

Career insecurity and burnout complaints of young Dutch workers

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ABSTRACT

Burnout complaints among young workers in The Netherlands are high and increasing. Our research question is whether and how the high burnout complaints of young workers in the Netherlands are associated with the employment relationships in the flexible labour market. We argue that especially an insecure career perspective contributes to burn-out complaints. Young workers in career jobs feel more insecure and this is a main reason why they have greater burnout complaints. We use the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey 2018 to test this argument. The analyses show that young workers in career jobs feel relatively insecure about their jobs and report a considerable higher level of burn-out complaints than student workers. Especially the workers in flexible career jobs suffer from insecurity and burnout complaints.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 March 2021
Accepted 10 December 2021

KEYWORDS

Job insecurity; career;
burnout; labour market entry

Introduction

The share of young Dutch workers with burnout complaints is high and increasing. In 2018 17,8% of the young Dutch workers in the age category 15–34 years reported burnout complaints. This is a slightly higher percentage than the 17,3% for the total workforce (own computations on NWCS). In 2014 13,3% of young workers reported burn-out complaints, the total workforce percentage then was 14,4%. Especially workers in the category 25–34 years suffer from burnout complaints. In this age category the percentage had increased to 20,9% to 2018.

So far, research has not yet provided a satisfactory answer about the causes of this increase (RIVM 2019). In the public debate in the Netherlands the focus is on the increased use of social media, on parenting styles that do not teach children to deal with setbacks, and the high levels of requirements that youngsters meet in education and on the labour market. A specific category of explanations focuses on the flexible labour market. The argument is that young workers find employment in flexible jobs, and that the insecurity of the job makes them uncertain about their future. This is argued to be a psychological burden, that contributes to burnout problems. In this article we elaborate on this explanation.

Research so far has not provided support for the flexible labour market explanation. An association between having a flexible job and burnout complaints was not established (Houtman and De Vroome 2015; Smulders 2015). We broaden the focus from the term of the contract to the psychological consequences of an insecure career. We argue that the insecurity of the career perspective is a main determinant of the high level of burnout complaints of young workers. In the flexible labour

market, the career perspective of young workers remains insecure for a relatively long period, and this insecurity makes young workers feel concerned about their career prospects and their work identity. Their worries contribute to burnout complaints.

To support this argument empirically, we draw on the contingency that there are many young workers in jobs without a career perspective in the Dutch labour market. These are young workers in full-time education, with a paid side job. Their career perspective develops in their education, not in their jobs. In addition, we use the term of the contract to distinguish workers in career jobs in those with a more secure and those with a more insecure career perspective. Comparisons between these groups enable us to test the effect of an insecure career perspective on burnout complaints.

We start with a short exposition of what is known about the relationship between burnout and labour market insecurity. We then explain what an insecure career perspective comprehends and how this concept differs from related ones that are used in empirical research on labour market insecurity: the flexible contract, job insecurity and employability. In the following section we describe the process of entry of young workers into the flexible Dutch labour market. Drawing on this description we formulate hypotheses about job insecurity and burnout problems among young Dutch workers. We test these hypotheses on the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey (NWCS) 2018.

Burnout and the flexible labour market

Burnout is the phenomenon of depletion of resources. It occurs when in daily activity during an extended period more psychological resources are used than added. The experience of burnout originates mainly from work conditions, and is not much dependent on person characteristics. Because of the exhaustion people lose both their energy and their sense of value of their job (Schaufeli, Leiter, and Maslach 2009). Burnout manifests itself in feelings of constant fatigue. Workers with a burnout share the feeling that they are not efficacious and competent in their work. The causes of burnout are localised in different domains (Maslach and Leiter 2017). Best known are a high workload and a sense of lack of control. Other causes may be reward issues, especially lack of recognition, tense social relationships on the work floor, harmed standards of fairness and value conflict (Maslach and Leiter 2017). A constant tension in one or more of these domains is the basis of feelings of burnout.

We want to explain the high level of burnout complaints of young Dutch workers. Young workers enter the labour market with high expectations and full of resources. Paid work offers the perspective of independence, development and new social contacts. After first experiences, expectations are downward adjusted and become more realistic (Elchardus and Smits 2008). In the process of labour market entry, workers set high standards for themselves, and much is demanded in terms of adjustment and the learning of new skills. This may explain why the level of burnout among young Dutch workers is high, but it does not explain why it has been increasing during the last years. We seek the additional explanation in the confrontation with the flexible labour market.

A flexible labour market implies that many jobs are insecure. Workers in insecure jobs feel that they are not in control of their employment (Maslach and Leiter 2017), and it has been shown that job insecurity increases the risk of burnout (Dekker and Schaufeli 1995). It is, nevertheless, not fully clear how the flexible labour market contributes to the high and increasing level of burnout of young workers. As indicated, previous research (Houtman and De Vroome 2015; Smulders 2015) showed that flexible employment contracts are not the cause of burnout complaints. In the following we therefore focus not on the duration of the contract, nor on job insecurity per se, but on career insecurity.

Career insecurity

Careers have an objective and a subjective side. The objective side consists of steps made during the career: subsequent jobs, promotions, growth in job security and in wages. The subjective side consists of expectations, plans and ideas that shape the career. In the flexible labour market the

objective and subjective career interact (Hall and Chandler 2005). The expectations and ideas determine what new opportunities are sought, and the outcome determines how expectations and plans are adjusted.

Recent literature on vocation emphasises the advantages of a strong career perspective (Duffy and Dik 2013; Steger et al. 2010). The career perspective consists of an idea in what field of occupations the career should develop (calling or work identity), and how this career can take shape (prospects). An insecure career perspective implies both an insecure work identity and insecure career prospects.

A strong work identity or calling is the main component of a strong career perspective. It consists of three elements: (1) a substantively defined field of occupations in which the worker hopes and expects the career to develop; (2) the judgment that work in this field is meaningful and that it makes the life of the worker meaningful; and (3) that this work fits the person, thus aligns with desires and capacities. The career perspective is anchored in and gives shape to personal values: it informs about the person, about who he is, who he wants to be and in what direction he is heading. The career perspective is built upon this work identity. Workers seek opportunities that fit the perspective. It is important that the worker feels that he is living his calling. When a career perspective is present mentally, but not in daily activities, the effect on well-being is negative (Duffy et al. 2018). Workers must feel that their daily efforts and concerns contribute to the deployment of their career and enrich their work identity. The prospect that the career unrolls must exist.

A strong career perspective has the benefit of greater satisfaction with the work and the life. (Duffy and Dik 2013; Steger et al. 2010). The career perspective incites to activities that give direction to the life and buffers setbacks. Workers are more pro-active, have greater self-regulating capacity, and adapt easier to changing conditions. In short: they are better equipped to give shape to their work career and their life.

A weak or uncertain career perspective implies doubt about the work identity and fear of the future. It also implies that important decisions concerning the accomplishment of private life goals are postponed (Blossfeld et al. 2005). Decisions about the establishment of a long-term partner relationship, the buying of a house, or having children have to be postponed, because the work career is not warranted. The uncertainty does not have a clear term, postponement may result in cancellation. On a deeper level, career insecurity disables workers to give direction to their life. Career insecurity diminishes self-esteem by devaluing competences obtained and performance shown, and it creates bleak future prospects due to the threat of long-term unemployment as the consequence of personal failure.

These problems are a psychological burden, that harms well-being. We therefore expect that an insecure career perspective increases the risk of burnout complaints. Burnout makes the victim feel exhausted, incompetent and inefficacious. It is probable that an insecure career perspective feeds such feelings.

In the remainder of this section, we compare the (in)secure career perspective with other well-known concepts from the literature on the flexible labour market: job insecurity, employability and the flexible contract. We use these concepts in our empirical analysis to better understand the effect of the insecure career perspective.

Just as career insecurity, job insecurity is a mainly subjective phenomenon. In empirical research often two questions are asked to measure job insecurity. One question is the estimated risk of losing the present job, the other is the extent to which the respondent worries about losing the job. Analysis shows that the negative psychological effects of job insecurity can be as large as those of unemployment (Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall 2002; Cheng and Chan, 20082008). Closer analysis shows low association between the 'objective' risk of losing a job and the level of concern. It is the seriousness of the consequences of job loss that determines its mental impact (Klandermans, Klein Hesselink, and Van Vuuren 2010; De Witte and Näswall 2003). We presume that the extent to which workers worry about job loss is dependent on the place of the job in the career perspective. We elaborate in the hypotheses.

Employability is the extent to which a worker is attractive for an employer in the labour market. Better employability is in the Netherlands the institutionally recommended advice to young workers for shaping their careers. By improving employability workers not only reduce the risk of unemployment, but also increase opportunities to determine themselves where and how they want to be employed. The concept of employability has, like career perspective and job insecurity, both an objective and a subjective component. The objective component consists of the skills and qualifications that give entry to specific jobs. The subjective component consists of the capacity and the skills to shape the own career. Research shows that workers who are highly employable have high self-esteem and are pro-active in the labour market. They experience the benefit that also befalls workers with a strong career perspective: the feeling of being in control of their employment (Lysova et al. 2019). An important difference is that the strong career perspective implies a certain level of inflexibility, since options beyond the career perspective are excluded. Empirical research usually shows a weak positive correlation between the level of employability and the strength of the career perspective (Lysova et al. 2019).

Another concept used to measure the insecurity of the labour market position (e.g. Standing 2011) is the term of the employment contract, that is whether it is a fixed contract, that is a contract of undetermined duration, or a flexible contract, that is a temporary or on call contract, or a contract with an employment agency. A flexible contract not necessarily implies an insecure career perspective. The flexible job may fit within the secure career perspective, because probation is convention, or because temporary work is necessary to gain work experience. It may also be that the job contracted is not or hardly related to the career perspective. We will elaborate on this possibility for student jobs, that is work mainly done for the income. On the other hand, however, we expect that flexible job fitting the career perspective increases career insecurity and contributes to burnout complaints. We elaborate on these expectations in the hypotheses section.

The entry into the flexible Dutch labour market

In this section we elaborate how the process of entry into the flexible Dutch labour market develops. The section provides the background information necessary to formulate hypotheses about the relationship between the insecure career perspective and burnout complaints. The issue in this section is how different entry jobs and their insecurity are related to the career perspective of young Dutch workers.

During the last decades the way in the Netherlands the entry into the labour market was organised has changed thoroughly. In the decades after World War II labour market entry was organised as a 'jump': young workers after graduation tried to gain access to an internal labour market of a work organisation by using their diploma as their credential. The internal labour market offered opportunities and services to develop the career: training, work experience, promotion opportunities, career counselling. The career took shape in the form of job promotions and wage increases.

In the last decades the facilities of the internal labour market have been built down, and in its place the flexible labour market has developed (Wielers and Mills 2011). Since the 1980s the share of workers on a flexible contract in the Dutch labour market has been increasing. These are mostly workers on temporary contracts, but also on on-call contracts, employment agency contracts, and payroll and self-employed workers. The consequence of this development is that large work organisations now consist of a 'fixed core' surrounded by a 'flexible shell'. Young workers are strongly overrepresented in the shell.

In this flexible labour market entry is not shaped as a jump, but develops in several small steps. In a process of years, young workers navigate from small, temporary jobs to large, fixed jobs. We distinguish three phases: (1) student jobs; (2) flexible career jobs; and (3) fixed career jobs. These jobs differ in their connection with the career perspective.

For many young workers the *student job* is the first work experience. These jobs consist of low-skilled work. Students in vocational or higher education do these jobs to generate an income, that allows them some financial independence. The student jobs are done next to the education, often in irregular hours

at irregular times (Van der Meer and Wielers 2003). These jobs are not part of the career perspective. The students' main activity is their education, and in the school the work identity takes shape. Both employee and employer are aware that student jobs are temporary, and this is attractive for them both.

After graduation of the vocational or higher education, young workers apply for jobs that align their education. The first *career jobs* are usually temporary. Employers use temporary contracts for young workers to reduce costs due to demand fluctuations. Offering young workers temporary contracts also enables them to test the qualities of the employee. During the last decades the practice has developed that the young worker has to show experience in temporary career jobs to qualify for a fixed contract. The temporary contract implies a high risk that the job is lost. Young workers in flexible career jobs want to be successful in the present job, to show their employers that they are good workers and deserve a fixed contract. At the same time, they keep on scanning the labour market for new opportunities. This double-sided strategy is exhausting, and the insecurity an extra mental burden. We conjecture that the burnout risk in these jobs is high.

The flexible labour market has also affected expectations and opportunities in *fixed career jobs*. Fixed jobs offer much more career security than temporary jobs. In the competitive labour market, the fixed contract is the signal that the employer wants to bind the employee, thus affirms the worker's career perspective. A fixed contract substantially reduces the problem of insecurity, but does not resolve it. In the flexible labour market even fixed jobs are perceived to be insecure. In addition, young workers do not have clear prospects once a fixed contract is obtained. To qualify for a better position, new sacrifices have to be made, again with uncertain outcomes. These uncertainties make it difficult to develop realistic expectations about the own career. We conjecture that in the fixed career jobs insecurity is relatively high, and that this increases the risk of burnout.

Hypotheses

The description of the three stages in the labour market entry process suggest substantial differences between entry jobs. We elaborate hypotheses for differences between student jobs, flexible career jobs and fixed career jobs for job insecurity (H1) and burnout complaints (H2).

Job insecurity is the extent to which workers worry about the loss of their job. The meaning of job loss depends on the state of the career. For older workers, whose career has deployed, job loss means that their career perspective becomes insecure. For young workers in student jobs, job loss is mainly the loss of an extra source of income. A new comparable job has to be found, but career security is not involved. This leads to different expectations about the extent and the determinants of job insecurity.

A first expectation is that concerns about job loss are substantially higher when job loss affects the career perspective. Student jobs are not part of the career perspective, career jobs are. In addition, uncertainty and insecurity are greater in temporary than in fixed jobs. This leads to the hypothesis that the extent to which young workers worry about job loss is greater in flexible career jobs than in student jobs and fixed career jobs (H1a).

We also expect that when the job is part of the career perspective, concerns about job loss are great even when the risk of job loss is low (H1b). Worries about the loss of a career job affect casreer and life goals. We expect that job insecurity in student jobs is highly dependent on the perceived risk of job loss, whereas that of young workers in flexible career jobs is less directly related to the risk of loss.

Burnout complaints and insecurity. We expect that the risk of burnout complaints is greater in career jobs than in student jobs for two reasons. One is that career jobs are more burdening than student jobs. The number of work hours is higher, responsibilities greater and tasks more straining. The other reason is that in the career jobs the worker's perspective is at stake. When the job is part of the career perspective, the worker is motivated to do a good job, if only to improve prospects. This implies that when we hold constant for job characteristics that increase risks of stress and burnout, burnout complaints are greater in career jobs than in student jobs (H2a)

Finally, we expect more burnout complaints in flexible than in fixed career jobs (H2b). The reason is the greater insecurity of the career perspective. Young workers in fixed career jobs want to prove that they are good workers willing to make a career, but do not have the concern that they have to start anew after expiration of their contract. Young workers in flexible career jobs feel less recognition of their qualifications and skills, and fear that they may have to develop a new career perspective. The uncertain prospect feed doubts about the work identity and contributes to burnout complaints.

Data

We use the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey 2018 (Hooftman et al. 2019) to test the hypotheses. NWCS is a yearly, large-scale survey among Dutch workers. The dataset contains representative data of 62.602 respondents. We selected the respondents in the age category from 15 to 35, who had provided valid answers for all relevant variables. Their number is 18.705.

Operationalisations

The following variables are used in the analysis:

Job insecurity is measured with the answer to the question: 'Do you worry about the loss of your job?' Answer opportunities: 1 = yes; 0 = no.

Burnout complaints are measured with five standard questions: (1) I feel emotionally exhausted by my work; (2) at the end of the workday I feel empty; (3) when I get up in the morning, I feel tired when confronted with my work; (4) it takes a lot to work with people throughout the day; (5) I feel fully exhausted by my work. Answering opportunities differ from 1 = never to 7 = every day. Cronbach's alfa 0,88. The convention is that when the average of these questions surpasses 3,2, the respondent is perceived to suffer from burnout complaints (Schaufeli and Van Dierendonck 2000). Tests to compare results for dichotomous and continuous variables did not show significant differences in effects. We use the continuous variable.

Type of job. We distinguish student jobs and career jobs, and fixed and flexible career jobs. Respondents in full-time education who work at most 16 hours per week have a student job. Respondents who are not in education and work more than 16 hours per week have a career job. Fixed career jobs have a contract of indetermined duration. Flexible career jobs have a temporary, on call or agency contract. A residual category consists of workers who do neither fit the criteria for student nor for career jobs. Job types are coded as dummy variables. Fixed career jobs are the reference category in the analyses.

Employability. Employability is measured by a variable that aggregates answers to four questions: it is easy for me (1) to meet the physical requirements of my work; (2) to meet the psychological requirement of my work; (3) to get a new job with my present employer; (4) to find a new job with another employer. Item scores are added and averaged. Cronbach's alfa is 0,71. Range runs from 1 = not at all to 4 = fully agree.

Risk of job loss. Risk of job loss is measured with the answer to the question: Do you run the risk losing your job? Answers: 1 = yes; 0 = no.

Control variables. As control variables, we add person and job characteristics, that are known to be related to burnout complaints. *Gender:* 0 = man, 1 = woman. In the regression analyses man is reference. *Age* is measured in three categories: 1 = ≤ 18 years, 2 = 19–24 and 3 = 25–34. *Educational level* is coded: (1) low (\leq lower professional education); (2) middle (secondary and middle professional education); (3) high (higher education).

Job demands is a scale consisting of three items: (1) Do you have to work fast? (2) Do you have a lot of work to do? (3) Do you have to work extra hard? Cronbach's alfa is 0,86. Item scores are summed and averaged. The scale runs from 1 = never to 4 = always.

Autonomy is measured with a scale consisting of five items: (1) Do you decide yourself how you do your job? (2) Do you decide yourself on the sequence of your tasks? (3) Do you yourself regulate the tempo of your work? (4) Do you yourself have to find solutions to solve problems in your work? (5) Can you have leave of absence whenever you want? Cronbach's alfa is 0,78. Item scores are summed and averaged. Scale runs from 1 = no to 3 = yes, often.

Social support supervisor is measured as the level of assent to the statements: (1) my supervisor has an eye for the well-being of the workers; (2) my supervisor pays attention to what I say. $r = 0,75$. Scores are summed and averaged. Scale runs from 1 = little to 4 = much.

Social support co-workers is measured as the assent to the statements: (1) co-workers have a personal interest in me; (2) co-workers are friendly. $r = 0,69$. Item scores are summed and averaged. Scale runs from 1 = little to 4 = much.

Emotionally demanding work is measured as level of assent to the questions: (1) does your work bring you in emotionally difficult conditions? (2) is your work emotionally demanding? (3) Are you emotionally involved in your work? Cronbach's alfa is 0,83. Item scores are summed and averaged. Scale runs from 1 = never to 4 = always.

Physically demanding work is measured as the level of assent to following questions: (1) do you need to use force in your work? (2) do you use in your work tools or apparatuses that cause vibrations or shakes? (3) do you do your work in an uncomfortable working position? (4) do you do work that requires you to make repetitive movements? If at least one of these questions was answered with 'yes, often' we coded the job as physically demanding: 1 = yes; 0 = no.

Harassment is measured with the question whether and how often the worker has felt harassed by supervisor or co-workers. The variable is coded: 0 = never; 1 = once in a while to very often.

Work-home disbalance is measured as the assent to the questions: (1) does your work make you miss or neglect family activities? and (2) does your family make you miss or neglect work activities? If at least one of the questions was answered with 'yes, often' or 'very often' we coded work-home disbalance: 1 = yes; 0 = no.

Analytical strategy

Analysis develops in three steps. In the first step we describe differences between job types, that is student jobs, flexible career jobs and fixed career jobs. We present the differences in terms of characteristics of workers in the job, and of job characteristics, especially in terms of job demands and insecurity.

In the second step we test how differences in job insecurity are associated with job type and the risk of losing the job (H1). We estimate logistic regression models with experienced job insecurity as the dependent variable. To test how the risk of losing the job affects job insecurity, we add that variable separately.

In the third step we test whether and how the risk of burnout complaints depends on the job types and on job insecurity (H2). We estimate OLS regression models with burnout complaints as the dependent variable and different job types, and person and job characteristics as the independent variables. We add job insecurity as an independent variable separately.

Empirical analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, we explored differences between job types to verify our theoretical argument. We argue that the labour market entry in the Netherlands now develops in stages, with qualifications, number of work hours and responsibilities increasing. [Table 1](#) presents the differences between student jobs, flexible career jobs and fixed career jobs, and also for the residual category, that is the jobs not determined as either student or career jobs.

Table 1 shows that age and educational level increase from student jobs via flexible career to fixed career jobs. The number of work hours is substantially higher in career jobs than in student jobs, and also job demands, autonomy and emotional demands. Physical demands become smaller, and also the support of the supervisor. Work-home interference increases. On almost all these characteristics the trend is linear, with the residual in in-between position.

The insecurity variables show a different pattern. Job insecurity is especially high in flexible career jobs, higher than in student jobs and in fixed career jobs. **Table 1** shows that workers in fixed career jobs slightly worry more about job loss than students. The low level of concern of students is remarkable, because most student jobs are flexible and therefore the risk of job loss is high. Students assess their employability as better than workers in flexible career jobs. This again is remarkable, given the better educational credentials of workers in career jobs. The risk of burnout complaints is greatest in flexible career jobs and smallest in student jobs.

We now proceed to the test of hypotheses. H1a reads: Young workers in flexible career jobs worry more about job loss than workers in student jobs and in fixed career jobs. H1b reads: job insecurity in student jobs is mainly determined by the risk of job loss, and in career jobs by the consequences of job loss.

To test the hypotheses, we estimate logistic regression models, with job insecurity as the dependent variable, and type of job, and person and job characteristics as the independent variables. Control variables are the same that will be used to estimate the risk of burnout complaints. Model 1 estimates job insecurity as a function of type of job, and person and job characteristics. In Model 2 the perceived risk of losing the job is added as an independent variable. **Table 2** presents results.

The models do not show differences between men and women. Job insecurity increases with age, and is highest in the age category 25–34 years. Job insecurity decreases with educational level. Workers are less worried about job loss when they are well employable. There are no effects of job demands, autonomy, physical demands and support co-workers. Support of the supervisor reduces job insecurity, whereas greater emotional demands, harassment and home-work disbalance increase insecurity.

Table 1. Differences between job types (descriptives).

Variable	Student	Career: flex	Career: fixed	Residual
Gender: woman	0.57	0.58	0.52	0.55
≤18 year(%)	50.05	3.42	0.32	13.51
25–34 year(%)	6.5	65.53	83.44	54.8
Education: Low (%)	43.32	11.12	7.45	20.24
Education: High (%)	11.41	49.61	55.14	40.77
Job size:1–12 hours (%)	85.1	0	0	23.37
Job size: 31–45 hours (%)	0	72.58	80.18	46.29
Job demands	2.21	2.35	2.44	2.38
Autonomy	2.11	2.20	2.32	2.20
Emotional demands	1.34	1.71	1.82	1.74
Physical demands	0.57	0.41	0.36	0.41
Support supervisor	3.14	3.08	3.06	3.11
Support co-workers	3.40	3.38	3.42	3.41
Harassment	0.06	0.11	0.09	0.08
Home-work disbalance	0.04	0.10	0.10	0.10
Employability	3.19	3.07	3.13	3.11
Job insecurity	0.08	0.28	0.09	0.13
Risk of job loss	0.14	0.31	0.07	0.13
Burnout complaints (cont.)	1.83	2.48	2.37	2.32
Burnout complaints (dich.)	0.11	0.26	0.22	0.23
N	4813	2312	7138	4442

Source: NWCS, 2018

To test H1a we focus on the effects of type of job. Model 1 shows that job insecurity is greatest in flexible career jobs. Workers in student jobs are substantially less concerned about job loss than workers in flexible career jobs, but somewhat more than workers in the fixed career jobs. Results support H1a: young workers in flexible career jobs are more worried about losing their job than workers in student jobs and in fixed career jobs.

To test H1b we add to Model 1 the perceived risk of job loss, and then compare the effects of job types in Model 2 with those in Model 1. The effect of perceived risk in Model 2 is strongly significant. The effect of student job on job insecurity is reduced by almost 80% and is no longer significant in comparison to the effect of the fixed career job. The effect of flexible career job of Model 1 is reduced by almost half, but remains strong. These results support H1b that job insecurity in the student job mainly depends on the more 'objective' risk of job loss, whereas in the flexible career job insecurity does not only mean the loss of the job, but also the loss of the career perspective.

H2 reads that burnout complaints are more frequent in career jobs than in student jobs (H2a), and more frequent in flexible career jobs than in fixed career jobs (H2b). We report OLS regression models. Model 1 contains job types, person characteristics and variables known to be determinants of burnout complaints. In Model 2 we add job insecurity.

The models show that job characteristics associated with career jobs, such as higher job demands, high emotional demands, work-home disbalance and low support of the supervisor increase the risk of burnout complaint. Nevertheless, holding constant for these characteristics, there are substantial differences in burnout complaints between job types. They are substantially lower in student jobs than in career jobs. This result supports H2a.

The models also show that the risk of burnout complaints is significantly higher in flexible than in fixed career jobs. This supports H2b. Model 2 in Table 3 shows that job insecurity adds substantially to burnout complaints. Addition of the variable job insecurity reduces the difference between flexible and fixed career jobs about a third. Job insecurity explains a substantial part, but not the full difference between flexible and fixed career jobs.

Table 2. Determinants of job insecurity (log.regr.).

Variable	Model 1. b	s.e.	Model 2. b	s.e.
Student	0.524*	(0.089)	0.067	(0.100)
Career: flexible	1.522*	(0.066)	0.857*	(0.077)
Residual	0.576*	(0.065)	0.318*	(0.072)
Woman	-0.002	(0.050)	0.126*	(0.056)
19–24 year	0.427*	(0.105)	0.578*	(0.117)
25–34 year	0.895*	(0.114)	0.984*	(0.127)
Education: Middle	-0.141	(0.079)	-0.206*	(0.088)
Education: High	-0.310*	(0.088)	-0.433*	(0.098)
Job demands	-0.048	(0.041)	-0.029	(0.046)
Autonomy	-0.056	(0.054)	-0.041	(0.061)
Emotional demands	-0.230*	(0.038)	-0.141*	(0.043)
Physical demands	-0.079	(0.043)	-0.029	(0.049)
Support supervisor	0.279*	(0.042)	0.225*	(0.047)
Support co-workers	-0.056	(0.053)	-0.032	(0.059)
Harassment	0.457*	(0.074)	0.377*	(0.085)
Home-work disbalance	0.331*	(0.075)	0.343*	(0.085)
Employability	-0.790*	(0.048)	-0.696*	(0.054)
Risk of job loss			2.631*	(0.057)
Constant	0.050	(0.261)	-1.156*	(0.295)
N	18,377		18,377	
ll	-6013.84		-4923.08	
chi2	1497.12		3678.65	
df_m	17		18	

Source: NWCS, 2018

Table 3. Determinants of burnout complaints (OLS).

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Student job	−0.116*	(0.025)	−0.132*	(0.025)
Career: flexible job	0.161*	(0.027)	0.107*	(0.028)
Residual	0.013	(0.021)	−0.003	(0.021)
Woman	0.029	(0.015)	−0.028	(0.015)
19–24 year	0.051	(0.028)	−0.060*	(0.028)
25–34 year	−0.121*	(0.033)	−0.144*	(0.033)
Education: Middle	0.007	(0.025)	0.012	(0.025)
Education: High	0.135*	(0.029)	0.144*	(0.029)
Job demands	0.344*	(0.014)	0.345*	(0.014)
Autonomy	0.008	(0.018)	0.010	(0.018)
Emotional demands	−0.156*	(0.014)	−0.150*	(0.014)
Physical demands	−0.148*	(0.017)	−0.145*	(0.016)
Support supervisor	0.607*	(0.016)	0.599*	(0.016)
Support co-workers	0.055*	(0.016)	0.056*	(0.016)
Harassment	0.346*	(0.035)	0.327*	(0.036)
Home-work disbalance	0.661*	(0.036)	0.647*	(0.036)
Employability	−0.357*	(0.018)	−0.334*	(0.018)
Job insecurity			0.275*	(0.028)
Constant	2.433*	(0.093)	2.334*	(0.092)
N	18,377		18,377	
r ² _a	0.37		0.37	
F	461.94		444.36	
rmse	1.00		1.00	
df _m	17		18	

Source: NWCS, 2018

Interpretation and discussion

Analysis has shown support for both our hypotheses. Job insecurity is especially high in flexible career jobs, and much lower in the fixed career jobs and in the usually temporary student jobs (H1). Burnout complaints are highest in flexible career jobs, lower in fixed career jobs and not very present in student jobs (H2). We discuss these results from several angles: the experience of job insecurity; the origins of high burnout complaints in career jobs; the psychological sources of career insecurity; and the effect of policies of employability.

Job insecurity. Our results show that the experience of job insecurity is dependent on the position of the job in the career perspective. Student jobs usually are temporary jobs, but workers in these jobs do not experience much job insecurity. Students only feel insecure about their job, when the job is seriously threatened. Job insecurity is a much more serious problem in career jobs. Workers in career jobs feel that their job is an important stepping stone to the realisation of life goals. Especially workers in flexible career jobs feel insecure. Job insecurity of workers in fixed career jobs is substantially lower than that of workers in flexible career jobs, but not absent. Its crude level is comparable and even somewhat higher than that of the students in their predominantly temporary jobs.

The outcome that job insecurity depends on the position of the job in the career perspective sheds new light on two well-known results in the research literature. One is that the extent to which the insecurity of a flexible contract affects the well-being of the worker differs substantially between workers. The effect varies from a hardly lower well-being than in a fixed job, to a strong reduction of well-being, that in effect size is comparable to that of unemployment (Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall 2002; Cheng and Chan, 20082008). Our analyses suggest that the size of the effect depends on the position of the job in the career perspective. Job insecurity has a strong impact on well-being, when job loss threatens the career perspective.

Another result in the literature is the large difference between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ job insecurity. ‘Objective’ insecurity is measured by the term of the contract (temporary or fixed), and ‘subjective’ insecurity by the extent to which the respondent worries about job loss (Klandermans,

Klein Hesselink, and Van Vuuren 2010; De Witte and Näswall 2003). Analyses usually show only weak or no correlation between the flexible contract and job insecurity. The plausible explanation from our analyses is that job loss concern primarily depends on the position of the job in the career perspective.

Burnout complaints and career insecurity. Our results show that burnout complaints are high in career jobs and much lower in student jobs. This difference depends on job demands and work conditions. Student jobs are small, have low demands, hardly work-home problems and relatively good support of the supervisor. These conditions reduce the risk of burnout complaints. Our results show that the threat of the loss of the career perspective add to the risk of burnout complaints. One such result is that despite higher work demands the risk of burnout is higher in flexible career jobs than in fixed career jobs. Another result supporting this conclusion is that job insecurity is lower in fixed career jobs than in flexible career jobs, but not absent. In the flexible labour market, the career perspective is precious.

Sources of career insecurity. Previous research showed that young workers have a need of labour market security (WRR 2020; Elchardus and Smits 2008; Tomlinson 2007). Our results specify that young workers after graduation have a need of a secure career perspective. They run the risk of psychological problems when this need is not satisfied. Insecurity emanates from both a lack of career prospects, and from doubts about the work identity.

A temporary job after graduation means uncertain prospects. The risk is serious that the career needs a restart and the perspective a rebuild. This insecurity makes it difficult to make future plans for the realisation of life goals, both in work and in private life. Young workers in an insecure labour market position postpone decisions of marrying, buying a house and having children (Blossfeld et al. 2005), and may feel that postponement is the portal to cancellation.

In addition, the insecure career perspective feeds a deeper doubt. Insecure prospects add to doubt the 'calling', the work identity, the career path that has been taken. Research shows that a 'calling' is a psychological resource, but also that a calling not lived harms well-being (Duffy et al. 2018). In the Netherlands the calling and the career perspective develop mainly in vocational and higher education. Work identity and career perspective are outcomes of many years of education. Career insecurity makes dubious the value of investments and efforts in education, and thus may lead to feelings of personal failure. Career insecurity is a breeding ground for feelings of non-efficaciousness and of depleted resources, thus of burnout complaints.

Policies of employability. Our results imply that the career perspective determines the extent to which the threat of job loss becomes a mental problem. The usual answer to the problem of the insecure career perspective is employability. Employability stands for the disposal of sufficient qualifications to be an attractive worker for different employers. Our results, however, do not confirm that greater employability solves the problem of an insecure career perspective. Better employability indeed contributes to the decrease of feelings of insecurity and the risk of burnout complaints, but the level of employability itself appears to be dependent on the state of the career. Young workers in student jobs evaluate their employability better than workers in career jobs (Table 1), and workers in flexible career jobs assess their employability lowest. These are remarkable results, because workers in career jobs are substantially better qualified than workers in student jobs. Employability appears to be more dependent on perceptions and expectations than on qualifications acquired. The pattern in our results is that a threat of the career perspective lowers the assessment of the employability. This makes employability not an adequate answer to problems of career insecurity.

Conclusion

Flexible labour market and burnout. Our analyses show that burnout complaints of young workers are related to the flexible labour market. The flexible labour market reduces the unemployment risk of workers looking for entry jobs. Workers navigate the market in subsequent stages, and thereby reduce the risk of unemployment. It, so far, was unclear what this flexible labour market means for

the career perspective of young workers. The usual picture is that young workers more or less fluently navigate from student jobs, via flexible career jobs to fixed career jobs. This picture focuses on the 'objective' career, whereas the 'subjective' side, that is the role of the career perspective is not illuminated. Our results show that for young workers there is substantial difference between the meaning of student jobs and of career jobs. Workers in student jobs are flexible, do not worry much about their labour market position, and easily adapt to the conditions of the flexible labour market. Workers in career jobs feel threatened by the insecurity of the flexible labour market and therefore often have burnout complaints. These psychological problems are a so far unobserved setback of the flexible labour market for young workers.

Shortcomings. The main shortcoming of our research is that we did not have a direct measure of the insecure career perspective. Lacking this measure, an alternative explanation for our findings is that different job demands and work conditions in student jobs and career jobs explain the differences in burnout risks. Cross-sectional statistical methods do not allow to fully disentangle effects of job demands and work conditions from the career perspective. We feel reassured, however, because job insecurity is strongly related to burnout complaints in career jobs and hardly in student jobs. It is further to be noted that work is not the only source of burnout risk for students. Burnout complaints of students in the Netherlands are increasing, and this growth is, among other causes, ascribed to performance pressure in education (RIVM 2019).

Directions for further research. A goal of further research should be to specify which young workers are especially at risk for burnout complaints. Research may produce insight into the strategies that young workers develop to deal with career insecurity and the relationship between strategies and psychological problems. Qualitative research may reveal to what extent and under which conditions young workers seek jobs in a narrow range that fit their educational credentials, and when and why they decide to leave their career perspective. Especially interesting are motivations, trade-offs and psychological problems in promising, but ultimately insecure employment relationships, such as unpaid internships and traineeships. Quantitative research may develop measurement instruments of career insecurity and strategies, and test the differential effects on burnout complaints.

Policies. Burnout, also the burnout problems of young workers, is usually dealt with as a curative problem. Workers with burnout complaints are perceived as relatively random exceptions, and there is consensus that the victims should be granted time to recover. At best, it is further argued that adjustments should be made in job demands and work conditions to prevent recurrence. The burnout problems of young workers in the Netherlands, however, are not random, but related to the excess of career insecurity in the flexible labour market. Flexible employment relations enhance tension in a demanding life phase, and often lead to serious psychological problems. So far, policies have not shown much awareness of these negative effects of career insecurity. The message sent to students and young workers was almost exclusively that they should improve their employability. Young workers, however, are better supported by institutions that help them to adjust their career perspective. Professional education should teach students the dangers and risks of the flexible labour market and sane strategies to deal with them within their career perspective. Furthermore, dangers and risks of flexible employment relationships are and should not be the exclusive problem of workers. Employers are advised, in their own interest of a qualified and motivated future workforce, to offer their young workers greater job security and more of a career perspective.

Meanwhile in the Netherlands the consensus has emerged that the Dutch labour market has become too flexible (Commissie Regulering van Werk 2020; WRR 2020). We hope that new policies will not only focus on the problem of uncertain livelihood, but also on the psychological problems due to insecurity of the work identity and the career.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research was done without additional funding.

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