

Temporary workers' health and well-being: An overview of empirical findings

Jeroen De Jong
Nele De Cuyper &
Thomas Rigotti

Methodology

- ▶ General combination of search terms:
 - a) term for temporary work AND b) health/well-being
 - a) 'temporary employ?', 'contingent employ?', 'nonstandard employ?', 'precarious employ?', 'fixed term employ?', 'short-term employ?', 'casual employ?' 'non-permanent employ?'
 - b) 'job insecurity', 'stress', 'emotional exhaustion', 'burnout', 'health', 'absence', 'well being', 'sickness'.
 - Used Web of Science and Google Scholar
 - Result is 43 empirical papers on temporary work and well-being

Analysis

Review of 43 studies, taking three different perspectives

- (1) The simple comparative perspective
- (2) Mediators between type of contract and outcomes
- (3) Differences within the temporary workforce

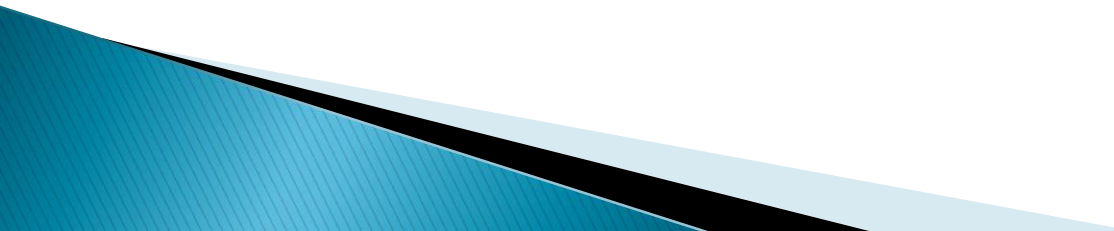
Discussion and Outlook



(1) The simple comparative view

	Databases	Temps better off	Temps worse off	Temps = perms
General/Mental Health	k = 23	8	10	5
Life satisfaction	k = 10	2	5	3
Absenteeism	k = 3	1	-	2
Mortality	k = 2	-	2	-
Occupational injuries	k = 3	-	2	1
Depressive symptoms	k = 7	1	5	1

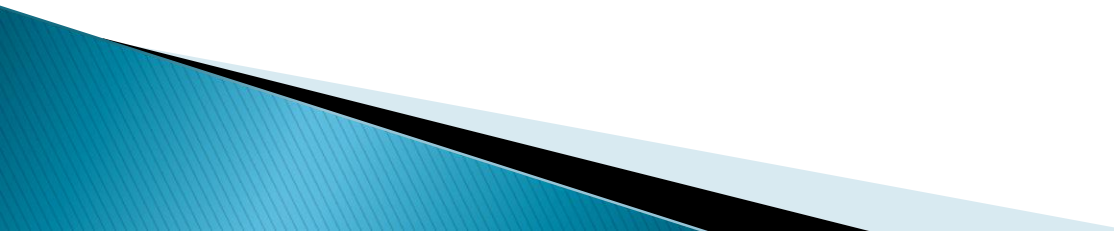
(1) The simple comparative view

- When comparing employees with permanent contracts, and temporary workers no clear picture concerning differences in well-being
 - Evidence for the duration of exposure – effect (Finnish panel studies), over the long run, people with a temporary contract history reported more depressive symptoms
 - However, employees with on-call contracts, with no contracts, with part-time temporary contracts, and to some extent with agency contracts showed constantly to report lower health, and well-being across studies
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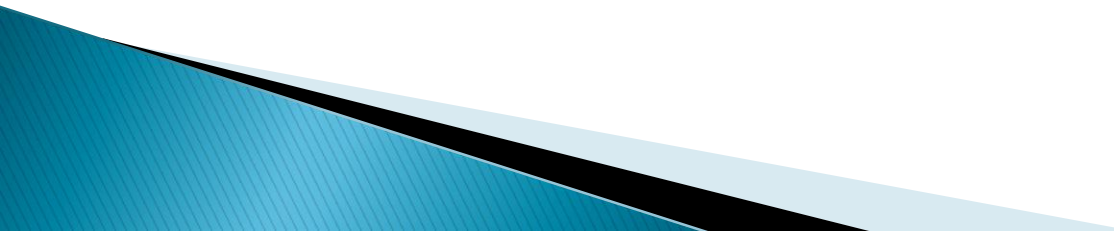
(2) Mediators between type of contract and outcomes

- Autonomy / Workload could not be shown to be mediators (accounting for differences between permanent and temporary employees, De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006b)
- However: Large-scale representative surveys report in general worse working conditions for temporary workers (e.g. lower autonomy, less training [especially concerning safety issues], less protection of workers' rights)
- It seems difficult to get to the "net-effect" of having a temporary vs. permanent contract as many forms of temporary work entail a higher risk of bad working conditions (so it is hard to tell whether effects are due to task- or contract characteristics)

(3) Differences within temporary workers

- Type of temporary contract makes a difference: fixed-term "in-house" contracts compare in general better to permanent employees, as on-call workers, short-term substitutes, agency workers → hence we need to get a better differentiation not only concerning the formal type of contract, but also a measure of precariousness
 - Volition and motives have been shown to have great impact on outcomes!
 - There is some evidence for gender differences concerning the impact of temporary work – it is likely not the biological sex, but the social role related to gender norms – Studies need to broaden the perspective and to include the life context into the equation
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Methodological Issues

- 33 studies used a cross-sectional design (self-reports)
 - 10 studies with longitudinal/panel data
 - In recent years growing evidence for causal links (longitudinal studies)
 - Lack of cross-level interactions (multilevel-designs, including e.g. organizational variables, like HR-practices, or societal differences)
 - Lack of theory-driven cross-national comparisons
 - Lack of studies with "objective" health outcomes (not only self-report)
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Summary and Outlook

- To learn more about the "net-effect" of having a temporary contract, we need studies that include a **refined set of confounding variables**
- **Most studies have a cross-sectional design.** It seems that having a temporary contract may not be a big threat if it comes early in the career, is taken voluntarily and enhances employability – however if temporary employment gets a trap for the career (duration, and persistence of exposure effect), negative effects are likely.
- **There is a lack of knowledge concerning life-context factors** (as moderating variables linking temporary contracts to health, and well-being of employees)
- **There are only few studies with a sound cross-national comparison.** Studies using good designs, and including e.g. social welfare, labour laws, workers rights, union coverage, (regional) unemployment rates could provide a good basis for political guidance