

Subjective insecurity and the role of institutions

This paper has been published as

Chung, H. and Mau, S. (2014) [Subjective insecurity and the role of institutions](#). *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24 (4): 303-318

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Abstract

The issue of social insecurity is high on the public and scientific agenda. However, most research looks at objective forms of insecurity like growing labour market volatilities or atypical employment. Less has been done with regard to the way people perceive these changes and the role of institutions therein. While recent studies have highlighted the relatively weak role of institutions in explaining different levels of subjective insecurity, they were limited in their understanding in the institutions-security interplay. This special issue aims to understand how institutions generate and moderate the outcomes of subjective insecurity, as well as to overcome some of the methodological limitations of previous studies. The introduction provides a state of the art literature review and unfolds the research question addressed in the special issue. It concludes with some thoughts for future research in the field of social insecurity and institutions.

Keywords: employment insecurity, subjective insecurity, institutions, theoretical framework, literature review, introduction

1. Introduction

The issue of social insecurity is high on the public and scientific agenda. In a programmatic statement the former President of the American Sociological Association (Kalleberg, 2009: 16) emphasized that: ‘[S]ociologists today have a tremendous opportunity to help shape public policy by explaining how broad institutional and cultural factors generate insecurity and inequality. Such explanations are an essential first step toward framing effective policies to tackle the causes and consequences of precarity and to rebuild the social contract.’ This

special issue of the Journal of European Social Policy on employment insecurity and the role of institutions is devoted to this mission. However, it assumes a specific perspective by looking at individual perceptions and evaluations of social conditions, operationalized here as subjective employment insecurity.

In the current literature, we find an increased emphasis on new forms of insecurities and market volatilities generated by processes of globalization, skill-based technological changes, increased flexibility, changes and the restructuring of the welfare state, and the dualization of the labour market into well-protected insiders and precarious outsiders (Blossfeld et al., 2011; Brady et al., 2007; Emmenegger et al., 2012; Rueda, 2007; Scheve and Slaughter, 2004; Standing, 2011). Many scholars emphasize the structural increase in levels of unemployment and long-term unemployment (Blanchard, 2006; Nickell et al., 2005), while others focus on the growth in atypical employment patterns and increasing instability of existing jobs across countries (Auer and Cazes, 2000; Kalleberg, 2000; Standing, 2011). Some researchers argue that this is mostly due to changing institutional settings or institutional rigidities stemming from employment protection legislation, wage bargaining structures and benefit systems etc. (Blanchard and Wolfers, 2000; Lindbeck and Snower, 1986; OECD, 1994). Others attribute the instability to technological changes, the decline of the manufacturing sector (Goos et al., 2009; Wright and Dwyer, 2003) or processes of globalisation (Scheve and Slaughter, 2004).

While much has been said about structural changes in the labour market and the reconstruction of the welfare state, less is known about how this affects feelings of security. For the interventionist state the concept of social security is paramount: a range of policy instruments and legal regulations aimed at protecting employees, stabilizing incomes or compensating for losses of income are supposed to counter feelings of insecurity. Moreover, the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy interventions rely on the way they are perceived by individuals, be it workers contributing to insurance schemes or beneficiaries of welfare transfers. Policy makers and social scientists alike often assume that providing employment, regulating the labour market or offering social security translate directly into feelings of security, and thus enhance people's subjective well-being (see next section regarding the literature on this issue). However, this is not necessarily the case. Whether certain policies generate subjective feelings of security is conditional upon a number of institutional and contextual factors. We can assume that some general features like institutional stability over time, high visibility of the social protection measures, transparency and institutional trust are

key aspects of the generation of subjective security (Braun, 1978; Mau et al., 2012). However, much of it will also depend on the type of intervention, the programmatic structures of labour market protection, the architecture of social security schemes and a number of related contextual factors (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Chung and van Oorschot, 2011).

Moreover, some recent studies conclude that when economic and labour market conditions are taken into account, institutions and policies do not explain levels of subjective insecurity very well (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Erlinghagen, 2008; Mau et al., 2012; van Oorschot and Chung, 2014). We suspect that this has partly to do with the way institutions are examined and the conceptual framing of their role in explaining subjective insecurity. As we will show in this special issue, a coupling between institutions and subjective insecurity does not only exist, it is manifold and complex. Thus, we must move away from a one-dimensional understanding of the relationship where institutions are expected to reduce feelings of insecurity uniformly for the entire population. Institutions influence different groups of the labour market in different ways, often rather with long-lasting effects and not measurable cross-sectionally. Moreover, institutions may not reduce the level of insecurity per se but may play a role in moderating the negative outcomes of insecurity, for example the effect on one's well-being. In addition, the changes in policies may be more important than just current levels. Lastly, subjective insecurity may fuel welfare state support. Against this background, this special issue aims to provide a new framework in understanding the relationship between institutions and subjective insecurity as well as to provide empirical evidence for the different linkages.

In the next section we offer an overview of the concept of subjective insecurity and the state of art in the literature on the relationship between subjective insecurity and institutions. The third section will outline the major limitations of previous studies and provide the framework and key questions addressed in this special issue. This section will also spell out the main outcomes of each article included in this issue. The fourth, final section will summarize the contributions of this special issue and offer some thoughts for future research in this field.

2. Subjective Insecurity as Research Topic in Welfare State Research

2.1 Discussing social insecurity: Bringing in the subjective dimension

In this special issue we are interested in subjective insecurity, rather than objective insecurity which is a topic that has been the focus of attention in many studies. It is a widely accepted notion by social scientists that objective and subjective dimensions of insecurity build on the one another. For example, Hacker (2006: 20) defines economic insecurity as a ‘psychological response to the possibility of hardship-causing economic loss. (...) Insecurity requires real risk that threatens real hardship.’ Here, it is as evident that the state of objective security is closely coupled with what people feel and experience, i.e. insecurity does not only exist as an objective state, but that it finds repercussions in the eye of the beholder. Whether a social situation or condition is viewed as insecure or risky is dependent on individual’s perceptions of such situations and their experience and capabilities in coping with insecurities. Insecurity, then, involves more than a simple reaction to an objective state of affairs:

‘It is not easy to give a precise meaning to the term economic insecurity. Partly because it often draws on comparisons with past experiences and practices, which have a tendency to be viewed through rose-tinted lenses, and also because security has a large subjective or psychological component linked to feelings of anxiety and safety, which draw heavily on personal circumstances. Still, in general terms, economic insecurity arises from the exposure of individuals, communities and countries to adverse events, and from their inability to cope with and recover from the costly consequences of those events.’ (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2008: vi)

There is evidence to show that subjective job insecurity is important on its own right, and perhaps even more relevant for policy. As we will show in the next section, high levels of subjective job insecurity are associated with low levels of well-being not only for the individual but also for their family, which may have implications for the companies the individuals work in as well as society as a whole (see section 2.2). Interestingly, it has also been demonstrated that workers’ perception of future unemployment is a strong predictor for unemployment occurring in the subsequent year (Green, 2009; Green et al., 2001). Due to their contextual knowledge about their situations, individuals are better able to make judgments about future unemployment than predictions based on objective measures related to skills, sector or economic cycles (Campbell et al., 2007; Stephens Jr, 2004).

As used in the literature, subjective job insecurity is a multi-dimensional concept. The most basic distinction is made between cognitive and affective job security (Anderson and

Pontusson, 2007; Ashford et al., 1989; Näswall and De Witte, 2003). Cognitive job security refers to the individual's estimate of how secure their job is, or the probability that they will lose their job in the near future. Affective job security refers to the fear, worry or anxiety an individual feels about losing their job. A third concept adopted in the literature on job insecurity is 'labour market security', which measures the individual's perception of how easy it will be to find another job with more or less equivalent characteristics as the one they have at the moment (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007: 214-215). Of these three dimensions, the most commonly used concept in previous studies is cognitive job insecurity (e.g. Böckerman, 2004; Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009; Erlinghagen, 2008; OECD, 2004; Pacelli et al., 2008), though some studies (e.g. Anderson and Pontusson, 2007) use all three concepts. However, as we will show later, relying exclusively on the concept of cognitive job insecurity is problematic in that it fails to capture the risks associated with a job loss as it neglects those who re-enter into the labour market quickly (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011). This special issue will thus focus on employment insecurity as the measure that most precisely captures the social risks associated with the labour market status. This concept measures the subjective perception of the likelihood of job loss and the perceived difficulty of finding another job relatively easy, and thus combines cognitive job security with subjective labour market prospects.

2.2 State of research on subjective job insecurity and the role of institutions

There is a growing body of literature dealing with subjective insecurity either as a dependent or an independent variable. Here we can distinguish three types of scholarly approaches. The first looks at individual antecedents of subjective insecurity, the second at institutional and contextual characteristics explaining cross-national differences in levels of subjective insecurity, and the third at individual and societal outcomes of subjective insecurity. This section will introduce the major themes and pertinent findings related to these approaches from the fields of sociology, political science and social psychology.

Figure 1 about here...

Individual and Workplace Characteristics as Correlates of Subjective Insecurity (a)

We have clear evidence that subjective feelings of insecurity are not random, but that they are coupled with the objective risk exposure of individuals (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009; Erlinghagen, 2008; Näswall and De Witte, 2003; Sverke et al., 2000). For example, the type of employment contract – often used as a measure of objective

security – influences individual's feelings of insecurity (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011). Due to the nature of their contract, fixed-term contract holders are more likely to feel insecure about their position than those with permanent contracts. Temporary workers might not be as strongly attached to the organisation as permanent workers, and may also be more at risk of losing their jobs during reorganisations. For part-time workers it is often argued that they are more likely to be insecure because they are not in the core of the organisation and may be the first to be downsized during turbulent times (Näswall and De Witte, 2003).

Other employment characteristics such as union membership, economic sector or company size have also been shown to predict subjective job insecurity levels. Unions provide voice and support for employees (Hartley et al., 1991; Näswall and De Witte, 2003; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002), and offer protection against unfair dismissal, which may raise the cost of firing workers (Green et al., 2000: 871). Thus being a union member has been shown to reduce feelings of insecurity for workers although it is possible that insecure workers select themselves into becoming union members as well (Chung and van Oorschot, 2010). Those in public sectors and large companies have also been shown to be less insecure about their employment (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Erlinghagen, 2008) because these employers or companies are less likely to be impacted by cyclical changes in the market.

Looking at socio-economic determinants of subjective insecurities, social class is usually considered as one main factor structuring exposure to social risk. Following Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992: 236), social classes stand for specific 'experiences of affluence or hardship, of economic security or insecurity, of prospects of continuing material advance, or of unyielding material constraints.' Indeed, there is ample evidence that there are striking class cleavages regarding perceptions of insecurity (Mau et al., 2012). We also know from the literature that there are gender differences with regard to subjective labour market insecurity which are related to the (more precarious) labour market status of women (e.g. Burgoon and Dekker, 2010; Green, 2009). Age has been found to be correlated with subjective insecurities (Erlinghagen, 2008; Green, 2009), though some authors underline that this relationship is not necessarily linear in that middle-career persons can feel higher levels of insecurity than other age groups (Fullerton and Wallace, 2007). Education seems to be a good predictor for subjective insecurity as it is a proxy for individual levels of human capital and, concomitantly, chances of employment and reemployment (Green, 2009; Näswall and De Witte, 2003; Postel-Vinay and Turon, 2005). Migrant status and poor health of individuals

have been shown to negatively influence one's job insecurity perceptions (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Chung and van Oorschot, 2010; Erlinghagen, 2008). Lastly, family structures – existence of children in the household for example - and partner's employment status have also been shown to impact individual's perception of insecurity due to the significance of job loss for the family's livelihood (Chung and van Oorschot, 2010; Erlinghagen, 2008; Näswall and De Witte, 2003: 194).

The Role of Welfare Institutions and Labour Market Regulation (b)

Most interesting from the comparative welfare state and labour market research perspective is the interplay between institutions and patterns of insecurity. The issue of security is, of course, highly topical in comparative welfare state research. Within this field, the dominant understanding of security entails the security to sustain a livelihood outside of the labour market as noted in the concept of decommodification (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Hence, most studies thus far have focused on objective security aspects, as the risk of poverty and unemployment (e.g. Emmenegger, 2009; Hacker, 2006), rather than on subjective insecurity. However, researchers have become increasingly interested in the subjective side of security, dealing mainly with the link between societal macro-structures – including welfare state and labour market regulation, specific welfare programs and the like – with subjective job insecurity (e.g. Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Erlinghagen, 2008; Mau et al., 2011; van Oorschot and Chung, 2014).

Of the labour market institutions that are set up to provide security for individuals, the main focus of insecurity research has been on employment protection legislation (EPL), unemployment benefit (UB), and active labour market policies (ALMP). Stringent EPL makes it difficult for employers to fire workers, and is put in place to protect workers from (unfair) dismissal (OECD, 2004). This provides workers protection from the loss of job, directly influencing individuals' job insecurity. However, EPL has also been shown to hamper re-employment chances especially of certain, mainly weaker, groups in the labour market (Dolado and Jimeno, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 2000; Scarpetta, 1996). On the other hand, UB provide income protection for workers who have lost their jobs (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007). Generous UB also enable a better job fit for workers (Marimon and Zilibotti, 1999). EPL and UB have been considered to be, at least partly, functional equivalents. One provides security through job security (EPL) and the other through income

security (UB) (Standing, 1999). These policies have also been referred to as ‘communicating pipelines’, implying that if one type of labour market policy is underdeveloped the other may replace or offset it (Schmid, 1995: 57). ALMP increases the skill set of the unemployed – through training programmes – as well as assisting in job search activities (Blanchard, 2006; Nickell, 1997). This can increase re-employment opportunities for the unemployed – increasing labour market security – as well as decreasing lay off risks for the employed – increasing job security (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; van Oorschot and Chung, 2014). This then helps to increase employment security overall.

In addition to labour market and welfare state institutions, socio-economic conditions can influence subjective insecurity. High unemployment rates may indicate that there are large numbers of people being dismissed, and may thus increase individual’s risk perception that their job is not stable. It could also indicate harder competition in finding a new job once a person is unemployed (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Erlinghagen, 2008). Wealth of the country, measured as the GDP per capita, has also been shown to change feelings of insecurity for individuals, with more prosperous countries exhibiting lower levels of economic insecurity (Mau et al., 2012; van Oorschot and Chung, 2014). Moreover, changes in economic conditions have also been noted to be of importance when explaining perceived insecurity levels of individuals (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007). For example, economic growth rates may indicate general market trends that influence product demands for companies, and consequently alter individual’s perception of job loss risks (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011). Similarly changes in unemployment rates have also been shown to be relevant in explaining job insecurity levels (Anderson and Pontusson, 2007), although others have shown contrary results (Green et al., 2000).

Earlier studies have examined the influence of institutions on job insecurity mainly through aggregate data at the national level (Böckerman, 2004; OECD, 2004; Pacelli et al., 2008). However, these mostly bi-variate analyses do not take into account the different composition of populations across countries which can be an important factor in explaining cross-national variance (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011). Only recently have scholars been examining the relationship between national contexts and subjective job insecurity using multivariate multilevel models, where institutions are tested against other socio-economic contexts while controlling for population composition effects (e.g. Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009; Erlinghagen, 2008; Mau et al., 2012). The results of the studies are divided: Some argue that institutions, especially generous social

benefit schemes (measured through social expenditure as a percentage of GDP and unemployment benefit replacement rates) help explain the varying levels of job and employment insecurity across different countries (e.g. Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Blomberg et al., 2012). However, others come to the conclusion that institutions have a minimal impact when macro-economic and labour market contexts are taken into account (e.g. Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Erlinghagen, 2008; Mau et al., 2012; van Oorschot and Chung, 2014). As we will show in section 3 and throughout this special issue, this is largely due to the way we look at the relationship between institutions and insecurity.

The Effects and Outcomes of Job Insecurity (c)

Turning to the individual and societal outcomes and repercussions of subjective insecurities, there are three lines of research focusing on potential effects of subjective job insecurity. The first looks at individual well-being, the second at work commitment and motivation and the third at political attitudes. With regard to the first, many studies point out that subjective insecurity negatively influences the mental and physical health of individuals, thus having implications for their well-being in general (Ashford et al., 1989; Burchell, 2009; De Witte, 1999; Drobnič et al., 2010; Ferrie et al., 2005; Hellgren et al., 1999; Näswall and De Witte, 2003). The bottom line of these studies is that perceived unemployment risks are harmful to people's mental state as they increase stress, work strain and the feeling of loss of control. The effect of job insecurity, however, reaches far beyond individuals and affects family life too. For example, job insecurity has been found to increase the work-family conflict of individuals (Chung, 2011; Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998). Research also suggests that parenthood decisions for women are affected by job security, with higher educated women postponing parenthood when worried about job insecurity, while lower educated women tend to respond by becoming mothers (Kreyenfeld, 2010).

The second argument for taking subjective insecurity seriously relates to potential repercussion on issues like job motivation and commitment. Here it has been established that if people feel insecure about their future job security, they are more likely to exhibit low levels of organizational commitment, become more indifferent and cynical, and show lower professional efficacy (Hartley, 1998; Laba et al., 2005). Job insecurity has been shown to impact the job performance of individuals (Rosenblatt et al., 1999), to decrease job satisfaction (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2007; De Witte and Naswall, 2003), and to lead to

higher intentions to leave the job (Ashford et al., 1989; also see Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; Richter et al., 2013; Sverke et al., 2002). This link can be explained by the implicit (psychological) work contract where employees give their time, engagement and skills, and receive in return security, income and career prospects (Maslach et al., 2001). When individuals feel like their job is insecure, this might be seen as a violation of that contract. This can explain why the negative impact of job insecurity on job satisfaction has been found to be stronger for workers on permanent contracts (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2007).

Given that most of these studies have been from an organisational and psychological perspective they focus on the repercussions of subjective job insecurity for individual and organisational outcomes. However, there is a long-standing interest of political scientists in the way insecurity influences political behaviour and the political system (Marx, 2014; Mughan and Lacy, 2002; Rueda, 2005, 2006). Moreover, in line with the literature on the varieties of capitalism (VoC), there has been increased interest in linking insecurity and welfare state support. Iversen and Soskice (2001) have put forward an ‘asset based theory of social policy preferences’ arguing that national variation in policy preferences can be explained by national skill profiles which make one protection regime more beneficial than another. The argument here is that skill levels are linked to a certain risk exposure which, in turn, fuels demand for social protection. Along this line, some studies have examined how insecure positions in the labour market can change individual’s preferences for policy, such as unemployment benefits (Rehm, 2011; Rehm et al., 2012), though these studies rest their claims primarily on objective insecurity definitions.

However, there are initial studies, such as those by done by Hacker et al. (2013) and Blomberg et al. (2012), which look at the impact of subjective insecurity or subjective risk on policy preferences and the support for the welfare state. Their findings suggest that perceived risk is an equally important predictor of welfare state support as objectively defined risk categories (unemployment, sickness, belonging to an immigrant group, being transfer-dependent). Contrary to these highly intuitive findings, Dallinger (2013) doubts that subjective job insecurity drives up demand for social security as those still in employment are sceptical as they might fear that higher levels of social expenditure will trigger higher tax burdens. Finally, we know that subjective insecurity is closely associated with other welfare related attitudes such as welfare chauvinism, wherein the more people feel threatened in their social position the less willing they are to include immigrants into the welfare system (Mewes and Mau, 2012).

3. About the Special Issue: Addressing Gaps in the Literature

Despite the large number of studies that examine the relationship between institutions and job insecurity there are several gaps, some of which are substantive and others are more methodological. Partly, there is a problem in the way subjective job insecurity has been measured in previous studies as it fails to filter out people who are truly insecure. In addition, most previous studies use cross-sectional data to look at snapshots of one point in time disregarding the time dimension in the relationship between institutions and insecurity. We believe that changes in the context may influence subjective insecurity levels, and institutions may influence subjective insecurity levels mid- and long-term. We also suggest that welfare states may moderate the impact insecurity has on individuals' well-being and support for the welfare state. Further, rather than institutions impacting insecurity, the relationship may be the other way around, where insecurity can potentially have an impact on the sustainability of the welfare state by changing individual's support for certain policies. Lastly, welfare state institutions may protect different groups within the labour market to different degrees. These different issues are dealt with by the contributions to the special issue and are summarized in this section.

Figure 2 about here...

Operationalising subjective insecurity

One of the major issues in the current literature on subjective job insecurity is the problem of how subjective job insecurity is operationalised and conceptualised. As already mentioned, of the various definitions of subjective job insecurity, cognitive job insecurity is the most commonly used and there are two major ways in which it is measured. First, it is through the statement 'my job is secure', where respondents are asked to answer in five- (or sometimes four-)point scale of 'Strongly agree' 'Agree' 'Neither agree nor disagree' 'Disagree' to 'Strongly disagree'. Second, it is measured through asking respondents about their perceived likelihood of losing their job in the near future, which is usually defined as 6 months or 12 months. Although these two approaches may theoretically be related to the same concept they evidently yield very different responses. In the former case, the question is posed in a more abstract manner – giving respondents more room for interpretation of what security entails. The question asking the probability of losing one's job in a specific period of time has a more

limited range of possible interpretations and presupposes a more specific idea of job risk. This difference in the operationalization of job insecurity could potentially be the cause of the variation in the results of the previous studies.

A bigger problem with the cognitive job insecurity measurement is that it may fail to exclusively capture those people who are truly insecure. Not all individuals who have jobs that are not long-lasting go through a long and personally burdensome period of unemployment, as some find a new position soon after. However, using the job insecurity concept, these people are also considered to be insecure though their likelihood to find a new job might be high. Thus, given the interest in job insecurity has to do with the negative consequences of being out of employment, cognitive job insecurity may not be the best way to capture these insecurities. Against this background, Chung and van Oorschot (2011) propose the concept of ‘cognitive employment insecurity’ which combines cognitive job insecurity with labour market insecurity. Within this concept individuals must perceive that they will lose their job, and not be able to find another one relatively easily. Only individuals who are likely to experience a significant duration of unemployment are considered insecure. Four of the five articles in this special issue apply the concept employment insecurity. Paskov and Koster use the variable from the 4th wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) which measures employment insecurity in one variable, asking ‘How likely it is that during the next 12 months you will be unemployed and looking for work for at least four consecutive weeks?’ Carr and Chung combine the job insecurity (‘My job is secure’) and labour market insecurity variables (‘How difficult or easy would it be for you to get a similar or better job with another employer, if you had to leave your current job?’) from the 5th wave of the ESS to construct a single employment insecurity variable. In their articles, Lübke and Erlinghagen, and Marx use the same two variables used by Carr and Chung but do not combine them, exploring each concept separately. Kohlrausch and Rasner define job insecurity as the extent to which one is concerned about one’s job insecurity – measured through the variable ‘What is your attitude towards the following areas ... Your job security?’ This measures affective job insecurity, the degree to which the respondent is concerned and anxious about their job insecurity.

Incorporating the time dimension (d)

The second issue addressed in this special issue is the fact that most studies dealing with job insecurity do not take into account the longitudinal perspective. The longitudinal aspect is of prime importance because for feelings of insecurity it matters what people are used to and at

which level they have accommodated themselves in. Changes of objective conditions and institutional contexts over time may be as important as absolute levels in understanding subjective insecurity. Yet most existing studies that deal with the relationship between institutions and job/employment insecurity have taken a static cross-sectional view in their analysis (e.g., Anderson and Pontusson, 2007; Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Erlinghagen, 2008; Mau et al., 2012; van Oorschot and Chung, 2014). The very few exceptions to this are the two studies that use the ECHP data set (Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009; Postel-Vinay and Saint-Martin, 2004). However, even these studies only examine how the current state of institutions influence direct short-term job insecurity changes, and do not examine the influence of changes in institutions or their long-term impacts.

Lübke and Erlinghagen's, and Kohlrausch and Rasner's articles are among the first to overcome this limitation. Lübke and Erlinghagen look at how changes in contexts – i.e. changes in institutions, labour market and economic conditions – influence how individuals perceive their likelihood of job loss and reemployment. Here, changes in context over the short-term (yearly), mid-term (in three and five years) and long-term (over the decade) are distinguished. This is done using the ESS for the years 2004 and 2010 for 19 European countries. They find that in addition to the current economic and labour market condition, changes in these climates also impact feelings of insecurity among individuals. Perceived difficulties in finding a job seems to be more influenced by long term economic and labour market trends, while likelihood of job loss is more sensitive to short-term changes.

Interestingly, short-term increases in ALMP levels reduce cognitive job insecurity, but increase labour market insecurity. They also find varying impact across different groups: disadvantaged groups more sensitive towards short term trends.

Whereas Lübke and Erlinghagen's article takes a longitudinal approach to the relevance of changing contexts, Kohlrausch and Rasner's article focusses on the time dimension for insecurity outcomes, examining the short, mid and long-term impact of training on affective job insecurity. Previous studies were only able to examine the direct short-term impact of institutions on job insecurity. However, training has been shown to have a stabilizing long-term effect on employment trajectories and is thus expected to have similar implications for job security perceptions. This was tested using the German Socio-economic Panel (GSOEP) data from 2000 to 2012, an interesting and dynamic period for Germany in terms of changes in benefit schemes and labour market conditions. The results show that training affects both short-term and long-term affective job security of workers – i.e. how concerned an individual is about their job security. In other words, participation in training not only decreases concern

about job insecurity right away, but also has a stabilizing impact on security perception. This relationship is consistent even when controlling for regional unemployment rates. What is more, the long-term stabilizing impact of training seems to be stronger for those with lower education levels – the outsiders of the labour market. Lastly, they show that additional training increases feelings of security as well.

Impact of insecurity on welfare states support, the feedback mechanism (e)

The third point that needs further exploration is how subjective insecurity feeds back into welfare state support, a topic under investigated. The contributions by Marx, and Paskov and Koster examine how employment insecurity changes the support for the welfare state. Marx's article examines the impact of job insecurity on social policy preference (for government led redistribution) and the moderating role of employability (labour market insecurity) in this relationship. His assumption is that the impact of insecurity on support for redistribution depends on individuals' perceived labour market potential. In addition, he aims to disentangling the role of political attitudes in this relationship, thus looking at whether individual perceptions are more informed by ideological mind-set or subjective insecurity. Using data from the ESS 2010 for 11 Western European countries, he finds that insecure individuals do support redistribution more. However, this effect is conditional upon subjective future employment prospects/employability and that the effect of pro-redistributive welfare attitudes is strongest for those without employability. On the other hand, for those with very high employability, cognitive job insecurity is negligible in determining support for redistribution. He also makes a robustness check to test whether this result is largely driven by reverse causation and to test the influence of individual's political attitudes in this relationship. For example, those who are left-leaning and more pro-welfare might be more afraid of unemployment. Marx's contribution adopts an empirical strategy to deal with this problem by splitting the sample between those respondents with a strong party identification and ideological position, and those who are less committed to one specific political camp. He shows that the findings are robust for both groups, evincing that neither partisanship nor ideology engender a problematic bias. Job insecurity has an independent effect on welfare attitudes regardless of ideological positions.

Paskov and Koster contribute to the existing literature on insecurity and welfare state support by examining how institutions moderate the impact feelings of insecurity have on the support for the welfare state. Previous literature shows how subjective insecurity can influence one's

preference towards unemployment benefits (Blomberg et al., 2012). However, it is unclear how current institutional settings influence insecure workers' support for unemployment benefit compared to that of secure workers. This is tested through the use of a multilevel random slopes model and the ESS 2008/9 data set for 26 countries. The authors find that in countries with more employment protection for workers with temporary contracts, both secure and insecure workers are more supportive of unemployment benefits. Furthermore, their attitudes converge. Also generous unemployment benefits bring the attitudes of the secure and insecure closer together by increasing the support for unemployment benefits of secure workers while decreasing that of insecure workers.

The moderating role of welfare state institutions on the consequences of job insecurity (f)

Fourth, institutions may also moderate the negative consequences that come from feeling insecure. As already mentioned, many studies provide evidence on how feelings of insecurity impact the well-being of the individual as well as their family and the organisation they work in. However, we still do not know whether different welfare institutions could moderate these negative outcomes of subjective insecurity, even if they may not reduce insecurity in itself. For certain institutions, the main purpose is not to reduce insecurity but to reduce its consequences. For example, unemployment benefit schemes (and somewhat active labour market policies) may be helpful in reducing the level of insecurity but are mostly put in place to buffer the repercussions of job loss for individuals. Thus it is important to examine the moderating role of institutions in reducing the negative impact feelings of insecurity have on individual's well-being. This is the topic of the article by Carr and Chung in this edition. Using the job dependency theory of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), they argue that the negative consequences of employment insecurity on life satisfaction largely depend on the ability to find another job, as well as individuals' access to alternative income. Given the role of UB and ALMP schemes to facilitate such support, they predict that countries with generous UB and ALMP are those where insecurity will not have a strong negative influence on life satisfaction. This is tested by applying a multilevel structural equation modelling framework using the ESS 2010 covering 22 European countries. They find that in countries where labour market policies are not very generous, the negative influence of subjective employment insecurity on life-satisfaction is the strongest. Thus, UB and ALMP moderate the negative consequences of employment insecurity on life satisfaction by providing support for income maintenance and enhancing employability after job loss. In addition, individuals

in different segments of the labour market seem to be protected to different degrees. This confirms that institutions designed to reduce the consequences of adverse risks do reduce the negative consequences of job loss on well-being, especially for the most disadvantaged in the market.

Varying impact of institutions on different segments of the labour market – relationship (g)

Lastly, we need to examine the varying impact of institutions on different segments of the labour market. The vast majority of the previous studies that examine the impact of institutions on individuals' perceived job insecurity presuppose that institutions have a uniform or similar impact on different groups in the labour market. However, we know from other strands of literature that institutions are not necessarily effective in securing all workers or the entire population. In light of labour market segmentation and dualisation theories (e.g. Emmenegger et al., 2012; Lindbeck and Snower, 1989; Reich et al., 1973), it can be suggested that institutional arrangements work differently for different groups of people and this may also cause differences in perceived insecurity. Thus, it is important to distinguish the influence of institutions on different labour market segments, e.g. separating the core labour force from more disadvantaged groups. The two previous studies that do test the impact of institutions across different groups show that institutions protect workers from public and private sector differently (Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009) and have a different impact on different social classes (Mau et al., 2012).

In this special issue, Kohlrausch and Rasner examine the impact of training on job insecurity by distinguishing different educational levels. They find that training seems to have a stronger additional value in increasing the feelings of security of the lower educated group and this group seems to enjoy a more lasting effect of training. This result emphasizes the importance of training and other related measures in enhancing perceived insecurity, especially for the more disadvantaged groups of the labour market. Lübke and Erlinghagen scrutinize how changes in institutions and economic/labour market conditions impact job insecurity and job search difficulties of individuals by looking at labour market segments differentiated by contract type, age group and educational level. They find that the disadvantaged in the labour market are much more sensitive towards both shorter and longer term labour market trends. Those with higher levels of education are not as affected by economic trends compared to others due to their relatively high employability, affording

greater insulation from general market trends. Finally, Carr and Chung examine how labour market institutions have different protective mechanisms towards different segments of the labour market when moderating the negative consequence of insecurity. They find that older workers, those in temporary contracts, and workers in manufacturing sectors are the ones who benefit most from protective policies. As such, the results of previous studies, where institutions had a minimal role in explaining insecurity levels, may have been adversely influenced by a focus on the institutional influence across the general population. Only when we divide the labour market into different segments are able to detect more striking effects of policies.

4. Further thoughts

The objective of this special issue is to advance our understanding of the relationship between welfare state interventions and subjective insecurity. Against the background of the still limited knowledge about the interplay between institutional settings on the one hand and people's feelings of insecurity on the other, this issue seeks to shed light on the determinants and repercussions of social insecurity. In particular, the multi-faceted nature of this relationship is our key focus. As is shown by the articles of this issue, the role of welfare state institutions is not confined to determining the level of feelings of insecurity of individuals at a certain given point. Institutions moderate the negative outcomes of subjective insecurity on well-being and the support for the welfare state. Moreover, the impact institutions have on feelings of insecurity varies largely depending on the labour market groups in question. There is evidence to show that welfare state institutions are especially helpful for the more disadvantaged groups in the labour market – whether in reducing the feeling of job insecurity or in moderating the negative consequences stemming from that insecurity. The way we look at welfare state institutions also needs to be changed. It may not be just current policies that matter, but also the changes made in these policies that influence how secure or insecure individuals feel. The overall impact on insecurity also needs to be distinguished between the short-term, mid-term as well as long-term impacts. Lastly feelings of insecurity can be crucial in the sustainability of the welfare state. Subjective job insecurity, especially when coupled with lack of employability, weakens the support for the welfare state, even if one controls for the influence of partisan preferences. Thus long-term increase in the levels of insecurity may

have devastating results for the sustainability of the welfare state. As a bottom line, institutions do matter; there is clear evidence that feelings of insecurity, and the consequences thereof, are strongly influenced by the institutional set-up and, moreover, that insecurity matters for institutions.

There are some aspects of the relationship between welfare institutions and subjective insecurity that we remain unable to adequately address. One major issue is the relationship between institutions and other macro contexts. The institutions under investigation in this issue – mainly employment protection legislation, and active and passive labour market policies – are not isolated from other policy, socio-economic and macro contexts. When modelling the impact of institutions we run into problems with causality. Assessing the significance and impact of policies may depend on what is included in the model, raising issues of robustness. However, there remain limits to the number of macro context variables one can include as explanatory factors in multilevel models due to the number of countries included in the analysis (Meuleman and Billet, 2009; Stegmueller, 2013). Further problems arise as many policies are highly correlated yet theoretically different, making it difficult to disentangle the effects. On top of this, the combination of policies may be the actual factor that impacts subjective insecurity, this again is difficult to capture with quantitative approaches. Such issues are not restricted to the study of the relationship between institutions and subjective insecurity, but are relevant for all studies dealing with macro-institutions in a quantitative manner. Nevertheless, without addressing them it is difficult to draw confident and robust conclusions about the findings of the impact of institutions on individual perceptions.

Another point this special issue has not been able to fully overcome is how to incorporate a more dynamic perspective in the study of subjective insecurity. Although two studies have dealt with this problem, we still need more evidence to test how the changes in policies and institutions impact levels of subjective insecurity for individuals, especially in a comparative perspective. To do this, better comparative data including the issues of subjective insecurity needs to be developed. Even if direct panel data cannot be used due to data and cost restrictions, repeated modules covering large number of countries across several years could be useful to be used in a pseudo-panel setting (see Jæger, 2013). One could also think of synergies between our type of welfare state research and life course studies where one looks at employment biographies, linking these finding to their way of framing and understanding subjective insecurity. It is very likely that the ‘suffering’ due to perceived insecurities is closely tied to what people experience in the past and their way of overcoming similar social

situations. Though there is evidence that those with comparatively precarious jobs are also those who feel most insecure (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011; Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009; Erlinghagen, 2008; Näswall and De Witte, 2003; Sverke et al., 2000) there are also groups that might not seem to suffer from relatively higher levels of insecurity per se. According to individualization theory, for example, flexibilisation and insecurity may be imposed on people, but it may also be seen as an increase in choice (Beck, 1992). New professions in the creative industries or freelancers of various kinds might not prioritise stable and dependent employment but instead chose higher levels of flexibility as a new lifestyle and form of self-expression. Such kind of ‘voluntary insecurity’ might still be a marginal phenomenon, but it has the potential to challenge our normative understanding of the issue of security in the context of labour market and welfare state policies.

Through this introduction and the articles of this special issue we have tried to shed light on the importance of examining the subjective side of insecurity, as well as to some of the more innovative ways in looking at the complex relationship between subjective insecurity and institutions. Here we have only been able to provide a first step into this endeavour but hope that this will provide a guide for future researchers in the field of social policy to follow and further develop.

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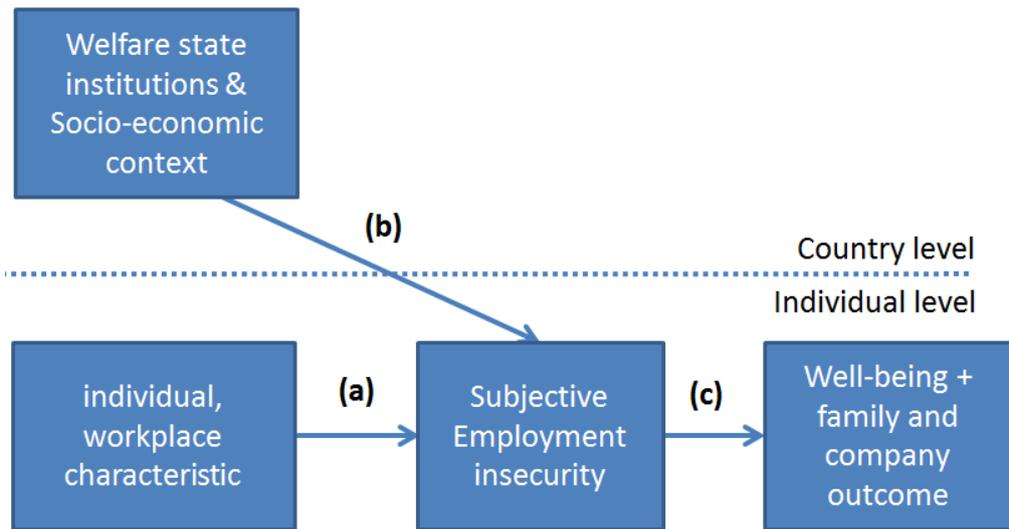


Figure 1. The existing studies on subjective insecurity

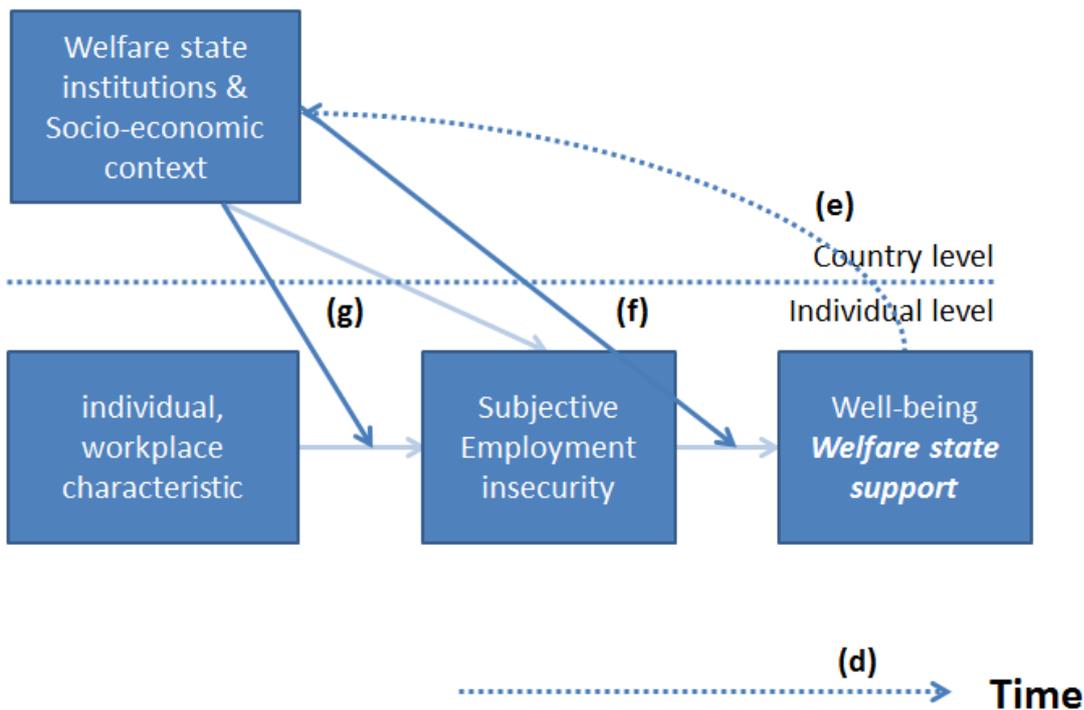


Figure 2. Gaps in the existing studies of impact of institutions on subjective insecurity