

EMPLOY State-of-the-art Report

Job Security

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With the soaring increase in unemployment rate in the 1980s and 1990s, job insecurity has caused major concerns. It has been found that physical and psychological illnesses occur at the stress-related consequences of feelings of insecurity (Ashford et al. 1989; Ferrie 2001; Nolan et al. 2000; Wichert 2002). The negative consequences of job insecurity are also extended to family lives. Furthermore, high level of uncertainty about employment future leads to lower levels of consumer expenditure and housing investment (Stephens 2004; Walker 2000). Apart from its effects on both micro individual and macro economic levels, at the meso level, it has been well documented that job insecurity has caused less incentive to invest in training, a decrease in workers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and hence a decline in companies' productivity and competitiveness (De Witte and Naswell 2003; Mankelov 2002; OECD 1997).

Considering the detrimental effects of job insecurity, in this state-of-the-art report, first, I shall attempt to illustrate the time trend of job insecurity in order to assess if there has been a secular rise. Second, I shall examine which groups of employees experience higher level of insecurity. Given the controversy over the reliability of the concept of perceived job insecurity in empirical research (Campbell et al. 2007; Green 2003; 2006; Green et al. 2001), I shall evaluate the objective nature or the concrete basis of the concept and see if it is a useful variable to predict the subsequent experience of unemployment. After assessing the reliability of this subjective indicator, based on the most recent findings, I shall present the effect of high fears of unemployment on individuals' wage growth. Next, I shall compare the differences in perceived job insecurity between countries. It should be noted that the present paper will mostly focus on the research findings in European countries, though results of other OECD countries will also be drawn, if appropriate.

Concept and Measures of Job Insecurity

Before summarizing and reviewing existing empirical literature on job insecurity, it is useful to provide both conceptual and operational definitions of job insecurity. Job insecurity is defined as a feeling or a state of uncertainty about future job continuity, characteristics, and rewards (Green 2003; 2006). There are a variety of measurements of job insecurity, which can be distinguished between objective and subjective indicators. While being in non-standard employment, level of layoff and dismissal, and length of job tenure are regarded as objective measures, expected risk of job loss and perception of overall job security are treated as subjective indicators. In this report, I shall focus on subjective perception of job insecurity. In surveys conducted in Britain, Germany, and the U.S., a typical question concerning the expected risk of job loss (hence job insecurity) is asked: “Do you think there is any chance at all of your losing your job and becoming unemployed in the next 12 months?” (Campbell 2007; Green et al. 2001).¹ Instead of specifically linking insecurity to expected chance of entering into unemployment, respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement “My job is secure.” in the International Social Survey Program 1989 and 1997, Eurobarometer Survey in 1996, and European Social Survey in 2004-5. Most of the summaries and discussion presented in the following will be drawn from the results of these subjective measures of job insecurity or security. As mentioned above, I will also establish the case of using subjective indicators in studying job insecurity by reviewing the results of empirical research on its reliability.

A Secular Rise of Job Insecurity? Tracking the Time Trend of Job Insecurity

Before illustrating the characteristics of individuals and countries which have been more susceptible to feeling of job insecurity, let me first examine the trend of perceived job insecurity over time. The overall picture is that insecurity increased since the 1980s (Green et al. 2001; OECD 1997). From the late 1990s onwards, it has been declining (Campbell et al. 2007; Green 2003; Maurin and Postel-Vinay 2004). In general, level of job insecurity has moved in accordance with the macroeconomic and labour market environment. No long-term secular trend can be observed.

¹ This question was asked in the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative Survey in 1986, Skills Surveys in 1997 and 2001. Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of its happening by choosing: No chance, Very or quite unlikely, Quite unlikely, Evens, Quite likely, or Very likely. Similar questions were posed to survey respondents in the U.S. and Germany.

We can trace the trend of the risk of job loss between the mid-1980s and 2001 in detail by summarizing four pieces of results. First, in the OECD report (1997), it has compared the proportion of workers who did not strongly agree that “My job is secure” in a few European countries between two time points of 1989 and 1996. While an increasing proportion of workers in Austria and Italy reported less insecurity, a decline was recorded in Ireland, the Netherlands, and the UK. Second, using data from the International Survey Research, it has been found that except Finland, a decreasing percentage of workers in all other OECD countries were satisfied with their job security from 1992 to 1996 (OECD 1997).² The sharpest fall was observed in Australia, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US (p. 135). In the pooled sample of the European Community Household Panel, perceived job security increased over the period between 1995 and 2001 (Maurin and Postel-Vinay 2004).

So far, I have shown that, on the one hand, there was an increase in fear of job loss from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s. On the other hand, level of subjective perception over job insecurity fell since the mid-1990s. As afore-mentioned, this time trend has reflected the cyclical fluctuations. Nevertheless, a closer inspection over the relationship between subjective perception of job insecurity and yearly unemployment rate reveals a more complicated picture. In all SCEDI 1986 and Skills Surveys 1997 and 2001, a same question about fear of job loss was asked. Comparing the results of 1986 and 1997, Green et al. (2000; 2001) have found that in spite of a fall in aggregate unemployment in Britain in the mid 1990s, there was no significant difference between the perceived risks of job loss in 1986 and 1997. They then have suggested that there might have been a shift in the relationship between the expected risk of job loss and the unemployment rate. Incorporating the findings from the Skills Survey 2001, Green (2003; 2006) has rejected the latter claim. He has shown that the level of perceived job insecurity subsequently declined in 2001 when the British economy improved since the mid 1990s. Indeed, the aggregate figures on fear of job loss reported in 1997 masked a picture of redistribution of insecurity between workers in different occupational groups and between those with different lengths of job tenure (Burchell 2002). In Britain, the overall trend in perceived job insecurity was of a decline between the mid 1980s and late 1990s. A similar trend of decline, with an unexpectedly high level of perceived insecurity against

² Green, Felstead, and Burchell (2000) have pointed out that International Survey Research did not provide a representative and stable sample for comparison either between countries or over time. The implication is that it is not wise to over-interpret these findings.

the macroeconomic upturn in the mid 1990s, was also observed in the US and Germany (Green 2003).

Who Feels Insecure? Differences in Perceived Job Insecurity between Workers

Perception of insecurity differed markedly between different groups of workers. The most systematic figures on individual characteristics of insecure workforce in European countries were available in the OECD report of 1997. Using data from the Eurobarometer Survey of 1996, the authors (OECD 1997) have reported that while there was a little gender difference in the proportion of workers perceiving high level of job insecurity, it was negatively correlated with age. Nevertheless, older workers in Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK expressed greater fear. In addition, although there was generally a weak negative relationship between educational qualifications and job insecurity, workers in Denmark, France, Italy, and the UK showed the reverse. A smaller proportion of workers in white-collar occupations or in public administration were subject to high level of insecure feeling. It must be noted that although workers in white-collar occupations reported higher level of security than their blue-collar counterparts in the Eurobarometer Survey of 1996, as illustrated in the last section, in the mid 1990s, while workers in professional occupations and finance industry in the UK and white-collar workers in the US became the most insecure groups, manufacturing sector workers and blue-collar workers in these two corresponding countries recorded a decline of insecurity (Burchell 2002; Green 2003).

After ten years, based on the multilevel regression analyses on the pooled data from the European Social Survey in 2004-5, Erlinghagen (2007) has presented the effect of personal characteristics on self-perceived job insecurity. Similar to the descriptive results from the Eurobarometer Survey illustrated above, there was no gender difference in subjective perception of insecurity. However, feelings of insecurity declined with increasing qualifications. The author has also found that in the pooled sample, older workers who were aged over 40 were more affected by job insecurity than their younger counterparts. In addition, his analyses have shown that having dependent children or being as the main earner in a household did not increase one's feelings of insecurity. There was also a curvilinear relationship between length of job tenure and degree of job insecurity, with individuals in both ends of the continuum of the length of tenure

reporting higher degree of fear. Workers with previous unemployment experience or in non-permanent contracts were more insecure.

How do we account for these results? First, concerning the U-shape pattern of the length of job tenure on feelings of insecurity, it might be reasonable to assume that the longer individuals remain with the same employer, the lower the likelihood to be dismissed. This might be due to high level of firm-specific human capital invested and more mutual trust developed over time. Nevertheless, skills possessed by workers with longer job tenure might be obsolete and leaving firms could lead to higher costs. These costs include the loss of firm-specific non-transferable human capital and of entitlement to pay rise in the form of seniority pay. All these contribute to the higher perception of job insecurity with the increase in the length of service in firms.

Second, regarding the relationship between occupations and fear of job loss, although there occurred a re-distribution of job insecurity with workers in higher occupational level expressed greater fear in the mid 1990s, the difference in perception of insecurity between occupational groups returned to a conventional pattern since the late 1990s (Green 2003; Maurin and Postel-Vinay 2004). While we could resort to Goldthorpe's theory of employment relations to explain the conventional pattern observed in the 1980s and in the late 1990s with the service relationship is more likely to be present in high level of occupations (Goldthorpe 2007), there has been no explicit explanation of the rather unexpectedly more intense feelings of insecurity found in these occupational groups in the mid 1990s. One of the plausible causes is the intense media attention and widespread coverage of the growing threat of unemployment of the professional classes might reinforce or simply create the heightened sense of insecurity among the latter groups during the time period (Green 2006).

Workers in temporary or fixed-term contracts unsurprisingly reported greater fear of job loss (Booth et al. 2002). It is simply because their jobs are more likely to end involuntarily. However, using the ECHP data, Maurin and Postel-Vinay (2004) have found that the gap of insecurity between workers in permanent and those in fixed-term contracts narrowed down over time. They have resorted this observed phenomenon to the improved labour market conditions in the late 1990s and holders of fixed-term contracts thus faced better re-employment prospects.

It has been well-established that prior unemployment experience has a positive association with perceived risk of job loss (Erlinghagen 2007; Green et al. 2000; Naswall and De Witte 2003). Arulampalam, Booth, and Taylor (2000) have suggested that previous

unemployment experience not only causes skills obsolescence but also implies that workers concerned have a rather worse labour market prospect, which might not be directly observed by researchers. Campbell, Carruth, Dickerson, and Green (2007) have taken one step further and hypothesized that close encounters with other people's unemployment raise individuals' perception of job loss. Although their results have confirmed that having a close friend in unemployment increases respondent's own expectations of unemployment, no evidence could be found after controlling for the economic status of the close friend.

Are Unemployment Expectations Warranted? The Concrete Basis of Subjective Measures of Job Insecurity

I have so far shown that current expectations of job loss or unemployment are broadly explained by a plausible set of individual social demographic characteristics and prior experiences of unemployment. These findings reveal that perceptions of job loss have a concrete basis rather than being simply a random answer to a question that an individual does not really understand or find any relevance (Green et al. 2001). Nevertheless, there have been doubts concerning the reliability of this subjective measure in the understanding of actual individual labour market experience (McGovern et al. 2004). In this section, drawing the results from the analyses of three consecutive waves in the British Household Panel Survey in the mid 1990s and of the initial and follow-up interviews in the Skills Survey in 2001, I shall present if the perceived risk of job loss turned out to be a useful additional variable for predicting subsequent unemployment.

Concerning the results from the BHPS, Campbell et al. (2007) have reported that around 18 per cent of workers claiming to be "very likely" to become unemployed at the time of their 1996 interview actually experienced unemployment between 1996 and 1997 interviews. This compares to only 2 per cent of workers in the "very unlikely" category who actually went on to become unemployed between these two panel waves. Similar rank ordering pattern has also been observed regarding the level of fear reported in 1997 and the actual subsequent unemployment experienced between 1997 and 1998. These authors have repeated the same strategy to compare the expectation of unemployment in the initial interview of the Skills Survey in 2001 with the actual experience of unemployment reported in the follow-up survey 15 months thereafter. The pattern found was similar to that in the BHPS.

Indeed, even in the formal regression models, it has been shown that the level of fear was positively and significantly correlated with actual unemployment experience

over the subsequent year after controlling for objective characteristics of individuals and their labour market history. By comparing two sets of models with and without the subjective measure of job insecurity, these authors have further confirmed that including the fear dummies significantly raised the explanatory power of the model. These results suggest that the workers' perceptions of insecurity do contain useful private information for predicting future unemployment, which are not otherwise available to the researchers. The authors then have concluded that the inclusion of the subjective insecurity variable is justified in empirical research. It is worthwhile to mention that research results in the US have also found that male respondents' fears of unemployment were correlated with subsequent realized displacements (Stephens 2004).

Level of Wage Growth: The Economic Consequences of Perceived Risks of Job Loss

In the introduction, I have briefly outlined several consequences of high level of perceived job insecurity. In this section, based on the most recent findings, I shall present the economic consequences of fear of job loss. Instead of reporting the economic costs of becoming unemployed (Gregg et al. 2000; Nickell et al. 2002), the main focus will be on the impact of unemployment expectations on wage growth for individuals who remained employed.

In the existing empirical literature, results regarding to the actual cost of job loss have been well documented. In Britain, Nickell, Jones, and Quintini (2002) have found that from 1982-6 to 1992-7 the permanent wage loss after a spell of unemployment rose from 7.8 to 15.5 per cent. Gregg, Knight, and Wadsworth (2000) have also estimated that displaced workers, on average, suffered 15 per cent monthly wage loss in the new jobs during the observed period between 1991 and 1996. As pinpointed by Campbell et al. (2007), although the economic consequences are manifest for individuals who have lost their jobs, it has been unclear about the effect of high level of fear on the extent of wage growth for those who remained in employment. In the same article which examines the reliability of the subjective measure of job insecurity presented above, these researchers have also investigated the extent to which the growth of wages is linked with unemployment expectations.

Using the data available in the BHPS 1996-8, Campbell et al. (2007) have reported that there was a significant difference between the median change in wages experienced by high fear and low fear men. For instance, between 1996 and 1997, high

fear men experienced a rise in hourly pay averaging 14 pence, while those with low fear benefited from a rise of 45p. The corresponding figures in the years of 1997-8 were 26p and 50p. No significant differences were found in the case of female workers. In the same vein, in the random effects models, it is estimated that being in the “very likely” (“likely”) category lowers the rate of wage growth for men by 12 per cent (4 per cent) compared with those who reported unemployment to be “very unlikely”. Again, there is no significant correlation between unemployment expectation and wage growth for women.

To account for the potential problems in estimation, such as unobserved individual heterogeneity and sample selection biases, various procedures have been used in order to check the robustness of the results in the former random effects models. The authors have found that results from fixed effects models, Hausman test, and Heckman’s two-step procedures did not differ greatly from those of the random effects estimates and thus they have claimed that the fear of unemployment does matter. High fears of job loss are associated with lower rates of wage growth for men but have no detectable link with wage growth for women.

Institutional Features of the Labour Market: Differences in Perceived Job Insecurity between Countries

Subjective perception of job insecurity is associated not only with characteristics of individuals but also with features of labour market in the national level. It is reasonable to expect that labour market regulations, social protection system, unemployment insurance benefits, and macro economic environment might have an impact on individuals’ perception of job insecurity (OECD 2004).

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Expressing “Not True at all” for the Statement “My Job is Insecure” Across Countries, European Social Survey 2004-5

| Countries | % | Countries | % | Countries | % |
|--------------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| France | 26.3 | Netherlands | 13.4 | Denmark | 9.4 |
| Greece | 24.5 | Hungary | 12.1 | Ireland | 9.2 |
| Poland | 21.5 | Portugal | 12.0 | Norway | 9.2 |
| Czech Republic | 19.7 | Belgium | 11.5 | Austria | 8.9 |
| Germany | 18.0 | Spain | 11.3 | | |
| | | Sweden | 10.7 | | |
| | | Finland | 10.1 | | |
| | | UK | 10.1 | | |
| Mean (SD) = 14.0% (5.7) | | | | | |

Source: Table 1, Erlinghagen 2007: 15.

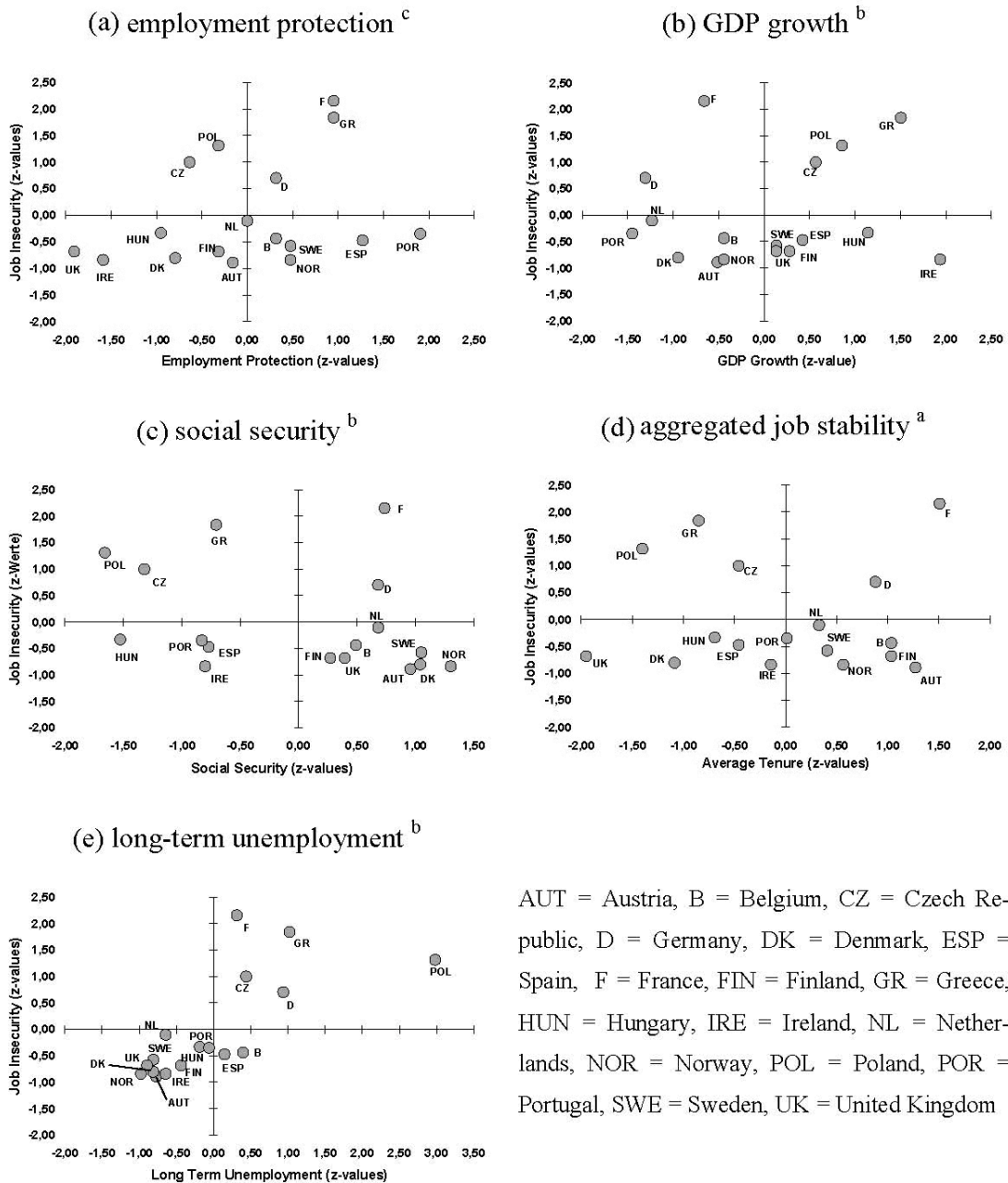
Before reporting the relationship between country-level characteristics and level of insecurity, I shall give an overall picture of feelings of job insecurity across different European countries. In the European Social Survey 2004-5, on average, 14 per cent of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement “My job is secure” (Table 1). Those in France, Greece, Poland, Czech Republic, and Germany reported an above-average level of self-perceived insecurity. At the other end, fewer than 10 per cent of employees in Denmark, Ireland, Norway, and Austria expressed high level of fear.

Drawing from the existing results in the 1990s, the authors in the OECD report of 1997 have summarized that first, although degree of employment protection legislation was negatively correlated with feelings of insecurity, the result was not significant. Second, no significant relationship was found between the extent of temporary employment in the national labour markets and reported level of job insecurity. Nevertheless, they have presented that the decrease in unemployment benefit replacement rate and the decline in collective bargaining coverage exposed workers to greater fear of job loss. For example, three countries with the lowest summary measures of gross unemployment benefit replacement rates – Japan, the UK, and the US – were among the four countries with the highest level of job insecurity.

Based on the findings from the European Social Survey 2004-5 and official statistics, Erlinghagen (2007) has examined if there was any expected correlation between five macro level indicators and aggregate measure of job insecurity in the country level. These five indicators are: degree of dismissal protection, rate of GDP growth, level of social security expenditure, average job tenure, and long-term unemployment rate. The diagrams of each of these five indicators and their correlation with perception of insecurity of each of the 17 countries were re-produced in Figure 1. First, we cannot observe a clear link between the extent of employment protection and the level of job insecurity at the country level (Figure 1a). For instance, in line with the prior expectations, while less protection and high insecurity is found in Poland and Czech Republic, more protection and low insecurity is observed in Sweden, Norway, Belgium, and Spain, and Portugal. However, less protection is correlated with low insecurity in the UK, Denmark, Ireland, Finland, Austria, and Hungary and more protection with high insecurity occurs in France, Greece, and Germany. This ambiguous link between country-specific indicators and perception of job insecurity can also be found in the effect of rate of GDP growth (Figure 1b), level of social security expenditure (Figure 1c), and average length of job tenure (Figure 1d). Nevertheless, as we can see from Figure 1e, there was an

expected correlation between rate of long-term unemployment and level of perceived job insecurity. On the one hand, high rate of long-term unemployment and high level of insecurity exist in Poland, Greece, Germany, France, and Czech Republic. On the other hand, low rate of long-term unemployment is associated with less fear in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, the UK, Austria, Hungary, and Finland.

Figure 1: Correlation between Macro Indicators and Perception of Job Insecurity^a



AUT = Austria, B = Belgium, CZ = Czech Republic, D = Germany, DK = Denmark, ESP = Spain, F = France, FIN = Finland, GR = Greece, HUN = Hungary, IRE = Ireland, NL = Netherlands, NOR = Norway, POL = Poland, POR = Portugal, SWE = Sweden, UK = United Kingdom

Data sources: ^aESS (weighted), author's calculations ^bEUROSTAT ^cOECD

Source: Table 1, Erlinghagen 2007: 16.

The findings reported by Erlinghagen (2007) are consistent with those presented in OCED report mentioned above: there is no correlation between extent of employment protection at the country level and degree of insecurity. In contrast, a significant positive relationship between macro economic environment and individual expectation of job loss is observed in the studies of all Erlinghagen (2007), Green et al. (2001), and Green (2003).

Conclusion

In this state-of-the-art report, I have examined five different aspects concerning job security or insecurity. The findings can be summarized accordingly. First, instead of a secular increase in job insecurity, the rise or fall of insecurity has been largely synchronized with the cycle of unemployment rate. With the upswing of the overall economic environment since that late 1990s, we have witnessed a reduction in the level of fear of job loss. Nevertheless, conflicting results were found in the UK and the US in the mid 1990s. Although the two economies recovered from the recession of the early 1990s, no decline of job insecurity was recorded when compared to that in the early 1990s. Overall, no secular increase in job insecurity has been found.

Second, this cyclical character of perceived job insecurity has further been substantiated by the analyses at the country level. While no clear links have been observed between degree of employment protection, rate of economic growth, level of social security expenditure, or length of average job tenure on the one hand, and perception of job insecurity on the other, there has been an expected positive relationship between rate of long-term unemployment and level of job insecurity. With the improvement of the macro economic environment since the late 1990s, we might assume that fear of job loss will remain comparatively low in Europe.

Concerning the characteristics of insecure workforce, although findings have been inconclusive, on average, individuals, who are more educated, in higher occupational level, on permanent contracts, and with no previous unemployment experience reported to feel more secure. Given these associations between individual characteristics and self-perception of job insecurity, it has been claimed that this subjective measure is a reliable indicator. Results from analyses based on longitudinal data have further confirmed that subjective indicator of job insecurity well predicts future chance of experiencing unemployment. In addition, fear of job loss is found to have

adverse impacts on the income prospects of employed men. All in all, job insecurity or perceived risk of job loss, though subjective in nature, has been proved to be a useful indicator for labour market studies.

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