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United in Precarious Employment? Employment Precarity of Young Couples in the Netherlands, 1992–2007

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Abstract: The trend towards labour market flexibilization in advanced economies since the 1990s is associated with more employment insecurity. This study examines to what extent employment flexibility among young people in the Netherlands is related to employment flexibility or unemployment of the partner, between 1992 and 2007. In addition, we aim to explain this relationship. Multinomial logistic regression models are estimated using 16 cross-sections of the Dutch Labor Force Survey (1992–2007), including 87,204 young couples. The results show that there is a positive relationship between precarious employment of two partners and that this can be explained by the mechanism of assortative mating (*i.e.* people select partners that are alike with respect to characteristics like education, age and ethnicity, and, these characteristics relate at the individual level with employment situation) and through partner effects (*i.e.* partners can be considered as providers of skills, knowledge, and network resources that add up to one's own labour market resources to which one has access).

Introduction

Labour Market Flexibilization in the Netherlands: A Dutch Miracle?

In the Netherlands, the last two decades of the twentieth century are characterized by a strong economic upturn, also known as a transition from 'Dutch Disease' to 'Dutch Miracle' (Visser and Hemerijck, 1997). While the late 1970s reflect a period of high levels of unemployment, especially among youth, next to massive transfer payments and a growing budgetary deficit induced by institutional sclerosis and political stagnation, the Dutch economy started to develop remarkably strongly halfway the 1980s and especially during the mid-1990s (Woldendorp, 2005). Although this economic revival coincides with a strong growth in employment, an important part of it concerned an increase in the number of flexible jobs, also referred to as a rise in *employment flexibility* (Delsen and de Jong, 1997). Flexible jobs are characterized by a fixed-term employment contract (of <1 year) and/or an unfixed number of working hours. Usually, they are considered as undesirable jobs by employees, as they offer little perspective and security in terms of a stable employment contract accompanied by a fixed income, especially compared to jobs with a permanent employment contract.

In addition to the fact that flexible jobs are cyclically sensitive, flexibilization of the labour market causes structural problems to individual's lives: people might stay in flexible, unstable jobs in their further career (Scherer, 2005). Being in flexible (financially) unstable employment might also prevent individuals from long-term commitments, especially concerning marriage and parenthood (Mills and Blossfeld, 2005). For instance, one might be hindered in the purchase of a house or the start of a family, because of financial instability. Not only the early, but also the later life course is hence affected by employment flexibility. Not surprisingly, the 'Dutch Miracle' is often referred to as an *unstable miracle* (Delsen and de Jong, 1997).

Association Between Partners' Precarious Employment

The macro level trend towards labour market flexibilization in the Netherlands implies, at the micro level, that individuals are more likely to have a flexible job,

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especially since the mid-1990s. Since individuals often share a household with a partner, combined with the considerable rise in the employment rate of women in recent decades, even more individuals will have to deal with the consequences of employment flexibility. This can be either directly, because they are in a flexible job themselves, or indirectly, when their partner has such a job, or both. Particularly, the latter would have severe social consequences, as it would increase the amount of labour market insecurity within a couple, especially compared to couples with a permanent employment contract. Even more employment insecurity might be experienced by couples of which one of both partners has a flexible job and the other is unemployed, compared to couples with double flexible employment. In this case, two partners have to be able to support themselves by the temporary earnings of only one partner.

In this article, flexible employment as well as unemployment is indicated as a type of *employment precarity*. Both the occurrence of double flexible employment and of flexible employment and unemployment within a couple can hence be characterized as types of precarious employment at the household level. Not only this is likely to have negative social consequences for the couples involved (like the disability to make long-term commitments as briefly described earlier), but also for society as a whole. On the societal level, precarious employment concentrated in couples will result in more social inequality between households, as some households experience much labour market security (*e.g.* couples with double employment), others experience much labour market insecurity (*e.g.* couples with double unemployment) and again others experience only (some) short term labour market security and long term insecurity (*e.g.* couples with double flexible employment or with flexible employment and unemployment).

Until now, research on the relationship between employment precarity of two partners is lacking, but indispensible in light of the current trend towards labour market flexibilization. Recent research did acknowledge the importance of studying partners' parallel careers and focused on the relationship between partners' employment situation, *i.e.* either in terms of labour market participation (employment versus non-employment) or in terms of occupational attainment. The results of most of these studies show a positive association between partners' employment situation (see, among others, Ultee *et al.*, 1988; Davies *et al.*, 1994; Bernasco *et al.*, 1998). Findings indicate that when one partner is employed, the other partner is likely to be employed as well, and, when one partner is unemployed, the likelihood that the other partner is also unemployed is relatively large. Other studies show a less clear picture of the relationship between partners' employment situation. Both Bernardi (1999) and Verbakel and De Graaf (2009) found that partner's resources have a negative effect on participation in the labour market, but a positive influence on occupational level. Verbakel *et al.* (2008) found a positive association between labour market positions of spouses, except for couples with children, who show a negative association between spouses' employment status.

Research Questions

As described earlier, most of the results of previous studies indicate towards a positive relationship between partners' employment situation. However, in light of the trend towards labour market flexibilization since the 1990s, these studies do not provide a complete picture of today's association between partners' employment situation, as flexible employment has not yet been considered as an alternative to standard employment or unemployment. This implies that it is still unclear how flexible employment is related to the partner's employment situation. Does flexible employment come in couples? Does employment flexibility of one partner imply that the likelihood for the other partner to be unemployed is high? With regard to the positive relationship between partners' employment situation found in earlier studies, one might expect a positive relationship between precarious types of labour market situations like flexible employment and unemployment. In this paper, we focus on the extent to which *employment precarity* comes within couples. More specifically, this implies that we study both the relationship between partners' flexible employment, and between partners' flexible employment and unemployment. We hence improve on previous studies by extending the usual distinction of labour market participation between employment and unemployment with a new type of employment: flexible employment.

We focus on young couples, as labour market flexibilization is especially concentrated among young people who enter first employment (Bukodi *et al.*, 2008). Labour market entrants are considered as outsiders in the labour market by firms: they usually lack work experience, seniority, lobby, and networks, which makes it hard for them to get a secure and stable job as compared to the established labour work force (De Vreyer *et al.*, 2000). A temporary contract enables employers to screen the labour market entrants' work potential first, before offering them a permanent one, as it is difficult and costly to fire an inadequately

functioning employee with a permanent contract. Double flexible employment and the occurrence of flexible employment and unemployment would hence be mainly prevalent among young couples.

Accordingly, the research questions that we address in this article are: *How is employment flexibility among young people in the Netherlands related to employment flexibility or unemployment of the partner between 1992 and 2007? And how can we explain this relationship?*

Theory and Hypotheses

Hypotheses Predicting a Negative Association Between Partners' Employment Precarity

Sharing a household with a partner, either married or within unmarried cohabitation, is characterized by (the intention of) a long-term commitment to each other. Although a multiperson household offers economies of scale, *i.e.* a reduction of fixed costs (like rent or mortgage, insurances, *etc.*) because of sharing such expenses by two partners, it also implies that two partners have to 'negotiate' how to run their household jointly. This particularly concerns the division of labour: partners have a common financial goal [*i.e.* (maximum) financial stability], which entails that a certain amount of paid and unpaid work needs to be 'produced' by the household. Given the fact that both partners are equally restricted by time, it is inefficient for both to apply themselves to paid labour as well as unpaid labour. Specialization between partners will hence arise in either market work or domestic work (under the condition that market and domestic production functions have constant or increasing returns to scale) as is argued by Becker (1981). In what way partners specialize, will be determined by comparing both partners' marginal productivity in market work and domestic work (Bernardi, 1999). Households can thus be compared to firms: all tasks are divided in such a way that the family income and quality of family life are optimized in order to reach maximum economic profit. This implies that when one partner becomes unemployed, the likelihood that the other partner stays in employment or will get a job is higher, due to the decrease in total household income. In other words: there is *substitution* between two partners.

Traditionally, specialization between two partners implied that women devoted most of their time to childbearing and other domestic activities, while men were charged with paid labour. As described earlier, in light of the current trend towards labour market flexibilization, preceded by the substantial increase in female labour-force participation, the usual division of labour between partners (*i.e.* employment versus unemployment/non-employment) has been extended with a third possibility, *i.e.* flexible employment. With respect to the common financial goal of partners, flexible employment does not contribute much to this, as it is characterized by a temporary labour contract, providing the employee with only short term financial security and it does not guarantee that the person will make a living after finishing the temporary job. With regard to financial security, flexible employment might hence be compared with unemployment. A permanent labour contract on the other hand, regardless of the wage level of a certain job, usually provides a household financial stability, since this type of contract guarantees the employee of being employed in the long run and hence it assures the employee of at least a certain income level, also in the long term.

Based on these theoretical considerations, a hypothesis on the negative association between partners' flexible employment and between partner's flexible employment and unemployment can be derived. To reach financial security within a couple, at least one of both partners needs to have a stable job (*i.e.* a standard employment contract). This facilitates the choice for the other partner to accept a flexible job or to be unemployed, since the household is then already ensured of a sufficient family income and does not necessarily need more money to live on. Also, when one partner already is in flexible employment or when one partner is unemployed, this puts pressure on the other partner to find a standard job, since the household income still needs to be assured. This could also imply that people with a flexible partner are still more willing to accept a flexible job instead of being unemployed, however, a standard job is always the most desirable. Accordingly, we can thus hypothesize that flexible employment of one partner decreases the likelihood for the other partner to have a flexible job (as against a standard job) (H1a), or, even more strongly, to be unemployed (H1b) (as against having a standard job). Both hypotheses amount to a negative association between partners' employment precarity.

Hypotheses Predicting a Positive Association Between Partners' Employment Precarity

Opposite to this economic approach, most empirical studies provide evidence for a positive association between partners' employment and between partners' unemployment (see, among others, Ultee *et al.*, 1988; Davies *et al.*, 1994; Bernasco *et al.*, 1998). Based on this empirical evidence, we formulate as an alternative hypothesis that flexible employment of one partner increases the likelihood for the other partner to have a

flexible job (H2a) or to be unemployed (H2b) as against having a standard job. However, this alternative hypothesis does not explain *why* people in flexible employment tend to have a long-term relationship with someone else with a flexible job or with someone unemployed. At least, it is rather unlikely that people 'choose' each other because of the fact that they are both in flexible employment or that one is in flexible employment and the other in unemployment. This is not only for the reason that it is quite undesirable for a couple that both partners have a flexible job, or one a flexible job and the other no job, given the financial insecurity it brings about, but also because of the temporary character of flexible jobs: people with such jobs have to change jobs often, which might not give them the opportunity to 'meet' potential partners at work. In the same way, one can argue that unemployed people cannot meet a partner at work.

In this paper, we distinguish three explanations for the positive association between partners' precarious employment situation, which is assortative mating, shared restrictions, and partner effects. We will now derive specific hypotheses based on each of these three mechanisms.

Assortative mating and partners' precarious employment

Assortative mating implies that people select partners that are alike with respect to characteristics like age, family background, education and ethnicity (Mare, 1991), and that such characteristics relate at the individual level with employment situation. For instance, people with a high level of education tend to have a partner with a high level of education, and a higher educational level decreases the likelihood to be in flexible employment. Similarity between partners' employment situation can hence be regarded as a by-product of partner selection and not because of influence between partners (Ultee *et al.*, 1988). According to this view, the positive relationship between partners' employment position would be spurious, as both partner choice and employment situation depend on a third characteristic which is equal for both partners. In this paper, we focus on similarities of both partners in educational level, age, and ethnicity. We consider these characteristics as most relevant in both explaining partner selection and labour market situation, but we can also assume that they (age and ethnicity, and most likely educational level) precede both partner selection and labour market situation.[1]

In current society, education might be one of the most important characteristics for partner selection, and educational systems act as marriage markets (Blossfeld, 2009). In general, people with a higher level of education tend to marry people who also have a higher level of education (Smits *et al.*, 1998). In addition, it is known that these people are less likely to end up in flexible employment or to be unemployed (Breen, 1997). This implies that people with a higher level of education are likely to have a partner who also has a higher level of education, and both are less likely to be in flexible employment or unemployment, compared to standard employment, because of their higher level of education. The same argument can be applied to partners with both a lower level of education, who are more likely to have a flexible job or to be unemployed. Precarious employment homogamy is hence a by-product of educational homogamy and of the relation between educational level and precarious employment at the individual level. So, because of partners' similarity in education level, flexible employment of one partner increases the likelihood for the other partner to have a flexible job (H3a) or to be unemployed (H3b) as against having a standard job.

In a similar way, we expect that age homogamy and the individual relationship between age and flexible employment or unemployment are an explanation for the positive association between employment precarity of two partners. As described earlier, young people are labour market entrants, who lack work experience. Employers are therefore reluctant to offer them a permanent contract immediately. Young people hence experience difficulties in entering the labour market and are more likely to be unemployed, or to enter the labour market in a temporary contract, compared to older people (Bukodi *et al.*, 2008). As people tend to mate with people of (nearly) the same age, they both have more or less the same likelihood to end up in precarious employment. Therefore, we hypothesize that, because of partners' similarity in age, flexible employment of one partner increases the likelihood for the other partner to have a flexible job (H4a) or to be unemployed (H4b) as against having a standard job.

Finally, partners' similarity in ethnicity may explain their equal likeliness to be in precarious employment compared to standard employment. Research has shown that young people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be in flexible employment than indigenous youth. For instance, between 1993 and 1995 one out of four youth from ethnic minorities had a flexible job in the Netherlands, compared to one out of five native youth (SCP, 1997). In addition, unemployment among ethnic minorities is disproportionally high. As people from ethnic minorities have a higher probability of getting a flexible job or to be unemployed compared to native people, and, as people from ethnic minorities tend to marry within their own ethnic group, ethnic homogamy

might be an additional explanation for the positive relationship between partners' precarious employment. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that, because of partners' similarity in ethnicity, flexible employment of one partner increases the likelihood for the other partner to have a flexible job (H5a) or to be unemployed (H5b) as against having a standard job.

Shared restrictions and partners' precarious employment

The second explanation for the positive association between partners' precarious employment situation is formed by shared restrictions, *i.e.* opportunities partners share and barriers they face together (Bernasco *et al.*, 1998). Shared restrictions come down to the fact that partners usually experience the same context and face the same more or less favourable labour market conditions. In particular, partners are temporally jointly restricted. Periods of economic recession will restrict the opportunities for both partners to find work, while periods of prosperity will benefit both in the same way. So, over time the likelihood to be in precarious employment will fluctuate, but since both partners share the same [(un)favourable] labour market conditions, the probability to have a flexible job or to be unemployed due to the general unemployment rate in a particular year is also the same for them (all else being equal). We expect that, because of similarity in the level of unemployment partners face when entering the labour market, flexible employment of one partner increases the likelihood for the other partner to have a flexible job (H6a) or to be unemployed (H6b) as against having a standard job.

As the unemployment rate might account for cyclical fluctuations in the shared likelihood of partners to experience precarious employment, we can argue, in a similar way, that a rise in the level of globalization explains a structural increase in the likelihood for both partners to be in a precarious employment situation (again, all else being equal). Globalization implies that since the 1980s firms in advanced economies started to increasingly compete against firms from other economies around the world, instead of competing only within their regional economy. This internationalization of markets and rising tax competition among welfare states 'enforced' employers to seek for greater flexibility through adaptation of the work force (Kalleberg, 2009). Consequently, a shift from low- to high-skilled labour took place and labour costs were reduced through flexible employment, such as temporary jobs and on-call employment. As globalization positively affects the likelihood to be in precarious employment compared to standard employment (Buchholz *et al.*, 2009), we expect that, because of similarity in the level of globalization partners face, flexible employment of one partner increases the likelihood for the other partner to have a flexible job (H7a) or to be unemployed (H7b) as against having a standard job.

Partner effects and partners' precarious employment

The third explanation of a positive association between partners' precarious employment is the existence of partner effects. Whereas the aforementioned by-product explanations assume no influence between partners, other explanations do postulate effects of the resources of one's partner. Partners can be considered as social capital: providers of skills, knowledge, and network resources that add up to one's own labour market resources one has access to (Bernasco *et al.*, 1998). The educational level and the employment situation of one's partner are indicators of such social capital and can hence be used for improving career opportunities. More specifically, partner effects imply that partners can transmit their own occupational skills, competences, and experience (in brief their human capital) to their partner, for instance when the partner is studying for an examination (Bernardi, 1999). In addition, partners can help prepare for a job interview, by suggesting how to speak, what to wear or how to behave. This can be regarded as the transmission of cultural capital between partners. Lastly, partners can provide information on jobs not advertised or form a 'bridge' to distant social networks. So, partner's human, cultural, and social capital all affect the employment situation of the other partner positively. In the same way, absence of such capital, which is more likely when the partner is in a precarious employment situation, prevents him or her from helping his or her partner. Therefore, the latter will also be more likely to be in precarious employment, as compared to standard employment.

Partner effects on couples' precarious employment, however, can only be observed when controlled for associations generated by assortative mating and shared restrictions, as we lack direct measures of partner effects. Our last hypothesis reads that, because of (a lack of) partner's labour market resources, flexible employment of one partner increases the likelihood for the other partner to have a flexible job (H8a) or to be unemployed (H8b) as against having a standard job, after controlling for assortative mating and shared restrictions.

Data and Measurements

Data and Selection of Sample Population

To test these hypotheses, we pooled 16 cross-sections of the Dutch Labor Force Survey (in Dutch: 'Enquête

Beroepsbevolking') collected by Statistics Netherlands in 1992–2007. This large-scale household survey aims at monitoring the Dutch labour market situation. The survey is representative of the Dutch non-institutionalized population of ≥15 years, and data are collected every year to provide national employment statistics on a regularly basis. The survey contains detailed information on education and occupation of respondents and their partners, including information on flexible employment.

Although we acknowledge the value of using dynamic data to answer our research questions, which would allow to investigate the causal relationship between partners' employment situation, we have several arguments to use cross-sectional data here. First, dynamic data covering such a long period (i.e. 1992–2007) do not exist. Our cross-sectional data enable us to study partners' employment precarity over a relatively long time span, in which precarious employment in the Netherlands actually seemed to grow. Related to this, our data provide, secondly, much statistical power given the large sample size. Thirdly, we believe that it is important to investigate whether the association between partners' employment situation exists, before examining the causal relationship. In case we do not find evidence for this association, based on cross-sectional data, it would not be necessary to use dynamic data, whereas if we do find evidence for the association between partners' employment precarity, the next step would be to investigate the causal relationship by using dynamic data.

The original data set contained 454,607 households, of which 276,298 were single-person households and 178,309 were two-person households. As we focus on couples and want to analyse male and female partners of one couple separately, we only included opposite-sex couples. In addition, we only included households with respondents aged ≤39 years, as we aim to study young couples in this article, as explained earlier.[2] Finally, we excluded respondents outside the labour force.[3] After these selections, our sample size includes 87,204 two-person households.

Dependent Variable: Employment Situation

Employment situation is measured through three categories: 'standard employment' refers to employees with a permanent employment relationship (*i.e.* having an employment contract of at least 1 year and for a fixed number of working hours); 'flexible employment' refers to employees with a flexible employment relationship (*i.e.* having an employment contract of <1 year without perspective of a permanent contract, and/or having an employment contract for an indefinite number of working hours) and 'unemployment' (*i.e.* according to the ILO definition: not working or working <12 h per week and actively seeking for work).[4] We excluded people who indicated to be self-employed, since this concerns a (small) group of people with a very specific type of employment, which is neither standard nor flexible.

Independent Variables (Respondent and Partner)

The explanatory variable *employment situation partner* is measured in the same way as our dependent variable, distinguishing between standard employment, flexible employment, and unemployment. Highest *level of education* and highest *level of education partner* are measured by six educational categories: elementary education or lower vocational education (BO/LBO), intermediate general education (MAVO), higher general education (HAVO/VWO), intermediate vocational education (MBO), higher vocational education (HBO), and university (WO). We decided to combine elementary education and lower vocational education in one category, as the former contained only a small percentage of respondents in our data. *Age* and *age partner* are measured by three categories: 15- to 29-years old, 30- to 34-years old, and 35- to 39-years old. *Ethnicity* and *ethnicity partner* are included as dummy variables referring to natives (0) and non-natives (1). Non-natives are defined as people with at least one parent born abroad.[5]

To measure the labour market situation partners face, we added the aggregate *unemployment rate* (percentage unemployed labour force) in the year of the survey to the micro data. These statistics are based on figures from Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2009). We also added the level of *economic globalization*, which is measured through the economic dimension of the KOF Index of Globalization (Dreher, 2006).

An overview of all variables is presented in Table 1, for males and females separately. Note that the characteristics of males are the females' partner characteristics and vice versa.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

To find out to what extent employment precarity among young people in the Netherlands is related to employment precarity of the partner, we first contrast male respondent's employment situation with their female partner's employment situation in Table 2. In the same

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of all variables analysed (males, $N = 87{,}204$; females, $N = 87{,}204$

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (SD) Males	Mean (SD) Females
Dependent variable				
Employment situation				
Standard employment (ref.)	0	1	0.94	0.85
Flexible employment	0	1	0.04	0.08
Unemployment	0	1	0.02	0.07
Independent variables				
Level of education				
Elementary/Lower vocational (ref.)	0	1	0.19	0.13
Intermediate general	0	1	0.05	0.07
Higher general	0	1	0.05	0.07
Intermediate vocational	0	1	0.42	0.44
Higher vocational	0	1	0.19	0.21
University	0	1	0.10	0.08
Age				
15- to 30-year old (ref.)	0	1	0.32	0.48
30- to 35-year old	0	1	0.36	0.33
35- to 40-year old	0	1	0.32	0.19
Ethnicity				
Native (ref.)	0	1	0.91	0.90
Non-native	0	1	0.09	0.10
Unemployment rate	3.46	8.46	5.86(1.58)	5.86(1.58)
Globalization index	86.78	95.54	91.32(2.63)	91.32(2.63)

Source: Dutch Labor Force Survey (1992–2007).

Table 2 Employment situation respondent by employment situation partner

	Total (%)		Total (%)	Within employment category (%)
Male respondents ($N = 87{,}204$)				
Standard employment	94.0	Standard employed partner	81.0	86.2
		Flexible partner	7.1	7.6
		Unemployed Partner	5.8	6.2
Flexible employment	3.9	Standard employed partner	2.9	75.8
		Flexible partner	0.6	14.7
		Unemployed partner	0.4	9.5
Unemployment	2.1	Standard employed partner	1.4	66.0
		Flexible partner	0.2	11.1
		Unemployed partner	0.5	22.8
Female respondents ($N = 87{,}204$)				
Standard employment	85.4	Standard employed partner	81.0	94.9
		Flexible partner	2.9	3.4
		Unemployed partner	1.4	1.6
Flexible employment	7.9	Standard employed partner	7.1	89.8
		Flexible partner	0.6	7.2
		Unemployed partner	0.2	3.0
Unemployment	6.7	Standard employed partner	5.8	87.2
		Flexible partner	0.4	5.5
		Unemployed partner	0.5	7.3

Source: Dutch Labor Force Survey (1992–2007).

way, we compare female respondent's employment situation to their male partner's employment situation. Table 2, first of all, shows that women more often find themselves in a precarious labour market situation than men: i.e. 7.9 per cent of all women has a flexible job, versus 3.9 per cent of all men, and, 6.7 per cent is unemployed versus 2.1 per cent of all men.

In addition, we learn from Table 2 that 14.7 per cent of all male respondents with a flexible job has a female partner with a flexible job, versus 7.6 per cent of all men with a standard job and 11.1 per cent of all men being unemployed. Furthermore, we find that 7.2 per cent of all women with a flexible job has a partner in flexible employment, versus 3.4 per cent of all women with a standard job and 5.5 per cent of all women being unemployed. In the same way, we see that both men and women who are unemployed more often have an unemployed partner (22.8 and 7.3 per cent, respectively), compared to people with a standard job (6.2 and 1.6 per cent) or a flexible job (9.5 and 3.0 per cent). In addition, men and women with a standard job more often have a partner with standard employment (86.2 and 94.9 per cent, respectively), than people with a flexible job (75.8 and 89.8 per cent) or in unemployment (66.0 cent and 87.2 per cent).

From these findings, we can conclude that the bivariate relationship between partners' employment situation points towards double flexible employment within households, as well as double standard employment and double unemployment. With regard to the occurrence of flexible employment and unemployment within one couple, the results do not show that this combination is more prevalent than, for instance, the occurrence of a flexible partner with a standard employed partner, or an unemployed with a standard employed partner. So, particularly the evidence of double flexible employment supports our hypothesis that there is a positive association between partners' precarious employment (H2a and H2b), instead of a negative association (H1a and H1b).

Multivariate Analysis

To test whether the positive relationship between partners' employment situation remains after controlling for important respondent and partner characteristics, and, to find out *why* this positive relationship exists, we estimated multivariate models. In Tables 3 and 4, we present the results of multinomial logistic regression analysis on employment situation, both for unemployment and flexible employment versus standard employment, for men and women separately.

In Model 1, we first estimate the effect of partner's employment situation on respondent's employment situation. From this model, we observe that there is a positive association between having a flexible partner and being in flexible employment oneself, compared to being in standard employment (logit effect of 0.792 for both men and women). This finding supports H2a. In addition, there is a positive association between having a flexible partner and being in unemployment, compared to being in standard employment (logit effect of 0.649 for men and 0.556 for women). This result is in line with H2b.

How can we explain this positive association between partners' precarious employment? The by-product explanation assumed no influence of partners on each other's career, but because of homogamy in education (H3a and H3b), age (H4a and H4b), and ethnicity (H5a and H5b) partners are alike and have similar jobs. In addition, partners face the same labour market circumstances, such as the aggregate unemployment rate (H6a and H6b) and the level of economic globalization (H7 and H7b), which affect the employment situation one finds oneself in. If these explanations hold true (assuming that there are no other explanations), the positive association between partners' employment situation should disappear, or at least turn non-significant, when controlling for partners' educational level, age, ethnicity, unemployment rate, and level of globalization. In addition to these by-product explanations, however, we expected that partners influence each other through partner effects (H8a and H8b). This implies that part of the association between partners' labour market situation remains unexplained after including respondent and partner characteristics.[6]

Model 2 takes all respondent and partner characteristics into account. However, to strictly test our hypotheses (H3a and H3b, H4a and H4b, and H5a and H5b), we need to add the respondent and partner characteristics (*i.e.* educational level, age and ethnicity) one by one to Model 1. Tables 5 and 6 show the results of these additional models. Model 1b in Tables 5 and 6 shows that by adding the *educational level* of the respondent and partner to Model 1 (as displayed in Tables 3 and 4), the logit effect of having a partner with a flexible job on being in flexible employment oneself (compared to standard employment) slightly decreases from 0.792 to 0.737 for both men and women. In addition, the logit effect of having a flexible partner on being unemployed decreases from 0.649 to 0.514 for men, and from 0.556 to 0.461 for women.

In Model 1c, the *age* of the respondent and partner are added to Model 1b, and it appears from this model that, concerning the association between partners'

Table 3 Multinomial logistic regression on unemployment and flexible employment for male respondents ($N = 87{,}204$)

	Unemployment			Flexible employment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	−4.057**	−3.238**	−5.315**	−3.315**	−2.677**	−8.980**
Employment situation partner						
Standard employment partner (ref.)	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Flexible employment partner	0.649**	0.405**	0.396**	0.792**	0.649**	0.648**
Unemployment partner	1.574**	1.246**	1.131**	0.556**	0.448**	0.459**
Level of education						
Elementary/lower vocational (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Intermediate general		−0.093	−0.092		−0.116	−0.118
Higher general		−0.152	−0.161		0.062	0.059
Intermediate vocational		−0.598**	−0.594**		−0.457**	−0.462**
Higher vocational		−0.736**	−0.736**		−0.408**	−0.412**
University		−0.310**	−0.311**		−0.544**	−0.545**
Level of education partner						
Elementary/lower vocational partner (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Intermediate general partner		−0.297**	−0.294**		−0.109	−0.112
Higher general partner		−0.376**	−0.362**		0.022	0.009
Intermediate vocational partner		−0.591**	−0.552**		−0.136**	−0.147**
Higher vocational partner		−0.470**	−0.418**		−0.004	−0.017
University partner		−0.564**	−0.480**		0.123	0.101
Age						
15- to 30-year old (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	
30- to 35-year old		−0.202**	−0.168**		−0.458**	−0.466**
35- to 40-year old		−0.023	0.029		−0.635**	−0.643**
Age partner						
15- to 30-year-old partner (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
30- to 35-year-old partner		−0.224**	−0.208**		−0.195**	−0.198**
35- to 40-year-old partner		−0.229**	−0.214*		−0.228**	−0.230**
Ethnicity						
Native (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Non-native		1.073**	1.133**		0.913**	0.902**
Ethnicity partner						
Native partner (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Non-native partner		0.354**	0.433**		0.275**	0.263**
Unemployment rate			0.265**			0.072**
Economic globalization			0.004			0.065**
Model Chi^2	831	2.776	3.064	831	2.776	3.064
Degrees of freedom	4	36	40	4	36	40

*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$.

Source: Dutch Labor Force Survey (1992–2007).

flexible employment, for men the logit effect decreases to 0.718 and for women to 0.721. In addition, the association between female's flexible employment and male's unemployment decreases (*i.e.* from 0.514 to 0.501) after including both *age* variables, while the association between male's flexible employment and female's unemployment is stronger (i.e. 0.535 instead of 0.461) after including *age*.

In Model 2 (Tables 3 and 4), *ethnicity* of the respondent and partner are added to Model 1b (Tables 5 and 6). It then appears that the effect of having a partner with a flexible job on being in flexible employment oneself (compared to standard employment) decreases a little, but it is still existing (*i.e.* 0.649 for men and 0.657 for women). A similar result is found for the effect of having a flexible partner on being unemployed: this effect has decreased to 0.405 for men and to 0.458 for women.

In brief, the results in Tables 3–6 revealed that both similarities between partners in educational level and ethnicity do (partially) account for the positive

Table 4 Multinomial logistic regression on unemployment and flexible employment for female respondents ($N = 87{,}204$)

	Unemployment			Flexible employment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	−2.635**	−1.914**	0.141	−2.430**	−1.696**	−0.682
Employment situation partner						
Standard employment partner (ref.)	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Flexible employment partner	0.556**	0.458**	0.490**	0.792**	0.657**	0.661**
Unemployment partner	1.574**	1.257**	1.138**	0.649**	0.408**	0.380**
Level of education						
Elementary/lower vocational (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Intermediate general		−0.338**	−0.340**		−0.282**	−0.283**
Higher general		−0.861**	−0.836**		−0.535**	−0.530**
Intermediate vocational		−0.926**	−0.886**		−0.577**	−0.568**
Higher vocational		−1.334**	−1.290**		−0.703**	−0.692**
University		−1.520**	−1.444**		−0.814**	−0.795**
Level of education partner						
Elementary/lower vocational partner (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Intermediate general partner		−0.309**	−0.308**		−0.224**	−0.224**
Higher general partner		−0.370**	−0.379**		−0.195**	−0.197**
Intermediate vocational partner		−0.361**	−0.357**		−0.220**	−0.219**
Higher vocational partner		−0.417**	−0.423**		−0.220**	−0.221**
University partner		−0.208**	−0.213**		−0.203**	−0.205**
Age						
15- to 30-year old (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
30- to 35-year old		0.167	0.192*		−0.234**	−0.228**
35- to 40-year old		0.320**	0.355**		−0.050	−0.042
Age partner						
15- to 30-year-old partner (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
30- to 35-year-old partner		0.087*	0.122**		−0.164**	−0.157**
35- to 40-year-old partner		0.341**	0.385**		0.066	0.074
Ethnicity						
Native (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Non-native		0.563**	0.641**		0.466**	0.484**
Ethnicity partner						
Native partner (ref.)		ref.	ref.		ref.	ref.
Non-native partner		0.127**	0.174**		0.154**	0.167**
Unemployment rate			0.171**			0.031*
Economic globalization			−0.035**			−0.013
Model Chi^2	831	3.780	4.362	831	3.780	4.362
Degrees of freedom	4	36	40	4	36	40

*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$.

Source: Dutch Labor Force Survey (1992–2007).

relationship between partners' flexible employment and between partners' unemployment and flexible employment. H3a, H3b, H5a, and H5b are thus supported by our results. Age homogamy does explain the positive association between partners' flexible employment and between female's flexible employment and male's unemployment, however, it does not explain the association between male's flexible employment and female's unemployment (confirming H4a and partly confirming H4b). Also, we conclude that the positive relationship between partners' flexible employment still remains after controlling for these respondent and partner characteristics.

In Model 3 (Table 3 and 4), we also control for the labour market situation both partners face (*i.e.* the aggregate unemployment rate and level of economic globalization). It appears that the positive effect of partner's flexible employment on respondent's flexible employment does not substantially differ from Model 2 (*i.e.* 0.648 for men and 0.661 for women). A similar

Table 5 Multinomial logistic regression on unemployment and flexible employment for male respondents (additional models) ($N = 87{,}204$)

	Unemployment			Flexible employment		
	Model 1b	**Model 1c**	**Model 2b**	**Model 1b**	**Model 1c**	**Model 2b**
	(M1 + education)	(M1b + age)	(M2 + unemployment)	(M1 + education)	(M1b + age)	(M2 + unemployment)
Intercept	−3.093**	−2.933**	−4.940**	−2.837**	−2.442**	−2.573**
Employment situation partner						
Standard employment partner (ref.)	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Flexible employment partner	0.514**	0.501**	0.396**	0.737**	0.718**	0.649**
Unemployment partner	1.332**	1.351**	1.131**	0.462**	0.529**	0.456**

*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$.

Source: Dutch Labor Force Survey (1992–2007).

Table 6 Multinomial logistic regression on unemployment and flexible employment for female respondents (additional models) ($N = 87{,}204$)

	Unemployment			Flexible Employment		
	Model 1b	**Model 1c**	**Model 2b**	**Model 1b**	**Model 1c**	**Model 2b**
	(M1 + education)	(M1b + age)	(M2 + unemployment)	(M1 + education)	(M1b + age)	(M2 + unemployment)
Intercept	−1.511**	−1.804**	−3.341**	−1.699**	−1.601**	−2.005**
Employment situation partner						
Standard employment partner (ref.)	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Flexible employment partner	0.461**	0.535**	0.484**	0.737**	0.721**	0.659**
Unemployment partner	1.332**	1.360**	1.138**	0.512**	0.496**	0.380**

*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$.

Source: Dutch Labor Force Survey (1992–2007).

result is found for unemployed men with a partner in flexible employment (*i.e.* 0.396), but not for unemployed women with a flexible partner. The positive association between men's flexible employment and women's unemployment even increases from 0.458 to 0.490. Also Model 2b, (Table 5 and 6) in which only the aggregate unemployment rate is added to Model 2, does not show any change in the logit effect of having a partner with a flexible job on being in flexible employment, and almost no change in the logit effect of having a partner with a flexible job on being in unemployment for men. For unemployed women we find, again, that the positive association with partner's flexible employment increases (from 0.458 to 0.484) after adding the aggregate unemployment rate. This also implies that adding the level of globalization to this model does not substantially change the positive association between women's unemployment and their partner's flexible employment. In brief, these findings indicate that H6a, H6b, H7a and H7b cannot be supported by our results.

After controlling for explanations of educational, age and ethnic homogamy, as well as shared labour market restrictions, we find that the positive relationship between partners' precarious employment has decreased to some extent, but still exists. Although there might be additional explanations for this relationship, we did control for the most relevant characteristics that are usually used in explaining individual's employment situation. Therefore, we believe to have indications for the fact that partners influence each other's careers, although we could not test for direct measures of partner support. Accordingly, this confirms our last hypotheses (H8a and H8b).

Conclusion and Discussion

In this article, we focused on the question to what extent employment precarity comes in young couples in the Netherlands. It appeared that, according to theories on homogamy, young people's employment situation does positively relate to the partner's employment situation, that is to say, individuals with a standard job tend to have a partner in standard employment, individuals with a flexible job tend to have a partner in flexible employment, and those in unemployment tend to have an unemployed partner. In addition, the combination of flexible employment and unemployment appears to be common within couples. These findings do not support an economic approach, assuming a negative relationship between partners' employment situation.

The fact that precarious employment is concentrated among young couples does not point towards an optimistic future perspective on social inequality within the Netherlands. Although nowadays the number of households 'united' in precarious employment might still be rather low and the consequences of double precarious employment might hence not seem to be too serious, a further increase in the number of individuals that is in precarious employment might be expected in the near future, in light of the trend towards labour market flexibilization since the 1990s. This also implies that more and more young couples will be involved in much financial insecurity, which might hinder them to buy a house or to start a family.

To explain the positive relationship between partners' precarious employment, we distinguished three possible explanations: *i.e.* assortative mating, shared restrictions, and partner effects. We found that the positive relationship between partners' employment precarity is only partially due to the fact that partners select each other on the basis of similar characteristics, like level of education, age, and ethnicity. We did not find, however, that the fact that both partners face the same labour market circumstances, like the aggregate unemployment rate and the level of economic globalization, explains (part of) the positive association between partners' flexible employment. As the positive relationship between partners' flexible employment still exists after ruling out the first two explanations, we can conclude that partner effects are also present. The fact that partners can positively affect each others' career through their labour market resources possibly makes the consequences of the trend towards labour market flexibilization less severe. At least, the existence of partner effects leads to the belief that something can be done to prevent couples from being in double precarious employment: if partners do lack the resources to help each other in finding a standard job, government agencies can compensate this by offering their help. Would we have found that double precarious employment is mainly the consequence of assortative mating and shared restrictions, then the occurrence of employment precarity within young couples would have seemed to be less inevitable.

In this article, we confirmed a positive association between partners' employment situation. By ruling out the fact that this association is a by-product of similarity between partners in characteristics like educational level, age, and ethnicity (*i.e.* characteristics of which we know that they precede one's labour market situation), we believe that partners do influence each other's career, as indicated earlier. Future research, however, should provide a more direct test of the existence of such partner effects, which was not possible with our (cross-sectional) data, unfortunately. Within this respect, it would be a logical next step to use dynamic data in future research. This would allow to disentangle the

causal relationship between partners' employment situation, by investigating how a change in one partner's employment status changes the other partner's status (or not). We could then also observe whether both sexes do affect each other equally, or if men, for instance, only affect the female partner's career, and not the other way round.

Notes

1 Although it would also be interesting to study assortative mating on occupational status, the causal relationship with partner selection and labour market situation is less clear. In addition, occupational status is strongly depending of level of education, and it is not possible to include the occupational status of unemployed people. Therefore, we decided not to consider assortative mating on occupational status.

2 As the age of 39 years might seem too old to study young people, we have replicated the analyses for respondents not >34 years, and once again for respondents until the age of 25 years. Since the results of these analyses are similar to the results of the analysis for respondents aged ≤39 years, we keep the age of 39 years as the upper limit.

3 The prevalence of non-employment (*e.g.* housewives or disabled workers) among young people is too low to include as an additional type of employment in our analysis.

4 Both our definition of standard and our definition of flexible employment do not differentiate part-time employment from fulltime employment. The reason for this is that, in the Netherlands, part-time jobs carry the same social rights as fulltime jobs (such as unemployment benefits, parental leave, *etc.*).

5 Distinguishing between types of ethnicities or generations of migrants was unfortunately not possible, as this information was not available for all survey years.

6 In fact, we are mainly interested in the association between partners' employment situation, which we try to explain by controlling for homogamy and shared labour market restrictions in order to observe partner effects (which we cannot measure directly with our data). This implies that we do not discuss the main effects of the respondent and partner characteristics. As these effects might still be interesting to see, we do present them in Tables 3 and 4.

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