

Quality of work and employment in Belgium

Executive summary

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February 17th 2012



This volume presents the findings of a research project on the quality of work and employment in Belgium. All findings are based on analyses of different Belgian experts on the data collected through the European Working Conditions Survey. The different contributions support a policy enhancing work quality in Belgium. The chance to enjoy good quality work and the risk to perform bad quality work is not evenly distributed within the working population. Gender, occupation, sector and company size are important determinants for the job quality of employees. And at the same time a different kind of work quality is associated with different health outcomes, with particularly 'full time balanced work' being linked to good outcomes. A main job quality determinant on work related health risks is of course a safe workplace. Violence and harassment is a second element with very negative health outcomes. These results back the current Belgian legal framework strongly focusing on risk prevention and with particular attention for violence and harassment at work. Furthermore, a good social climate and controlling emotional pressure and speed pressure seem to be vital in a good quality of work policy.

Seven job quality types on the Belgian labour market

In the first chapter Tom Vandenberghe and Sem Vandekerckhove develop the framework of indicators that will be used throughout the volume. The EWCS has a lot of information on job quality, and reporting on all questions would only bring less clarity in the subject. The first chapter reduced this information and came up with a list of 22 essential job quality indicators and 10 indicators on job quality outcomes. In a second step, this information was used to divide the Belgian workers in seven groups, each of them confronted with a particular job quality type.

Figure 1 illustrates the job outcomes for two out of the seven job quality types. 'Full time balanced work' outperforms on almost all job quality outcomes 'emotionally demanding work'. All health outcomes for workers in full time balanced work are far better, their absenteeism rate is lower and they show up at work less often when sick. The huge difference in the sustainability is remarkable. Full time balanced workers far more often think they will be able to do their job until the age of 60. The most important conclusion of this illustration is that the quality of work matters. People with a different quality of work have different risks to face health problems and to work in a sustainable job.

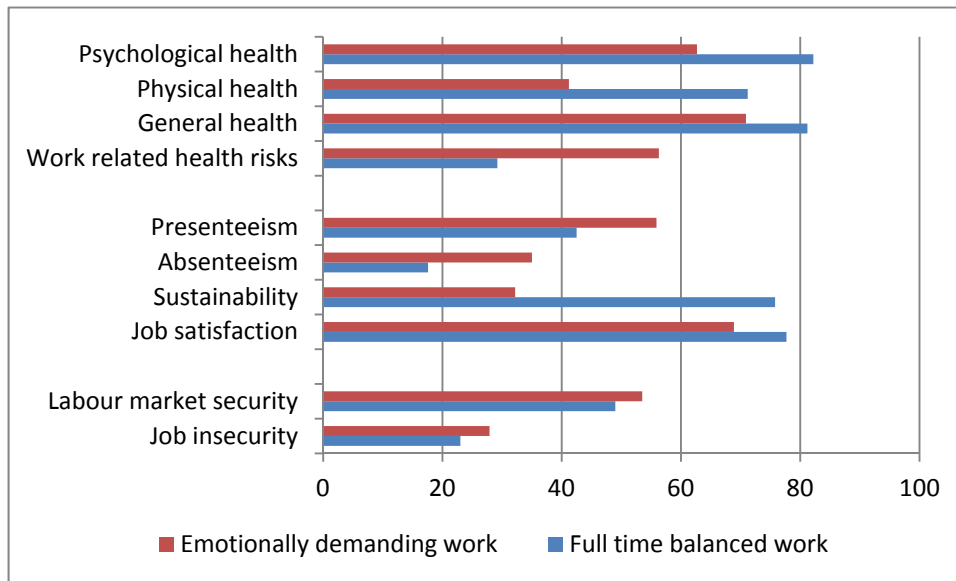


Figure 1 Job quality outcomes for ‘emotionally demanding work’ and for ‘full time balanced work’

In order to have a better understanding of the particular risk factors, this volume has focused on the variety of job quality constellations on the Belgian labour market, and on drivers and barriers for good quality work outcomes. Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the 7 job types on the Belgian labour market.

Employees in the first cluster have interesting scores on almost all quality of work sub-dimensions. They enjoy a lot of autonomy to work on complex tasks in team. The work environment has limited risks. Working conditions are very favourable: high wages, full time work, training and career opportunities and a permanent contract. On top of that, they have a say on behalf of the work organisation, work together with a supportive manager, and are decently represented. On the negative side, these workers do have to cope with flexibility, as working schedules and places might be unpredictable. Anyhow, the overall balance is clearly positive. We call this cluster the *saturated job* cluster as workers in this cluster have higher levels of job factors across all the main dimensions of job quality (cf. Holman, 2011). About 18% of Belgian workers are assigned to this cluster.

Cluster B is the second cluster with reasonable positive scores on most sub-dimensions. Nevertheless, most scores are a little bit less favorable than in the ‘saturated jobs’ cluster. These workers have a little bit less team work, complexity and autonomy. Wages are above average but lower than in the first cluster, just as career and training opportunities. The positive element is that these workers do not have to cope with unpredictability, as they have a fixed workplace and work schedule. We can call this the group of employees with *full time balanced work*. About 13% of all employees are placed in this group.

Work in cluster C is labelled as *work with limited career prospects*. On the one hand, part time work is a distinguishing characteristic of this group, with 54% of the employees not working full time. On the other hand, these workers have rather bad working conditions and not much career prospects. These workers not only lack a full time job, but also have a big chance on a temporary contract, low pay, and no training or career opportunities. Taking these two characteristics together, we find a group of workers that are not considered as important for the company. The 'positive' characteristics of this group of workers also relate to unchallenging work packages: workers enjoy task autonomy in a work environment with limited risks and no speed pressure, and they work normal working hours according to a regular work schedule. Work organisations do not give opportunities for career advancement, but neither force these workers to overperform. That is why we consider work in this cluster as *work with limited career prospects*. The cluster analysis has assigned 21% of all employees in this cluster.

Table 1 Presentation of the characteristics of the seven quality of work types on the Belgian labour market

Group	Label	(Share in employment)
A	Saturated jobs (legislators, senior officials and managers) <i>positive:</i> autonomous team work, no repetitive tasks, task autonomy, complex tasks, working time autonomy, limited risks, career opportunities, permanent contract, high wages, full time work, training, say, supportive management, social support, little violence and harassment, voice <i>negative:</i> no fixed workplace, unusual working hours, working time flexibility	18%
B	Full time balanced work (professionals, clerks) <i>positive:</i> no emotional pressure, no speed pressure, task autonomy, task complexity, no risks, no dealing with people, fixed workplace, career opportunities, permanent contract, good salary, full time work, training, normal working hours, regular work schedule, supportive management, social support <i>negative:</i> no team work	13%
C	Work with limited career prospects (professionals, clerks & elementary occupations) <i>positive:</i> no repetitive tasks, no speed pressure, task autonomy, no risks, normal working hours, regular work schedule, no harassment <i>negative:</i> little team work, no fixed workplace, limited career opportunities, temporary contract, low wages, part time work, no training	21%
D	Work on flexible and unusual hours (professionals, plant and machine operators and assemblers) <i>positive:</i> good salary, full time work <i>negative:</i> no team work, no task autonomy, no task complexity, no working time autonomy, no fixed workplace, unusual working hours, working time flexibility, no say, no supportive management, no voice.	11%
E	Emotionally demanding work (professionals) <i>positive:</i> autonomous team work, complex tasks, training, voice <i>negative:</i> emotional pressure, repetitive tasks, speed pressure, no working time autonomy, risk, working with people, limited career opportunities, part time work, unusual working hours, working time flexibility, no say, no supportive management, no social support, violence and harassment	13%

Table 1 Presentation of the characteristics of the seven quality of work types on the Belgian labour market. Next

Group	Label	(Share in employment)
F	Heavy repetitive work (craft & related trades workers) <i>positive:</i> autonomous team work, no emotional pressure, not much work with people, fixed workplace, good salary, full time work, training opportunities, normal working hours, regular work schedule <i>negative:</i> repetitive tasks, no task autonomy, no working time autonomy, risky work environment, no say, no social support	9%
G	Indecent work (clerks, service workers, shop and market sales workers and elementary occupations) <i>positive:</i> no emotional pressure, not much work with people, fixed workplace, regular work schedule <i>negative:</i> not much team work, repetitive tasks, no task autonomy, no complex tasks, no working time autonomy, risky work environment, no career opportunities, temporary contract, very low wages, part time work, no training, no say, no voice	14%

The next cluster of workers, with 11% of the Belgian employees, has a good salary and a full time job, but faces rather unfavourable working time arrangements. They often have to work at unusual hours and changes in their work schedule regularly occur. It is the employer who decides about the time when they have to work, as working time autonomy is very limited. That is why we label this group as *work on flexible and unusual hours*. Quite often, these workers also lack a fixed workplace and have to work on different locations. A final point of attention is the fact that these workers have few say or voice in the organisation of the work in the company.

A fifth cluster has typically *emotionally demanding work*. Although these workers can work in team on complex issues, receive proper training opportunities and are represented at the work floor, they have to cope with a lot of stressful work characteristics. These workers very often have to deal with people who are not employees at the workplace such as (sometimes angry) customers, passengers, pupils or patients. In their organisation, they do not feel supported by colleagues or management. And on top of that, they have to work on repetitive tasks and under speed pressure. Unsurprisingly this cluster has by far the biggest score on emotional pressure. This is not compensated by good working conditions, as career prospects are poor, full time work rare and unusual working hours and changing work schedules frequent. We find about 13% of the Belgian workers in this cluster with emotionally demanding work.

Cluster F differs from other clusters because of the *heavy repetitive work* of respondents in this cluster. Workers are asked to fulfill repetitive tasks. They have no autonomy nor say at work, and have to work in a risky environment. On the positive side, they are paid well in a full time job, have a fixed workplace and a normal and stable working day schedule. 9% of the Belgian workforce performs this kind of heavy repetitive work.

Finally, cluster G may be labelled as the *indecent work* cluster. Work in this cluster has bad scores for about every aspect of work quality and in that sense contrasts fully with the ILO decent work agenda. Workers are expected to perform simple repetitive tasks in a risky work environment, but have no say or autonomy on how to fulfill these tasks. Wages are very low, career opportunities nihil, training is not provided and part time temporary contracts probable. And the workers are not represented collectively to express their views. Not much to mention on the positive side here: these workers can go to the same plant following a regular daily schedule and do not suffer from emotional pressure as they have no contact with people from outside the company. In Belgium, 14% of the workers can be found in this cluster of *indecent work*.

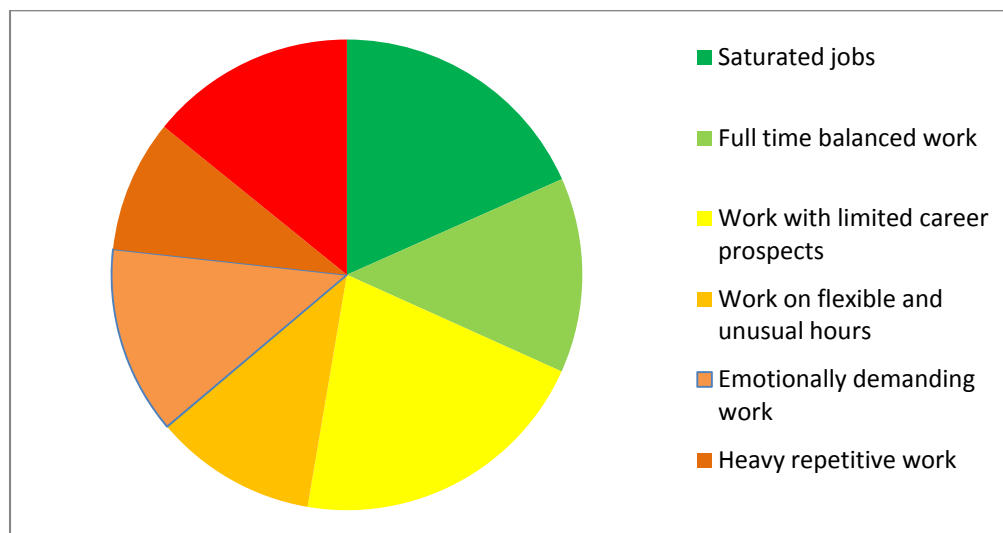


Figure 2 Share of quality of work types in the Belgian economy

Figure 2 summarises the share of the different clusters in the Belgian economy in a pie. Two clusters are characterised with a good to excellent quality of work. About one out of three Belgian employees enjoys ‘saturated jobs’ or ‘full time balanced work’.

Four clusters have at least one unpleasant element of the work quality, but to some extent this is complemented with a number of positive elements. These unpleasant characteristics may be found in the part time contract and limited career prospects, in the working time arrangements, in the emotional demands of the work, or in the heavy and repetitive character of the tasks. More than half of the Belgian workers are confronted with at least one particularly uninteresting element of the work quality.

Finally, one out of six workers is found in the last cluster with ‘indecent work’. Whereas the former clusters all have some decent elements of the work quality, this is merely the case for these workers. This cluster is characterised with a bad score on almost every indicator on work quality.

The quality of work is not ad random distributed on the labour market. The occupational group, the activity of the company and the educational level of the worker are important determinants for the job quality type of workers. Furthermore, we already introduced that being confronted with a particular job quality type has consequences for the workers’ health.

In table 2 the selection of 10 job quality outcomes of employees has been related to the different quality of work clusters. The η^2 statistics indicate that health variables, job satisfaction and sustainability are more connected to the clusters than the selected absenteeism/presenteeism questions and the job insecurity/labour market security questions.

Table 2 Job quality outcome indicators, by quality of work type

	A Saturated jobs	B Full time balanced work	C Work with lim- ited ca- reer prospects	D Work on flexible and un- usual hours	E Emotio- nally de- manding work	F Heavy repetitive work	G Indecent work	Total	Eta ²	p
Job insecurity	0.24	0.23	0.28	0.30	0.28	0.33	0.36	0.29	2.00%	***
Labour market security	0.55	0.49	0.51	0.48	0.53	0.46	0.46	0.50	1.11%	***
Job satisfaction	0.80	0.78	0.76	0.69	0.69	0.72	0.64	0.74	11.49%	***
Sustainability	0.63	0.76	0.61	0.50	0.32	0.56	0.50	0.56	1.56%	***
Absenteeism	0.18	0.18	0.22	0.25	0.35	0.25	0.24	0.22	1.58%	***
Presenteeism	0.51	0.43	0.47	0.52	0.56	0.42	0.45	0.48	0.76%	**
Work related health risks	0.36	0.29	0.33	0.44	0.56	0.42	0.40	0.39	7.07%	***
General health	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.76	0.71	0.77	0.77	0.78	3.03%	***
Physical health	0.66	0.71	0.64	0.56	0.41	0.59	0.59	0.62	5.42%	***
Psychological health	0.78	0.82	0.79	0.74	0.63	0.81	0.81	0.79	3.96%	***

Note: *p<0.050; ** p<0.010; *** p<0.001.

The health outcomes point at one particular quality of work cluster with very problematic relative health outcomes. The workers with 'emotionally demanding work' have by far the highest score on work related health risks, and also register the worst scores on the three different health indicators. Not surprisingly, they have a very low score on work sustainability. Within the group of workers with emotionally demanding work, only 32% of the respondents believe he or she will be able to do the same job until 60.

Workers with 'full time balanced work' seem to have the best health outcomes. This suggests that the 'saturated jobs', with challenging work and extremely good working conditions, is not the best work for workers' health. The 'next best' work with rather moderate expectations for the worker seems to be a better choice when it comes to optimizing workers' health outcomes. Further, healthy work seems to be an important determinant for sustainability. Within the group of workers with 'full time balanced work', 76% believes it is possible to do this job until the age of 60, a score far above the scores in other job quality clusters.

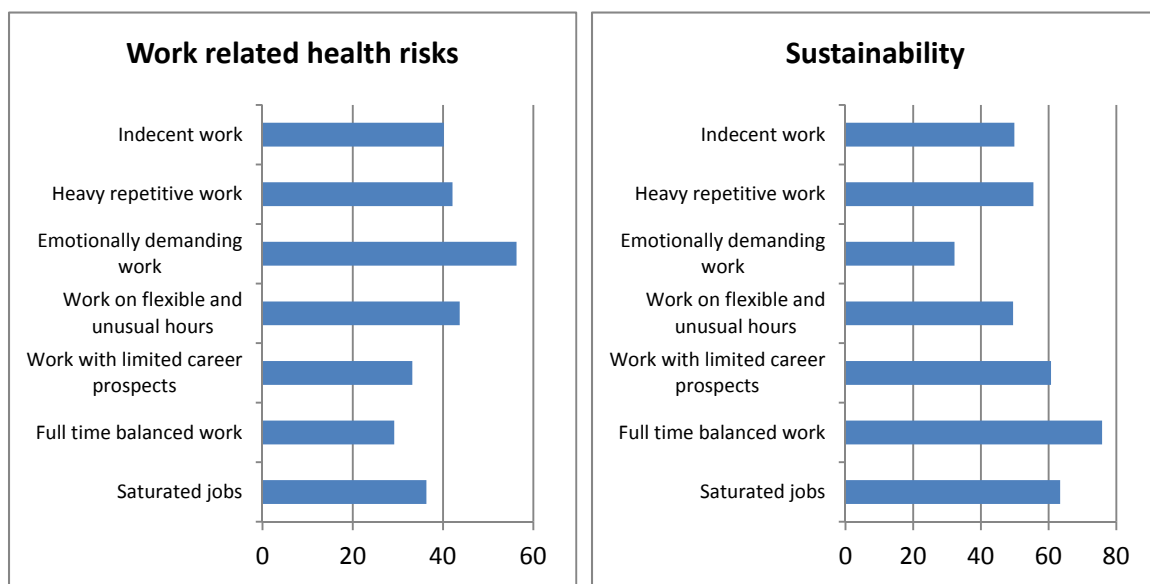


Figure 3 Work related health risks and work sustainability, by quality of work type

We find particularly important differences in work sustainability and health outcomes between the workers with a different job quality. That is why the volume dedicated the two next chapters to a further investigation of these two outcomes, i.e. sustainability and health outcomes.

Sustainability

Sustainability is at the central stage in the second chapter by Patricia Vendramin and Gérard Valenduc. It is believed that sustainable work is a key issue for any policy aiming at increasing the employment rate of older workers. The ECWS-2010

results allow for fine-tuning the picture of employment and working conditions of ageing workers, and to develop more targeted insights on the various aspects of the improvement of quality of work for them.

Looking at occupational structures and the sectoral division of 50+ workers on the labour market emphasises the gender differences among older workers. The chapter highlights further differences between older male and female workers, with sustainability of the work being an important example. The distribution of answers on the question whether workers will be able to do their job at the age of 60 by gender (figure 4) indicates that women consider their work less sustainable than men (with 5.5 percentage points less positive answers), and the gender gap of 5.5 percentage points is distributed into inverse gaps of 3.5 points “I don’t think so” and 2.0 points “I wouldn’t want to”.

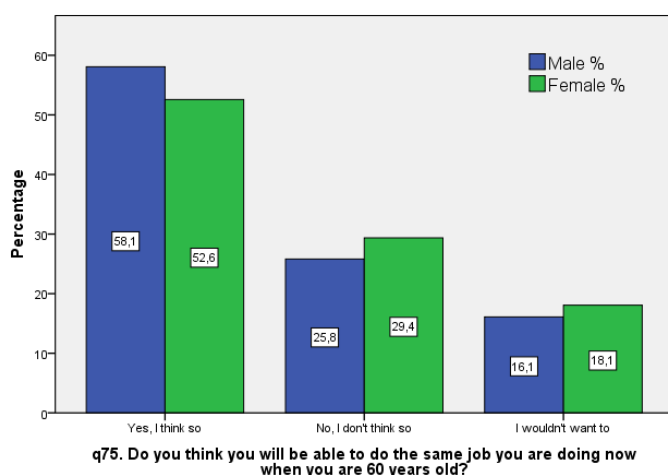


Figure 4 Distribution of answers to Q75 by gender

These gender differences on job sustainability are more acute among older workers than within younger generations. For instance, the preference for working less hours a week is rather widespread among 50+ workers, but it takes different forms for women and men. Female workers have stronger working time reduction wishes than men. Not surprising, male workers are more than females working in ‘saturated jobs’, whereas females are more represented in the work quality clusters with ‘emotionally demanding work’ and ‘indecent work’.

The first chapter highlighted the huge differences in job sustainability between different job quality types. This chapter analysed the correlations between the 22 underlying job quality dimensions and job sustainability and revealed some meaningful relations. While ‘emotional pressure’, ‘repetitive tasks’ and ‘speed pressure’ have higher scores among those who don’t think to be able to do the same job when 60, ‘task autonomy’, ‘working time autonomy’ and mainly ‘career opportunities’ are favourable factors of job sustainability. In the area of working conditions, a higher score on risk exposure is correlated with a lower score in job

sustainability. Again, there are some significant differences among men and women. Most of the indicators concerning social relations seem to have more impact on the negative evaluation of the job sustainability by women. This is also the case for 'career opportunities', 'unusual working hours', 'working time flexibility' and 'emotional pressure'. For men, repetitive tasks seem to be more correlated with a negative assessment of job sustainability.

As regards job quality outcomes, health aspects appear as the most explicative variables of the perception of job sustainability. Good scores in general health, physical health and psychological health are correlated with better scores in job sustainability, while work-related health risks are correlated with lower scores in job sustainability. Job satisfaction is another important outcome, positively correlated with job sustainability. Regarding the differences between men and women, 'job insecurity' and 'physical health' are the most 'gendered' outcomes. Insecurity has a more negative impact on job sustainability for men than for women, while good physical health has a more positive impact for men than for women. Besides these two outcomes, the results for women and men go in the same direction.

Health outcomes

Chapter III, by Isabelle Hansez, goes more in depth on the health outcomes of workers.

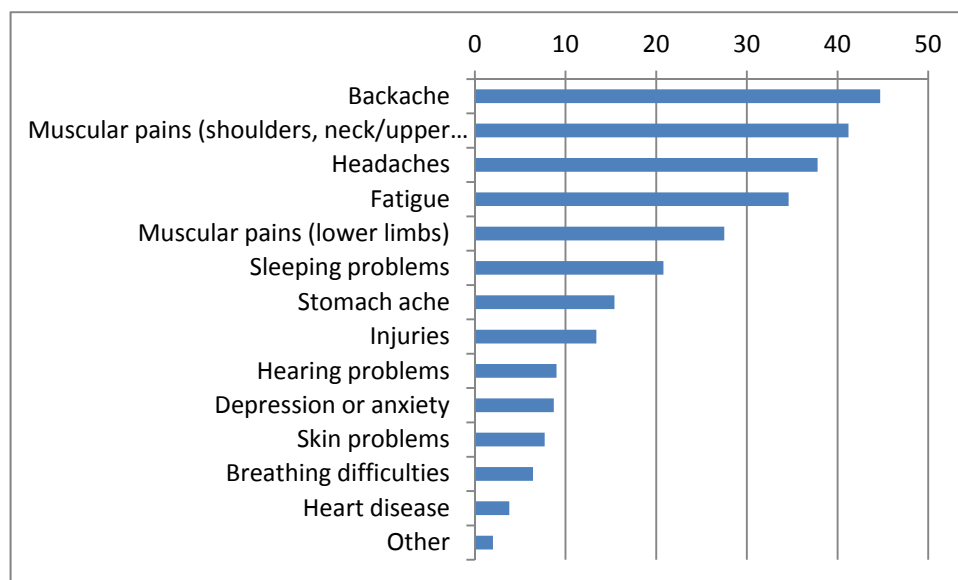


Figure 5 Percentage of workers reporting each individual symptom

General results (in figure 5) about the main symptoms show that musculoskeletal disorders including muscular pains and backaches remain the main symptoms reported by workers. Even if work-related musculoskeletal disorders are usually associated to repetitive tasks or to those implying carrying of heavy loads, vibra-

tions, inadequate postures (Van Gyes, 2007), our results support the view that they are multifactorial (as presented in the regression analyses results in table 3). In this chapter, risks including work-related musculoskeletal disorders (vibrations, painful positions, etc.) are the strongest predictor of physical health but there are also psychosocial risks associated with physical health. In particular lack of social support and emotional pressure are significant predictors of physical health.

The other view of symptoms reported by workers in this survey is focused on fatigue, sleeping problems and headaches. Again psychological health is predicted by emotional pressure and social support in addition to speed pressure, harassment and supportive management.

Table 3 Health outcomes determinants

Quality of work components	Physical Health	Psychological Health
<i>Employment conditions</i>		
Earnings	0.01	0.04
Career opportunities	0.07***	0.04
Permanent contract	-0.01	0.05*
Full time work	0.05*	-0.01
Unusual working hours	-0.05*	0.00
Training	0.00	-0.01
Working time flexibility	0.03	-0.04
<i>Job content</i>		
Autonomous team work	-0.02	0.06**
Emotional pressure	-0.11***	-0.18***
Repetitive	-0.02	-0.02
Speed pressure	-0.04	-0.12***
Task autonomy	-0.06**	-0.02
Task complexity	-0.07**	-0.06**
Working time autonomy	0.04	-0.01
<i>Social relations</i>		
Harassment	-0.08***	-0.11***
Supportive management	0.04*	0.10***
Say	-0.02	-0.04
Social support	0.09***	0.11***
Voice	0.01	-0.01
<i>Working conditions</i>		
Fixed workplace	0.04*	-0.02
Working with people	0.02	-0.02
Risks	-0.28***	-0.09***
R ²	.17	.18
	D=22,1 P=000	D=23,1 P=000

Note: Entries are standardised regression coefficients. * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

As emotional pressure appears in this survey to be significant in predicting all health outcomes, it is necessary to focus more attention to interventions regarding

emotional demands and emotion regulation strategies workers develop in this respect.

Another result concerns job resources as main predictors of health outcomes amongst Belgian workers. Social support was a main predictor of both physical and psychological health. In this respect, it is necessary to design interventions aiming at developing high social support but also high supportive management and career opportunities in organisations. In most psychosocial risks diagnosis, work practitioners point job resources problems in terms of social support from the organisation, supervisors and colleagues and in terms of supportive management and companies need guidelines or best practices in how to improve job resources.

As far as risks are concerned, it is important to reinforce or at least to consolidate the culture of risk prevention in Belgium. It is also probably necessary to reinforce a better application of existing laws in this respect, pointing out the costs of non-policy as far as health outcomes are concerned. As harassment is also a significant predictor of all health outcomes, the same comment applies to the legal framework on the prevention of psycho-social burden.

Next to these general recommendations, vulnerable groups according to individual characteristics emerge from the analyses of health outcomes: ageing workers, lower educated and non-native workers. According to organisational characteristics, some effort should be placed in considering psychosocial risks and health indicators of SME owners and developing peer support groups or sensitisation actions. Moreover, results suggest decreasing health indicators for employees encountering work changes, an issue tackled in the next chapter.

Restructuring calls for active jobs

Rik Huys and Geert Van Hootegem discussed the impact of restructuring processes on the quality of work and employment in chapter IV. Inevitably restructuring requires changes in work organisation. New or remaining tasks must be redistributed between employees and jobs must be redesigned. This necessity, however, is at the same an opportunity. The analysis confirms that the way this reorganisation of work is implemented either reinforces or alleviates the negative impact of restructuring on psychological health. If jobs are designed in such a way that the available job control enables employees to tackle the increased job demands, the negative effects of restructuring are partly compensated.

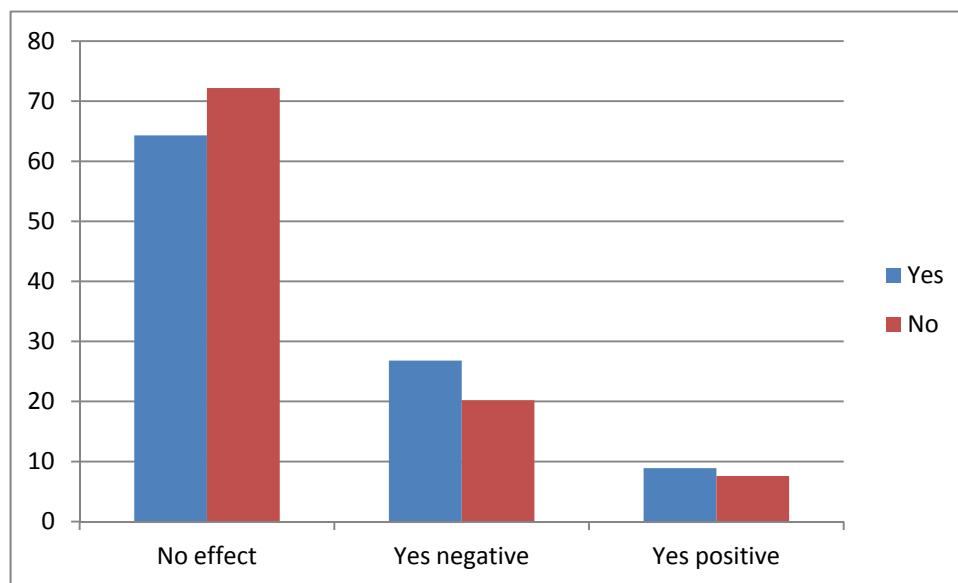


Figure 6 Share of employees with health affected by work, according to the occurrence of restructuring

The chapter starts with the statement that restructuring does have an influence on occupational health and quality of life of workers. Employees experiencing restructuring are more likely to report an impact on their health (35.6% versus 27.8%). This impact is mainly considered as negative. Three out of four employees reporting an impact from work on health, perceive the impact as negative, both for those affected by restructuring as for the employees not affected by restructuring (figure 6). The impact of restructuring goes beyond mental health problems and affects the general mood of employees involved in restructuring. Indeed restructuring is associated with a poor overall assessment by employees of their working conditions.

An important reason for these negative feelings is found in the impact restructuring traditionally has on work organisation. Table 4 reflects both the increase in job demands and the smaller decrease in job control in the case employees have faced a restructuring. The share of employees with low job control increases in organisations with restructuring from 44.9% to 49.9%. The share of employees with high job demands increases considerably in organisations with restructuring from 37.9% to 55.2%.

Table 4 Share of employees in the Karasek-quadrant, according to the occurrence of restructuring (data in case of restructuring are '**bold**')

	Demands Low	Demands High
Control High	Low-strain jobs	Active jobs
	35.4 25.2	19.7 24.9
Control Low	Passive jobs	High-strain jobs
	26.7 19.6	18.2 30.3

On the one hand, this leads to an increase in the share of 'active jobs' (from 19.7% to 24.9%). In this job type employees are able to deal with higher demands, protecting them from excessive strain. Learning and feelings of mastery may result. These, in turn, help the person to cope with the inevitable strain-inducing situations of the job, resulting in reduced strain and even higher levels of productivity (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

On the other hand, this leads to a much larger increase in 'high-strain jobs' (18.2% to 30.3%). In this job type employees cannot respond optimally to situational demands (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). The main shift associated with restructuring is therefore one from 'low-strain jobs' to 'high-strain jobs'. As high-strain jobs are associated to more psychological health problems, restructuring processes often have a negative impact on workers' well-being.

Despite its significance, the aspect of work organisation is often overlooked in the debate on restructuring. Recommendations are usually concerned with the importance of providing relevant information, adopting good communication strategies, the significance of employee participation, establishing a clear vision and goal (Knutstad & Skarholt, 2006; Wiezer et al., 2011). Recommendations of the social partners at the European level calling for transparency, good-quality communication, and information and consultation go in the same direction. The above analysis, however, makes clear that social partners need to consider aspects of work organisation in the discussion on alleviating negative consequences of restructuring on the well-being of employees. Work organisation must be considered as an effective tool in 'reflective restructuring' (EMCC) and 'high quality change management' (Saksvik *et al.*, 2007). While we know that 'active jobs' in general are beneficial to employees mental health, such jobs are especially needed in the case of restructuring as restructuring has overwhelming negative implications on psychological well-being. Restructuring therefore calls for a work organisation resulting in 'active jobs'.

Precarious work on the Belgian labour market

In the final chapter of this volume, Christophe Vanroelen, Vanessa Puig-Barrachina, Kim Bosmans and Hans De Witte used the EWCS data to estimate the prevalence of precarious work on the Belgian labour market. Separate indicators on employment (in)stability, income (un)sustainability, (limited) employability opportunities, intensive working times, flexible working times, (the absence of) formal bargaining relations and (the absence of) informal bargaining were constructed. These eight indicators serve the analysis in this chapter on the prevalence of precarious work on the Belgian labour market.

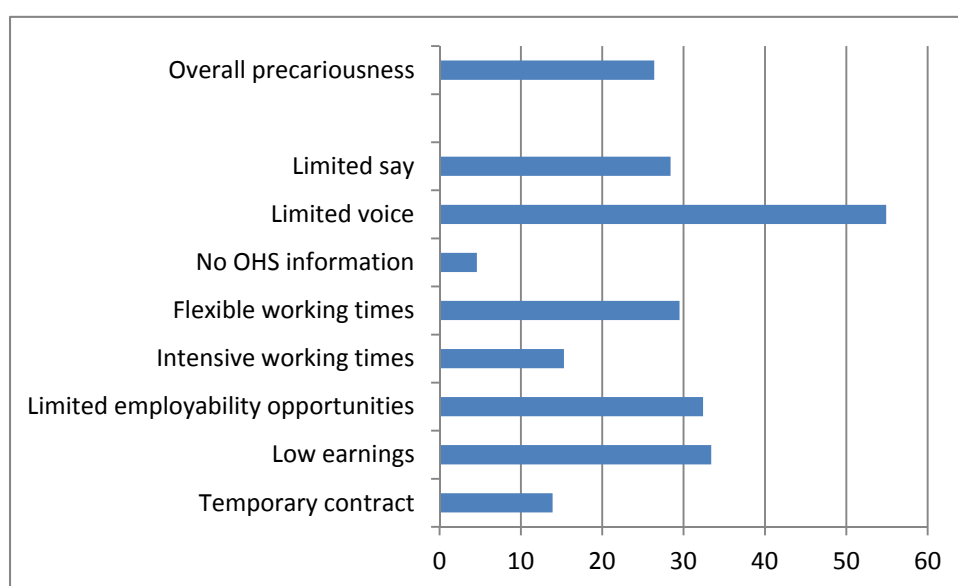


Figure 7 Prevalence of the precariousness items and overall precariousness at the population level

In figure 7, the prevalence of the different dimensions of precarious employment in this sample of Belgian workers is reported. The results need to be interpreted as percentages. That is to say, for example, 13.9% of the Belgian workers is employed with a temporary contract. About 55% of the respondents reports having only limited voice (54.9%) at their work. The prevalence of limited say is 28.4%. One third of the Belgian workers have rather limited employability opportunities (32.4%), the same holds for work in some kind of flexible working times regime (29.5%). The amount of people that does not receive information on occupational health and safety issues is rather limited (4.6%). The mean score for overall precariousness is 26.4.

Like job quality in general, precariousness is not equally distributed on the labour market. A pro-low socioeconomic position distribution of precarious employment is shown. In general, women, younger workers, less educated or qualified workers, as well as workers from micro and small organisations and those from agricul-

tural, service and elementary occupations have higher scores on the overall precariousness indicator.

The dimensions of precarious employment show a limited number of associations with health outcomes, indicators of well-being, job insecurity and job satisfaction. Psychological health is related to temporary employment and intensive working times; job insecurity shows a strong relation with the type of contract, but also with employability possibilities and low earnings. Job satisfaction is related with 5 of the 8 precarious employment indicators.

Employment arrangements have considerably changed. Non-standard employment is increasing all over the world and Belgium is not an exception. In addition, it is possible that the European economic crisis worsens the situation, placing more and more workers in a vulnerable bargaining situation regarding their employment conditions. This makes it all the more useful to overcome conceptual and measurement problems regarding precarious employment, in order to be able to better monitor employment situations over time. Although this study only shows some first empirical results on an alternative approach to investigate employment conditions and relations in a broader way than before, it suggests that the effects of degrading employment should be taken seriously from a worker well-being and labour market dualisation perspective. The results point at the necessity to develop policy strategies in order to counter the degrading of employment conditions and the rising contractual insecurity, to enhance worker participation and to promote training and skill enrichment opportunities. This should be done with special attention to vulnerable groups in the labour market, such as young, female and immigrant workers, as well as workers at 'the bottom of the labour market'.