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Bio sketch

Malte van Veen is a researcher at TNO Healthy Living and Work and PhD-student at Amsterdam UMC. He has a background in social and organizational Psychology and Epidemiology. His research focus is on mental health of young workers.

“Trends in mental health complaints of Dutch young workers and potential causes”

Based on earlier analyses, which showed that burnout-related complaints were increasing more in young workers compared to the general working population, the Dutch Ministry of Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment called on research to analyse trends within this group. The goal was to identify potential risk groups and underlying reason for this observed increase.

We conducted secondary data analyses on the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey (NWCS) and focus-groups with young workers. For the secondary data analysis the two outcomes were burnout-related complaints, measured as emotional exhaustion and absenteeism from work with psychological or stress complaints, which were at least partly caused by work. We analysed NWCS-waves from 2015 up to and including 2022. We conducted four focus-groups with in total 27 young workers. In these focus-groups we mixed open and closed questions and asked for stressors within and beyond work.

When grouping young workers on severity of burnout-related complaints within each year, there is a robust increase in complaint severity over the years in the group with most complaints. For young workers with fewer burnout-related complaints on the other hand, the scores were stable. When analysing the distribution of burnout-related complaints and how they changed over the years, we found that there were fewer female young workers with little complaints. For absenteeism we also found a general increase over the years. This increase was highest in university-educated women. Focus-group participants ranked performance pressure, uncertainties in life, and social pressure as the top three causes of stress. Young workers reported a lack of perspective concerning what they are working for, a negative effect of seeing others succeed on social media, and that they feel pressure to always appear happy.

Further research is needed to better understand the origins of stress perceptions of young workers.