

Precarious Work & Mental Health Outcomes

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Context

- Non-standard & precarious work was increasing in many EU countries before the pandemic
- So too was mild to moderate mental illness
- Over 38 per cent of EU citizens have depression & anxiety – many of working age
- Only 25 per cent of them receive any treatment
- Direct & indirect costs of mental illness across Europe is over €460bn – or 3.4 per cent of GDP
- But are changes in employment arrangements exacerbating the mental health crisis? Are there different levels of mental health risk? Impact of COVID-19 & jobs recovery?

Precarious work & mental health

- Is any job a 'good' job?
- Is there a gradient of 'precarity' which exacerbates mental health problems?
- How have workers coped during COVID19?
- What are the post-COVID messages for employers & policymakers?

Is Any Job a 'Good' Job?

- Being out of work is bad for income, self-esteem, dignity, social inclusion, relationships and health
- Being in even poor quality work which is boring, routine or represents under-employment is widely regarded as a good way for the workless to remain connected to the labour market and to keep the work 'habit' – the 'jobs first' policy
- BUT...poor psychosocial job quality is damaging

A Message from HILDA

- Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey
- Analysis (Butterworth et al, 2011) of seven waves of data from 7,155 respondents of working age (44,019 observations) from a national household panel survey.
- Longitudinal regression models evaluated the concurrent and prospective association between employment circumstances (unemployment and employment in jobs varying in psychosocial job quality) and mental health, assessed by the MHI-5

Psychosocial Job Quality (1)



- 1. My job is more stressful than I ever imagined
- 7. My job is complex and difficult
- 8. My job requires learning new skills
- 9. I use my skills in current job



- 10. I have freedom to decide how I do work
- 11. I have a lot of say about what happens
- 12. I have freedom to decide when I do work



- 4. I have a secure future in my job
- 5. Company I work for will be in business in 5yrs
- 6. I worry about the future of my job



- 3. I get paid fairly for the things I do in my job

Psychosocial Job Quality (2)

*“As hypothesised, we found that those respondents who were unemployed had significantly poorer mental health than those who were employed. However, the mental health of those who were unemployed was comparable or **more often superior** to those in jobs of the poorest psychosocial quality.”*

[These results have now been replicated in the UK]

A gradient in 'precarity' & mental health?

Data and methodology*

- Individual-level data » 6th wave EWCS
- Country-level data » Eurostat and the World Bank
- Sample: » EU28 » employees (NB not 'gig' workers)
- Aged between 18 – 65 years
- n= 27,000

* Analysis by J Vanderleyden

Typology of employment arrangements

‘Standard Employment Relationship’ (SER) 35%

High levels of employment & income stability, predictable working hours & work schedules, regularity of working time, access to training opportunities & a voice on issues such as safety, & access to consultation on workplace issues

‘Instrumental’ 21%

Despite having moderately high levels of stability & predictability, they had little or no access to workplace consultation or representation

‘Portfolio’ work 12%

Combines high amounts of stability & control with excessive & unpredictable working hours

‘Precarious Unsustainable’ 20%

Employment status was considerably less stable & predictable, they had little access to representation or training, though could have access to additional pay if their hours increased

‘Precarious Intensive’ 12%

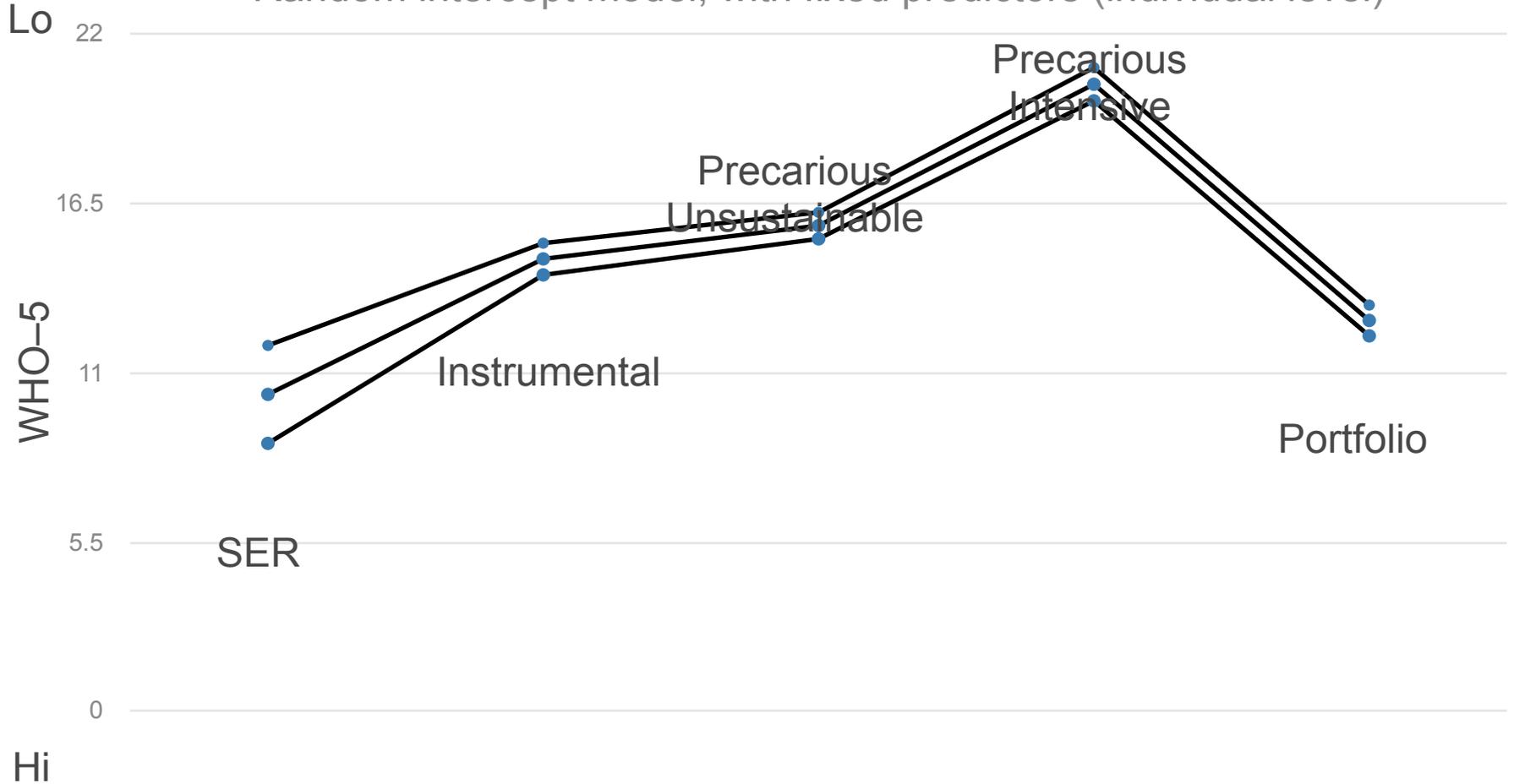
Included workers whose jobs had high levels of instability & unpredictability of hours, with little control in the hands of the employee in terms of working schedule, and where extra work often went unpaid

Results – SER 35%

Results – Precarious intensive 12%

Results – Job Type & WHO5 Score

Random intercept model, with fixed predictors (individual level)



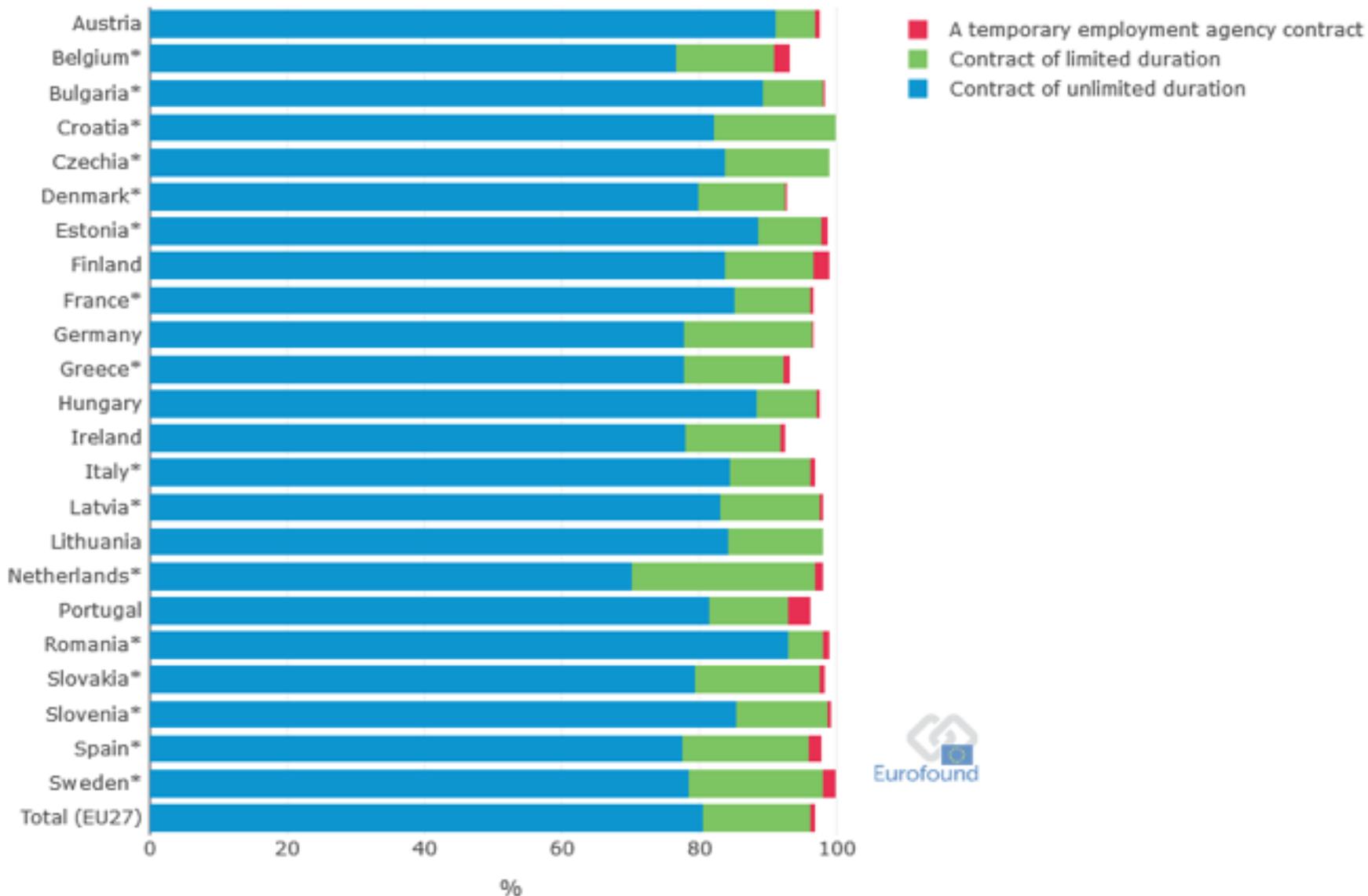
Note: controlled for sex, age, occupational class, educational level, size of organisation, economic sector, work intensity, ergonomic demands, job autonomy and cognitive demands

Reflections

- Significant associations between mental wellbeing and employment arrangements in the job typology – even controlling for confounding factors
- The association is not uniform between countries – the effects are not fixed
- Scope to influence & mitigate these effects through policy choices

Eurofound Survey: Working During Covid-19

Contract Type (n=22,000)



Job insecurity across the EU

- Job insecurity fell from 15% in April to 10% in July '20, however concerns remain widespread for respondents on fixed and short-term contracts
- Over 40% of men aged 34–49 years on temporary contracts fear they may lose their job in the next three months
- Despite an overall increase in people's working hours, a third of respondents still report working less than before the pandemic
- Well over half of unemployed respondents did not receive any official financial support since the outbreak of COVID-19, forcing many to rely heavily on informal support

Implications

- Job quality, job demands, control, task discretion, decision latitude all matter...
- ...but so too do choices about labour market regulation, coordination, social dialogue & enforcement...
- ...and some forms of non-standard employment can be beneficial for mental wellbeing
- Both policy makers & employers need to take a more informed & nuanced approach to ensure that mental wellbeing is not the first victim of a shift towards greater precariousness
- Especially important if post-COVID-19 job growth is to be characterised by employers shifting 'risk' to employees and 'gig' workers

Thank You for Your Attention

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