

The quality of employment (trajectories) and the mental health and mortality of women and men. Evidence from Belgium and the UK

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Abstract

Increasing attention is now paid to the quality of jobs and employment as work-related health determinants. Employment precariousness has been linked to adverse health outcomes, and could contribute to the reproduction of health inequalities. However, individuals' relation to the labour market should be rather understood in terms of 'careers' than as 'jobs' at discrete moments in time. Careers, or employment trajectories, are dynamic, and can involve multiple jobs, spells of employment over time, and for those in more 'precarious' trajectories, can result in an accumulation of employment-related risk factors for health and wellbeing, with possible gender differences. More longitudinal studies are therefore needed to situate low employment quality and employment precariousness within men's and women's working lives, and in relation to their mental health and mortality over a longer follow-up period.

Against this backdrop, this PhD thesis examines the links between the quality of employment (trajectories) and the mortality and mental health outcomes of women and men in Belgium and the United Kingdom (UK). The thesis is composed of four empirical papers and draws on secondary administrative and survey datasets: the 2001 Belgian census linked to a mortality follow-up, social security data derived from the Belgian Crossroads Bank for Social Security, and the UK Household Longitudinal Study (Understanding Society). The papers apply a variety of quantitative statistical techniques, including Multichannel Sequence Analysis and Latent Class Analysis, to derive types of employment arrangements and trajectories in multiple dimensions, as well as

survival and regression analyses, to investigate associated mortality and mental health outcomes.

Overall, findings from this thesis underline the importance of the quality of employment as work-related mortality and mental health determinants in both the UK and Belgium. The thesis highlights the urgent need to consider not only the quality of employment, but the quality of employment trajectories from a mental health perspective. Women's and men's quality of employment and their labour market paths can differ quite significantly, as can the mortality and mental health implications of their employment situation. Finally, in the UK, low employment quality is shown to be associated with reduced mental wellbeing more so than with mental ill-health. This points to the importance of considering multiple dimensions of mental health. Overall, policies wishing to alleviate labour market and health inequalities should improve the quality of employment of those in the most precarious jobs on a sustainable basis.