily occupations, and the health and well-being of workers during the socio-economic crisis in Spain. The findings show how the situation of threatened job loss generates constant uncertainty in the workers and concern about their employment situation. This instability is due to the volatility that characterizes their work, which has its roots in the diverse contextual changes at the socioeconomic, political, and legislative levels experienced during the Spanish socioeconomic crisis of 2008, and is currently dealing with COVID-19. Volatility implies the absence of stability at work and that the participants are in a “state of alarm” for fear of being fired. Thus, workers feel situations of insecurity and fear of losing their jobs every day, which means that they orchestrate their daily occupational choices and that they

have to decide and prioritize which occupations to do or not do, even (re)considering basic aspects of life such as food or clothing. Thus, job instability situates them in a position of uncertainty about the possibility or not of having income both in the present and in future months, which influences their possibilities of participation and choices. This study sheds light on the volatility of employment and how the Spanish context is the articulator of the occupational opportunities of workers and their health and well-being.

Recently, OT/OS researchers have shown interest in advancing the understanding of the various forms of employment that coexist in today's societies. However, this research focuses on approaching the situation of job insecurity, which differs from recent research in the discipline, which is mainly focused on unemployment, job search, government policy analysis (Aldrich et al., 2020; Asaba et al., 2021; Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2016) or job insecurity (Ferreira-Marante et al., 2017; Rivas-Quarneti et al., 2018; Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017). Therefore, this study highlights a reality of employment that has not been explored so far and contributes to broadening the conceptualization of work as well as understanding the occupational negotiations that workers do to resist performing an unstable or insecure occupation.

In this study, the participants (Arizona and Breogán) state that the basis of the problem of job insecurity is found in the socio-economic and political context and, specifically, in the policies carried out by the government with the labor reform. These policies facilitate the dismissal of workers, which places them in a situation of social vulnerability. In the OT/OS literature, Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich (2016) studied the experiences of 8 participants in situations of long-term unemployment and active job search in Canada and the United States. According to this study (Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2016), it is necessary to understand the reality of employment determined by logic and austerity measures, informed by government neoliberal policies to respond to the phenomenon of unemployment, especially in times of recession, as it has been the case in Spain since 2008. Asaba et al. (2021) also understand neoliberalism as an articulator of unemployment. This is how volatile employment experiences such as long-term unemployment (Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2016) or job insecurity (Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017) are shaped by the sociopolitical and economic context. This concurs with the findings of this research since the participants (Breogán and Arizona) narrate how the labor reform based on austerity policies with numerous legislative modifications worsened their labor conditions and rights, facilitated dismissals, and increased the power of the employer. Previous studies maintain that this situation can lead to increase inequalities with levels of poverty and social exclusion (Aledo et al., 2013; Unión General de Trabajadores, 2018). In this way, more flexible or volatile employment relationships arise, which negatively influence the perception of job security among workers (Sora et al., 2010).

Aldrich et al. (2020) continued their line of work on the long-term unemployment during the post-recession phase in North America from the perspective of governmentality; or long-term unemployment in older people who have the option of extending their working lives (Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2021). These studies situate the occupation of work within neoliberal policies in

which remaining active is an individual responsibility, mainly due to workers' concerns associated with economic aspects. This aspect has also been recognized by the participants who remain in their working conditions of insecurity and uncertainty due to the fear of not achieving economic assets and not being able to participate in basic occupations such as food or save for the future, which is consistent with other studies (Beagan, 2007; Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2016; Lo Bartolo & Sheahan, 2009; Macías, 2015; Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017). This fact responds to the neoliberal socio-cultural values of Western society, taken for granted and invisible in a society in which the constant pressure to “produce” and work to achieve economic income is a priority, placing a responsibility on the workers to remain “active” to respond to social expectations (Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2016). This aspect is consistent with the findings of Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich (2016) and Aldrich et al. (2020), where workers are in a continuous and active job search, or Asaba et al. (2021) who show the challenge of not individualizing the social problem of unemployment.

Thus, the current labor market generates jobs characterized by precariousness, emigration, and unemployment, which is consistent with previous research. The study shows how the crisis worsened the quality of employment with lower-paid jobs and little protection, increased unemployment, and with it, labor inequalities (Aledo et al., 2013; Leibovich de Figueroa et al., 2007; Unión General de Trabajadores, 2018).

Considering neoliberal policies as an articulator of the various forms of employment that coexist in the world, this study problematizes job insecurity as an occupation located in a changing sociopolitical and economic context, characterized by the crisis experienced in the last decade and that affects the human and labor rights of people, which provides a different and novel nuance than in previous studies. Thus, the context as an articulator of the occupational rights of the population has already been seen in similar studies (Aldrich et al., 2020; Asaba et al., 2021; Ferreira-Marante et al., 2017; Huot et al., 2020; Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017). Thus, this research reflects on how this globalized society in which we currently live generates volatile employment situations. Therefore, it is necessary to generate a line of research in OS to address the nuances of the various employment conditions that the population currently resists to expand the work's conceptualization. The theory and the knowledge generated can support the advancement in OT practices.

The participants reveal the lack of meaning attributed to the work they perform, defining their day-to-day as “monotony”, which challenges the conceptualization taken for granted in the profession that work is meaningful (Asaba et al., 2021; Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017). Thus, this study expands the idea that employment as an occupation is not always a generator of health, well-being, or quality of life (Kiepek et al., 2019; Twinley, 2020). Espino-Granado (2014) maintains that situations of socioeconomic crisis and the situation of the labor market cause feelings of insecurity and fear of the future, which generates work stress and therefore a negative impact on the well-being and quality of life of workers, as other authors maintain (Macías, 2015; Scanlan et al., 2011; Scanlan & Beltran, 2007). The participants also expressed how this situation generates

situations of anxiety and concern that increase their difficulties, for example, falling asleep or increasing their hours about “*doing nothing*” (Arizona_I1) because “[...] *we are always thinking about work*” (Arizona_D).

The participation in insecure or precarious work can limit the occupational choices and possibilities of workers (Laliberte-Rudman, 2010; Galvaan, 2012) due to the threat of finding themselves without economic support. The participants explain that this threat implies thinking about having or not their social participation with friends, shopping at the supermarket, or the clothes they are going to wear. The working conditions also make the participants be tired and they define their routines as “*home-work; work-home*” as Arizona explains. Thus, the results show a negative impact on daily occupations and differences or transitions in their occupations before-after the threat of job loss. Therefore, their occupational choices are situated in a context of economic crisis where factors such as job instability determine the individual choices of the workers (Jaramillo et al., 2015). This agrees with Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich (2016) or LoBartolo & Sheahan (2009).

Thus, the reality lived by the workers can generate situations of occupational alienation due to the lack of identity, meaning, and purpose that implies participating in their work (Durocher et al., 2014; Townsend & Wilcock, 2004), an issue also showed in Veiga-Seijo et al. (2017). The results also show how the restriction in occupational choices also impacts the health and well-being of the participants (Durocher et al., 2014). Therefore, this study supports the idea that health is determined by external contextual factors, such as the socioeconomic crisis, as it was found in other studies (Crepeau et al., 2011; Rivas-Quarneti et al., 2018).

In this sense, the authors have been aware of how critical OS (Farias & Laliberte-Rudman, 2016; Laliberte-Rudman, 2018) has been a valuable tool for analyzing volatile employment situations in different parts of the world (Aldrich et al., 2020; Asaba et al., 2021; Huot et al., 2020; Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2016) to address the structural, sociopolitical and economic conditions that situate employment as an occupation. In this work, this theoretical position has made it possible to question and problematize tensions about employment as an occupation, to analyze the possible situations of inequality and occupational injustice in which workers may find themselves, as well as to understand how employment is negotiated in the Spanish labor reforms in which the culture of productivity is taken for granted (Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2016; Laliberte-Rudman, 2018). Thus, it allows us to question how capitalist social expectations determine the occupations that people should or should not carry out, which are conditioned by sociopolitical structures and systems based on neoliberal values (Aldrich et al., 2020). From critical OS, the need to analyze changes at the level of labor policies that have an impact not only on work as an occupation but also on the occupational possibilities of the population is proposed (Laliberte-Rudman & Aldrich, 2021).

Therefore, a critical position makes visible situations of occupational inequality and injustice derived from political measures and understands work as an occupation situated in sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and historical factors

(Hammell & Iwama, 2012; Laliberte-Rudman, 2018; Veiga-Seijo et al., 2017). Given that the critical occupational perspective is committed to using occupation as a tool for social transformation and creating just communities (Farias & Laliberte-Rudman, 2016; Laliberte-Rudman, 2018), it is necessary to continue researching occupations that can generate situations of injustice to respond to current challenges of the profession (Simó-Algado, 2015), for example, studying the occupations of workers during the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Salas-Nicás et al., 2021). From a human and occupational rights approach, the OT and OS can cooperate in the visibility, social awareness, and reduction of inequalities, generating new fields of practice, debates, and reflection for the disciplines.

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Olalla Vilar-Figueira presented the original idea, the conception of the studio, writing of the text, analysis of data, and writing of the scope. Silvia Veiga-Seijo conceptualized the research design, data analysis, writing, and critical review of the document. Natalia Rivas-Quarneti conceptualized the research design, data analysis, and critical review of the document. All authors approved the final version of the text.

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