

PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS PREDICTING JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOUR OF LONG- TERM WELFARE RECIPIENTS IN THE NETHERLANDS*

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Abstract

In spite of active labour market policies, a considerable number of welfare recipients in the Netherlands are long-term unemployed. In order to investigate the job search behaviour of this group, we developed a model of job search behaviour, inspired by the theory of planned behaviour, expectancy value theory and self-determination theory. Survey data relating to 193 individuals receiving welfare benefits for at least one year were collected. A model, consisting of six social-demographic and eight social and psychosocial variables, was tested with hierarchical multiple regression. Seven factors were found to be positively related to job search behaviour: being a non-Western immigrant, having recently started receiving welfare benefits, receiving encouragement in searching for work from an intimate social network, having a job search requirement imposed, having an expectation of finding a job, individual work valence and job search attitudes. Of these, duration of welfare assistance, the encouragement of an intimate social network, work valence and job search attitude appeared to be mediating factors. The article concludes that activation policy might benefit from a combination of

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improving job searching attitudes, for instance by discussing ideas about the valence of employment and expectations of success or by considering potential barriers to finding employment within social networks, and introducing a clear requirement to search for jobs, in particular for native Dutch, single mothers and people who have been in receipt of benefits for a long period of time. Such policies have been absent in the Netherlands for a long time, priority being given to those with better chances in the labour market.

Keywords: job search; long-term unemployment; welfare beneficiaries; work attitudes, social networks, social-psychological behavioural theories

1. INTRODUCTION

In a review of the effectiveness of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP), Kluge (2010:11) concludes that ‘private sector incentive schemes appear to be set up in a way that works, and it is exactly the modern types of job search programmes – which are the ones that typically include sanction elements – that seem to be particularly effective.’ In addition, Kluge identifies those ALMP programmes that offer a combination of ‘services and sanctions’ as particularly effective. Both types of programme are intended to stimulate the job search behaviour of people who are outside the labour market, and Kluge appears to conclude that job search behaviour – in the context of these kinds of activation programmes – may result in finding a job. Two amendments can be made to that conclusion: First, the economic literature is inconclusive on the relationship between active job search behaviour and finding a job. Abbring *et al.* (2005); Blundell *et al.* (2004) and Meyer (1995) all found, like Kluge, impressive positive effects resulting from both stricter monitoring of job search behaviour and from a combination of ‘sticks’ (tougher monitoring of job searching) and ‘carrots’ (more job assistance) on the job search behaviour of welfare recipients. In contrast however, Ashenfelter *et al.* (1999) did not find positive outcomes from the introduction of stricter enforcement of job search behaviour. Also, while Gelderblom *et al.* (2007) and Kanfer *et al.* (2001) found a clear positive relationship between job search behaviour and re-employment, Boswell *et al.* (2012) warned that the resulting job search behaviour may stem not from genuine efforts to find a job but purely to meet job search requirements. Secondly, it is as yet unclear whether these results can be attributed to these ‘modern’ activation programmes or whether other individual characteristics or the social environment of welfare recipients need to be considered as well.

This article combines elements of both strands in the literature. Rather than studying the employment outcomes of intensive job search, it focuses on the factors that might explain recent trends in job search behaviour: is it determined by ‘modern activation instruments’, that is, by the stricter requirements for job searching, or are other factors relevant as well? Job search behaviour has often been investigated

within the field of social psychology, but this investigation has seldom related to welfare recipients. Such studies focus on psychological factors, such as motivations, expectations and attitudes. When social factors are included, these are usually limited to the subjective norm, or the pressure enforced by social networks, as suggested by the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This article attempts to explain the job search behaviour of long-term welfare recipients by looking at the influence of job search requirements in combination with social-demographic and psychological predictors of job search behaviour as well as the normative influence of social networks.

1.1. ACTIVATION OF LONG-TERM WELFARE RECIPIENTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Like most OECD countries, the Netherlands has reformed its welfare policy in the last twenty years (Knijn *et al.* 2007; Van Berkel 2009). The post-industrial labour market is a more flexible service-based economy in which the position of unskilled workers is more vulnerable and their jobs less permanent and less protected. Single mothers, low skilled young adults and migrants constitute particularly vulnerable categories in the labour market (Bonoli 2005; Clasen and Clegg 2006) and hence represent a majority among welfare recipients. In line with other OECD countries, policy reforms in the Netherlands, motivated by the desire to reduce public spending as well as to improve individual well-being through labour market participation, are aimed at re-activating these categories of welfare recipients. In addition to major policy reforms such as the obligation for single mothers to work, the conditional (on training and participation in Youth Work programmes) welfare benefit for young adults till the age of 27, and the decentralisation of activation budgets to the municipalities, many other forms of activation targeted at welfare recipients have been introduced. Examples are: training programmes to improve education levels and provide work experience and to enhance motivation and specific capabilities necessary for re-entering the labour market, mediation and other employment assistance programmes, and negative incentives, such as more stringent requirements for inclusion within social security regulations (Brenninkmeijer and Blonk 2012; Sol *et al.* 2011; and van der Aa 2012). These measures have not been successful for everyone. The most recent data are from 2007. At that time, 80 per cent of Dutch welfare recipients had been receiving benefits for at least one year while 43 per cent had done so for five years or more (CBS 2013). Because of continuously failing activation, this group is considered as the 'granite file'. This concept refers to the assumption that they have very little chance of getting or holding a job, often due to 'multiple complex problems' including, for example, possessing obsolete skills, having mental and physical health issues, addiction or problematic family situations (Giesen *et al.* 2007). In relation to single parents, Knijn *et al.* (2007) comes to the same conclusion.

Studies of the effectiveness of activation policies either focus on macro-data on the relation between public spending on activation and unemployment rates, or on factors

predicting individual job search behaviour and successful re-employment. The latter usually focus on personal and psychological characteristics and the conclusions are indecisive. The influence of social networks on activation has received less attention so far, although the need to investigate social influences has recently been advocated by Wanberg (2012). The social environment may influence welfare recipients positively, for instance by motivating them to find work or by offering support, or negatively, in cases when, for example, there is no commitment to employment or when voluntary time-consuming activities within informal support networks are expected. Gelderblom *et al.* (2007) reviewed the international literature on a variety of 'soft' predictors of successful work reintegration, and concluded that the search for psychological explanations completely overshadowed the search for social network influences. Moreover, the authors highlight the fragmented nature of many studies. For that reason, they make a strong argument for an integrated approach which might provide a better understanding of the relative influence of both psychological mechanisms and social network factors, thereby clarifying the interrelationship between individual and social factors.

1.2. PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS EXPLAINING JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOUR

Many researchers have successfully tried to predict job search behaviour using a variety of social-psychological perspectives on behavioural change, such as the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), expectancy value theory (EVT) or self-determination theory (SDT). Sometimes these theories have been combined in order to increase the explanatory power. Van Hooft *et al.* (2004a) discusses both TPB and EVT as perspectives that are useful for studying the job search behaviour of unemployed and employed persons. Vansteenkiste *et al.* (2005) investigate whether combining the EVT and SDT increases the explanatory power of a model that predicts the job search behaviour of unemployed people. We briefly discuss these three theories in order to develop a combined model.

The theory of planned behaviour or TPB (Ajzen 1985, 1991) identifies three factors that influence behavioural intention and subsequently behaviour itself: attitude or the positive or negative evaluation of performing specific behaviour; perception of social pressure, termed the subjective norm; and self-efficacy, or perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the specific behaviour. Applied to job search behaviour, the theory of planned behaviour states that job search intention and behaviour are explained by (1) job search attitude, (2) social pressure to look for a job, and (3) self-efficacy or confidence in the ability to perform job search activities.

Expectancy value theory, or EVT (Feather 1992) states that human actions are related to expectations. These concern the perceived probability that behaviour will have the expected outcome and the evaluation of this outcome. In this theory, individuals are seen as active agents, appraising and construing situations. Applied to

job search behaviour, EVT explains job search behaviour in terms of a combination of the perceived expectation of finding a job and the subjective valuation of this outcome, termed work valence or employment commitment.

The self-determination theory or SDT (Deci and Ryan 2000) stresses the importance of developing a deeper understanding of human motivations to action. Autonomous motivations are distinguished from controlled motivations. The first are split up into intrinsic motivations and identified motivations or incentives, the latter into internally and externally regulated motivations. Actions can thus be situated on a continuum ranging from purely intrinsically motivated actions to purely externally regulated actions, or, to adopt a slightly different wording, from self-determined to non-self-determined actions. According to this theory, where a greater proportion of motivations are self-determined, this satisfies a basic psychological need for autonomy. Research points to two important findings: more self-determined behaviour generally results in higher levels of well-being and more successful behaviour, in the sense that objectives are achieved more often (Deci and Ryan 2000). Applied to job search behaviour, these motivations may be divided into autonomous motivations and controlled motivations, as was done by Vansteenkiste *et al.* (2005). Another option is to distinguish all four kinds of motivations: (1) job search attitude being the autonomous intrinsic motivation, (2) work valence being the autonomous identified motivation, (3) feelings of shame because of receiving welfare benefits being the controlled internally regulated motivation and (4) the requirement to apply for jobs, imposed by the welfare agency, being the controlled externally regulated motivation.

Surveying these theories we see that they overlap in the concepts they use. Attitude acts as a predictor in both TPB and SDT, as does work valence in EVT and SDT.

Hypotheses about the relationship between these variables and job search behaviour have been tested in various original studies and meta-analyses. Most of these studies relate to recently unemployed people. Van Hooft *et al.* (2004a) studied employed as well as unemployed people, and a meta-analysis by Kanfer *et al.* (2001) combined both groups, although the majority, 63 per cent, were unemployed. Van Hooft *et al.* (2004a) found job search attitude to be strongly related to job searching, for both employed and unemployed persons. Self-efficacy in job searching was found to be related to job searching for unemployed persons by Wanberg *et al.* (1999) and van Hooft *et al.* (2004a), but not for employed persons (Van Hooft *et al.* 2004a). Self-esteem was found to be related to job search behaviour in the meta-analysis by Kanfer *et al.* (2001). Feelings of shame, the controlled internally regulated motivation according to SDT, provides a concept that, to our knowledge, has never been tested in relation to job searching. Studies on the expectation of finding a job show inconsistent results. Van Hooft *et al.* (2004a) found no relationship to exist either for unemployed or for employed persons. Vansteenkiste *et al.* (2005), investigating unemployed people, found, contrary to expectations, a moderately negative correlation: the more people expected to find a job, the less active they were in job searching. Their explanation for this result was that highly confident individuals may give priority to activities other

than job searching because they are sure they will find a job in the near future. Feather (1992) did not find a relationship in two studies on unemployed people. However, he used the broader concept of control optimism instead of expectation to find a job. Control optimism also incorporated feelings of hopelessness and general control over external situations. Subsequently, Feather assessed that the concept of control optimism had been too general. Work valence was found by all the above mentioned authors to be related to job search behaviour. Social pressure was investigated by van Hooft *et al.* (2004a) and found to be related to job searching. A review by Boswell *et al.* (2012) came to the same conclusion.

These results tempt us to investigate whether the abovementioned variables may be organised into a theoretical model that we can test for its ability to predict the job search behaviour of 'the granite file', welfare recipients who are long-term unemployed. However, before developing a research model, we want to go deeper into the concept of social pressure as conceptualised in the TPB, since there is an on-going discussion on cultural aspects of poverty and unemployment that have a negative influence on job search behaviour.

1.3. SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON INDIVIDUAL WORK ETHICS AND JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOUR

Government welfare programmes are implicitly based on the notion that unemployed welfare recipients share the value of commitment to employment. Yet, several studies suggest that social dynamics may result in other values, with corresponding consequences for job search behaviour. Lewis (1966) found that a concentration of poor and unemployed people leads to a culture characterised by the erosion of hope and a declining appreciation of paid work. Wilson (1987) in 'The Truly Disadvantaged', has studied poverty within black ghettos of American cities. He concluded that the gradual disappearance of unskilled jobs in the post-industrial labour market and the exodus of socio-economically strong residents from the ghettos to better neighbourhoods had left the remaining population with even fewer examples of employment success. Their lost career expectations resulted in people attributing more value to activities such as caring for relatives, performing voluntary work, or working in the informal economy.

Although ghettos with extremely high concentrations of unemployed workers and high levels of poverty are still uncommon in the Netherlands, in that country too, social networks of unemployed people are characterised by higher unemployment rates. 28 per cent of the non-working population knows at least three other unemployed persons, compared to thirteen per cent among the working population (SCP 2010a). Nordenmark (1999) found similar results in Sweden, although he found no relation with work ethic and concluded that factors such as class, ethnicity, age and regional unemployment figures explained unemployment. Engbersen (1990) carried out a qualitative study on the work and income strategies of 221 Dutch long-term unemployed individuals and came to a more subtle conclusion. He portrayed six

types of job search attitude in the context of future expectations and values attached to consumption and employment. In the most prevalent conformist culture, people experienced pressure from their social network to find a job, and they tried to do so by traditional means. Another large group, the 'retreatists', valued employment but had given up hope and made no effort to improve their situation. The other groups were relatively small. 'Ritualists' had given up hope but continued to apply for jobs and visit the employment agency against their better judgement. People with an autonomous unemployment culture displayed alternative work ethics: striving for a paid job was not perceived to be the ultimate good and they accepted the jobless situation. The enterprising and calculating unemployed still strove for high consumption levels; however, they tried to achieve these by informal or even illegal means. Two recent Dutch studies of the unemployed were more in line with Nordenmarks observations, finding that in general, there is no such phenomenon as an unemployment culture; it is only a very small minority that subscribe to it (SCP 2010b; SCP 2008; Koen *et al.* 2013). These inconsistent findings guide us to a more sophisticated measurement of social pressure than is usual. For this, we distinguish two kinds of social pressure: the encouragement of the intimate social network to find a job, and the work valence of this social network.

1.4. AIM OF THE STUDY

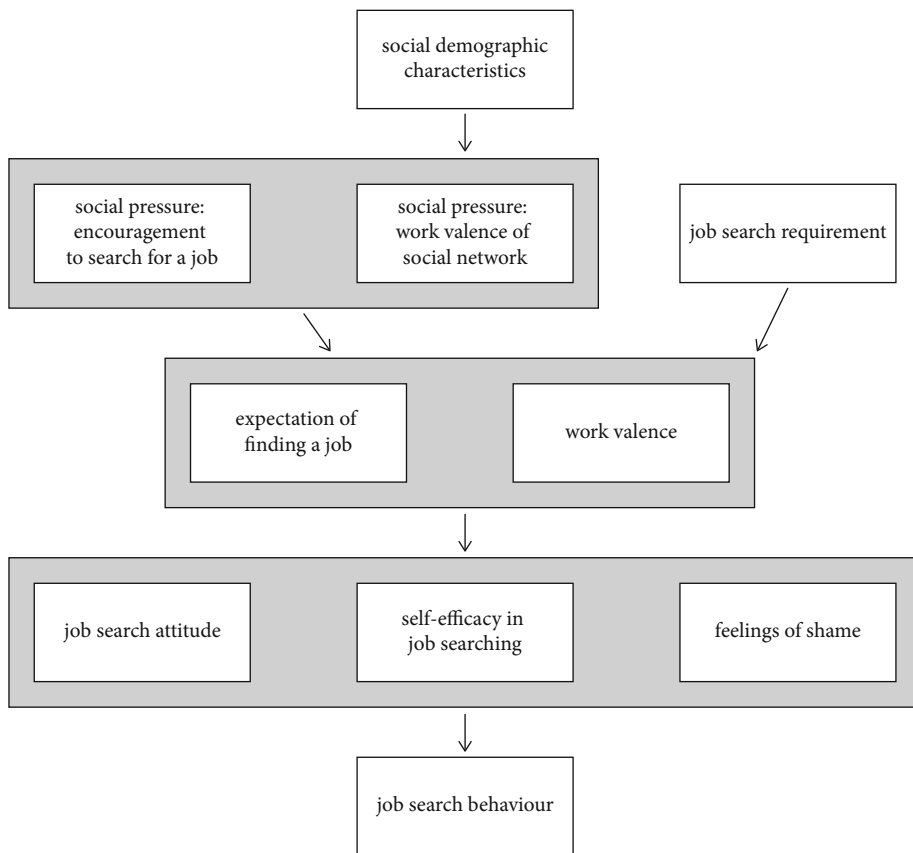
In order to achieve a better understanding of the factors that influence the job search behaviour of long-term welfare recipients, we have developed a model that combines the above mentioned variables. Figure 1 presents this overall theoretical causal model. We assume that external influences will contribute to individuals' normative and motivational disposition to job searching.

If the social environment of the welfare recipient encourages, as well as puts pressure on, welfare recipients to look for work, and if this is also required by the welfare office, this will result in the recipient valuing work and it may raise their expectations of finding a job. Such a motivational and normative disposition will result in a positive job search attitude, will improve self-efficacy to find a job and will also result in the recipient feeling ashamed of not having a job yet. Finally we assume that these attitudes will influence the actual job search behaviour positively.

In order to explore the interrelationships between variables we follow a step-by-step procedure, starting with those variables that are most 'external' and concluding with the psychological variables. The following order has been chosen: (1) social-demographical variables, used as a group of control variables, (2) social influence of the intimate social network or social pressure, (3) job search requirements, (4) expectations, respectively the expectation to find a job and the evaluation of the expected outcome, which is work valence, (5) motivations and attitudes: job search attitude, self-efficacy in job searching, and feelings of shame. Following this stepwise procedure we investigate whether the various variables have a direct, an indirect or no

effect at all on job search behaviour. The first block of social-demographical variables includes single parenthood, because it is assumed to be a barrier to employability, and also duration of welfare assistance, because of its known relationship with many employment-related variables. The first aim of our study is to explore which of these variables influences job search behaviour and how these variables are interrelated. The second aim is to explore in more detail whether and how the values and norms of the intimate social network influence job search behaviour. The study is part of a research project in which structural characteristics of the intimate social network and social resources accessible through network members are also assessed (Varekamp *et al.*, submitted).

Figure 1. An inclusive model on job search behaviour



2. METHODS

2.1. STUDY DESIGN AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Activation policies in the Netherlands are decentralised, which means that each municipality has financial budget responsibility for welfare recipients and that their activation policies may differ slightly. However, all municipalities apply the same regulations, make use of the same kind of activation instruments and participate intensively in nationally coordinated networks in implementing activation programmes. For that reason we can assume that the two cities – Enschede and Utrecht – in which we collected data in 2010 and 2011, do not vary much in the way they support or sanction welfare recipients. Dutch welfare recipients are officially required to apply for jobs, unless they have a temporary exemption because of informal care obligations, a recent divorce or mental or physical health problems. For privacy reasons the researchers could not approach welfare recipients directly. Instead the welfare agencies of the two cities informed their clientele who were in receipt of welfare benefits for one year or longer, with or without the requirement to apply for jobs, about the research project in a letter. Although the anonymity of respondents was guaranteed in this letter, the procedure may have resulted in response bias; welfare recipients who were most eager to find a job may have reacted more positively to the invitation than those who were more unwilling to work. Participants could present themselves by telephone, by e-mail or by mail using a stamped, self-addressed envelope included in the invitation letter. Once participants had given permission for an interview, interviews were carried out face-to-face in their homes. Face-to-face interviews were chosen in order to help respondents of non-Dutch origin by explaining the questions, and because social network research is too detailed to be carried out by mail, telephone or internet questionnaires. An additional reason was the expectation that this method would contribute to a higher response rate. The interviews were carried out by a junior researcher and by trained Masters students in the social sciences.

2.2. MEASURES

2.2.1. *Social-demographic variables*

Six social-demographic characteristics were measured. Sex, being a single parent and ethnicity were measured as dichotomous variables. For ethnicity, respondents were divided into a group consisting of native Dutch individuals or Western immigrants and a group consisting of non-Western immigrants. Age was measured as a continuous variable. Education was measured with seven levels. For duration of welfare assistance five ranges were distinguished: 1 = 1 year, 2 = > 1 year and ≤ 2 years, 3 = > 2 years and ≤ 6 years, 4 = > 6 years and ≤ 14 years, 5 = > 14 years.

2.2.2. *Social influence of the intimate network*

'Intimate social network' is defined as the group of persons that an individual feels strongly related to. Strong ties is another word for this type of relationship. Respondents were invited to identify the persons who made up their intimate social network, up to a maximum of six people. Two continuous variables measured the influence of the intimate social network. Encouragement by this network to search for a job was measured with two 5-point Likert items. One item measured the importance that the intimate social network attributed to respondents' job searching and another item measured how motivating the intimate social network was in job searching. Respondents could give answers about these attitudes in relation to a maximum of six strong ties; the values for these ties were averaged for each of the two items, after which the two scores were totalled (Cronbach's alpha: 0.76). Work valence or employment commitment of the intimate social network was measured with ten 5-point Likert items, assessing the work valence of the strong ties. The same ten items were used to assess the work valence of the individual respondent (see below). Examples of items were: For my (strong tie), work is the most important issue in his/her life; My (strong tie) is of the opinion that people who don't work become lazy; My (strong tie) is of the opinion that being totally dedicated to your work is the best thing there is; My (strong tie) finds it humiliating to receive money without working for it; My (strong tie) is very motivated to work. The values for the strong ties were averaged for each of the ten items, after which the ten scores were totalled (Cronbach's alpha: 0.83).

2.2.3. *Job search requirement*

This concept was measured as a dichotomous variable: being required to apply for jobs.

2.2.4. *Expectations*

Two continuous variables measured respondents' expectations. The expectation of finding a job was measured in terms of five defined time spans: 1= never; 2 = after three years or more, at some point, or 'I do not know when'; 3 = within 2 years; 4 = within one year; 5 = within six months. The evaluation of the expected or hoped-for outcome, work valence or employment commitment was measured using the same ten 5-point Likert items that measured the work valence of the intimate social network. The scale is a combination of the work ethic scale and the scale measuring desire to work (van Wel *et al.* 2012). Cronbach's alpha was 0.85.

2.2.5. *Attitude and motivations*

Job search attitude was measured with three 5-point Likert items, adapted from the four-item list (Vinokur and Caplan 1987), measuring whether respondents thought job searching to be pleasant, unnecessary (reversely coded) or useful. Scores ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree (Cronbach's alpha:.74). Self-efficacy in job searching was measured with the self-esteem scale (Rosenberg 1965), consisting of ten 5-point Likert items. Examples of items were: I think that I'm just as valuable a person as someone else; I have the feeling that everything I try ends in failure; I am positive about myself; Sometimes I have the feeling that I have nothing to offer (Cronbach's alpha:.79). Feelings of shame because of being a welfare recipient were measured with one dichotomous variable.

2.2.6. *Job search behaviour*

This variable was measured with an adapted version of the validated Blau behavioural scale (1994). Nine items measured the intensity with which nine job search activities had been undertaken in the past month: these included: writing application letters, attending interviews for a position, discussing the possibility of a job with others, contacting employment agencies, searching for vacancies online or in newspapers. Answer categories ranged from 1 = (almost) never to 4 = very often (Cronbach's alpha:.88).

2.3. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

First, the correlations between all independent variables and the dependent variable were calculated (Table 1). Next, hierarchical multiple regression was employed to investigate the explanatory value of the model. Five blocks of independent variables were successively entered, as discussed in the introduction, and these are presented in Table 2. Each block of independent variables was assessed in terms of what it added to the explanation of the dependent variable after the variables of earlier blocks had been controlled for (Pallant 2005). Due to the assumed interrelatedness of independent variables, the method is not valid for comparing the relative effects of independent variables within one block (Pedhazur 2007). However, it enables us to investigate whether adding a subsequent block does influence b-values of the independent variables of earlier blocks. In that case, mediation is supposed and more is learned about how the variables are related.

Analysis was performed using SPSS EXPLORE to evaluate the assumption of normality. The dependent variable job search behaviour had a high skewness (1.00) and kurtosis (1.00), which may result in underestimating statistical relationships in regression analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). In order to improve normality, the variable job search behaviour was transformed to a logarithmic variable as

follows: $\text{NewVar} = \text{Lg10}(\text{OldVar})$. Skewness improved substantially (0.34) and kurtosis improved slightly (0.91). A disadvantage with transforming variables is that descriptive statistics and b-values are then difficult to interpret. For that reason, the original variable is presented in Table 1, which shows means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables. Hierarchical regression analyses were carried out using the transformed variable (Table 2).

2.4. PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSE RATES

The welfare agencies of the Dutch cities Enschede and Utrecht sent, respectively, 1280 and 1311 invitations to participate; there were 117 and 107 respondents respectively, a response rate of 8.6%. Due to language problems 21 persons were unable to express themselves properly, resulting in unsuccessful interviews. Another ten respondents did not meet the inclusion criterion of being on welfare for at least one year. This means that the final research population consisted of 193 persons.

3. RESULTS

3.1. STUDY POPULATION

Table 1 presents mean values or percentages for a number of characteristics. Women made up 56 per cent of the participants; the mean age was 43 years. Respectively 41 per cent, 34 per cent and 25 per cent had a lower, middle and higher education (not in table). 20 per cent had a paid job, for 14 hours a week on average; about two-thirds of them worked 12 hours or more weekly (not in table). 34 per cent were single parents and 51 per cent were non-Western immigrants. 49 per cent stated that bad health or psychological problems were the main reasons for not having a paid job (not in table). The duration of welfare dependency varied from one year to 31 years and averaged five years (not in table). Half of the respondents stated that they had feelings of shame because of being a welfare recipient. Encouragement by the intimate social network to search for a job and work valence among the intimate social network were perceived as rather high, respectively 6.7 on a scale from 2–10 and 34.7 on a scale from 10–50. 51 per cent of the participants reported that they were required to apply for jobs. 30 per cent expected to find a job within a half year, but 14 per cent expected they would never find a job (not in table). The individual work valence was comparable to that of the intimate network and rather high. Self-efficacy in job searching had a mean value of 38, which is rather high on a scale from 10–50. Job search attitude likewise averaged rather high: 11 on a scale from 3–15. Job search behaviour, on the other hand, averaged low at 15 on a scale from 9–36.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, percentages and correlations¹ between dependent and independent variables (n=193)

Variables (min. - max. value)	Mean or %	S.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Job search behaviour (9-36)	15.0	5.9	1.0														
Social demographic variables																	
2. Sex ² (% female)	56.0		-.23	1.0													
3. Age	42.7	9.0	-.11	-.14	1.0												
4. Education (1-7)	3.8	1.9	-.01	.02	.17	1.0											
5. Single parent ³ (%)	34.2		-.18	.57	-.21	-.05	1.0										
6. Ethnicity ⁴ (% non-Western)	50.8		.20	-.08	-.19	-.20	.08	1.0									
7. Duration of welfare assistance (1-5)	2.8	1.1	-.21	.15	.11	-.10	.09	.04	1.0								
Social influence of intimate network																	
8. Encouragement of intimate social network to search for work (2-10)	6.7	2.5	.34	-.13	-.27	.02	-.00	.32	-.25	1.0							
9. Work valence of intimate social network (10-50)	34.7	6.4	.20	-.07	-.05	-.16	-.13	.41	-.14	.45	1.0						
Job search requirement																	
10. Job search requirement ⁵ (%)	54.9		.38	-.07	.05	-.10	-.10	.12	-.03	.23	.16	1.0					
Expectancies																	
11. Expectation of finding a job (1-5)	3.1	1.5	.30	.00	-.11	-.10	.09	.13	-.21	.34	.22	.21	1.0				
12. Work valence (10-50)	34.3	7.6	.32	-.13	-.05	-.06	-.06	.50	-.18	.40	.65	.08	.29	1.0			
Attitude, motivations																	
13. Feelings of shame ⁶ (%)	50.3		.06	-.09	-.03	.07	-.00	.22	-.09	.13	.19	.10	-.11	.28	1.0		

Variables (min. - max. value)	Mean or %	S.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
14. Self-efficacy in job searching (10-50)	37.5	6.3	-.01	.08	.07	.04	.09	-.13	-.09	.01	-.06	-.04	.06	-.11	-.28	1.0	
15. Job search attitude (3-15)	10.8	3.1	.42	-.19	-.04	-.02	-.11	.26	-.11	.40	.25	.22	.36	.40	.14	.05	1.0

1 Correlations printed bold: $p < .05$ (1-tailed tested).

2 0/1 = male/female.

3 0/1 = no/yes single parent.

4 0/1 = Dutch or Western immigrant/non-Western immigrant.

5 0/1 = no/yes job search requirement.

6 0/1 = no/yes ashamed of being welfare recipient.

3.2. CORRELATIONS

The correlations between the variables are presented in Table 1. The dependent variable job search behaviour was found to be related to all social-demographic variables except age and education, meaning that women, native Dutch people or Western immigrants, single parents and individuals who received welfare for a longer period, undertook less job search behaviour. The highest correlation was with duration of welfare dependency. Job search behaviour was strongly positively correlated with the social influence variable 'an encouraging intimate social network' and the job search requirement, and moderately positively correlated with the work valence of the intimate social network. It was also strongly positively correlated with the expectation of finding a job and individual work valence. Job search behaviour was not related to self-efficacy in job searching nor to feelings of shame; however it was very strongly related to job search attitude.

Many of the independent variables were correlated. Non-Western immigrants had more encouraging intimate social networks that also had a higher work valence, and they had a higher work valence themselves. Prolonged welfare assistance was associated with poor expectations and a less encouraging intimate social network. An encouraging social network with high work valence was associated with high individual work valence. Finally, social network influences, job search requirements and expectancies were positively related to job search attitudes.

3.3. HIERARCHICAL MULTIPLE REGRESSION

Table 2 presents the contribution of all variables to the prediction of job search behaviour. By adding blocks of variables in successive steps one can see how much each new block of variables contributes. By considering the change in b-values of earlier variables one can see whether variables of a new block may operate as a mediator. We have to be aware that in cases of interrelated variables within one block, the most strongly correlating variable will 'claim' for explained variance and present a high b-value at the expense of other variables in the same block.

Table 2. Hierarchical multiple regression on job search behaviour¹

	Block 1. Social-demographic variables		Block 2. Social network influences added		Block 3. Job search requirement added		Block 4. Expectancies added		Block 5. Attitude and motivations added		
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	P
Sex ²	-.04	-.14	-.03	-.10	-.04	-.12	-.04	-.11	-.03	-.09	.26
Age	-.00	-.11	-.00	-.05	-.00	-.01	-.00	-.11	-.00	-.12	.10
Education	.00	.04	.00	.01	.01	.06	.01	.06	.01	.06	.36
Single parent ³	-.04	-.10	-.04	-.11	-.02	-.07	-.03	-.10	-.03	-.07	.38
Ethnicity ⁴	.07	.22	.04	.13	.04	.12	.02	.06	.02	.05	.52
Duration of welfare assistance	-.03	-.18	-.02	-.12	-.02	-.13	-.01	-.09	-.01	-.10	.15
Encouragement of intimate social network to search for work			.02	.28	.01	.18	.01	.13	.00	.07	.44
Work valence of intimate social network			.00	.01	.00	.01	-.00	-.10	-.00	-.06	.52
Job search requirement					.11	.34	.11	.33	.10	.31	.00
Expectation of finding a job							.02	.15	.01	.08	.28
Work valence							.00	.19	.00	.12	.22
Feelings of shame									-.02	-.05	.46
Self-efficacy in job searching									.00	-.01	.95
Job search attitude									.01	.28	.00
Variance explained (R ²)		.15		.21		.31		.36		.41	

1 The variable job search behaviour was transformed into a logarithmic variable in order to improve normality.

2 0/1= male/female.

3 0/1 = no/yes single parent.

4 0/1 = Dutch or Western immigrant/non-Western immigrant.

5 0/1 = no/yes job search requirement.

6 0/1 = no/yes ashamed of being welfare recipient

The first block consisting of six social-demographic variables explains 15 per cent of the total variance. Only being a non-Western immigrant and being a recent welfare recipient contribute significantly to job search behaviour. The second block adds two kinds of intimate social network influences. Only encouragement to find a job by the intimate social network adds significant explanatory power. Apparently, this variable mediates the other variable in this block, the work valence of the intimate social network. Ethnicity and duration of welfare assistance have lost their direct influence, which means that their influence is mediated by encouragement of the intimate social network. The total explained variance rises to 21 per cent. Block 3, the requirement imposed by the welfare agency to apply for jobs, adds significantly to job search behaviour and total explained variance rises to 31 per cent. Block 4 consists of the expectation to find a job and the valuation of the expected outcome, work valence. Both contribute and the explained variance rises to 36 per cent. The encouragement of the intimate social network to find a job has now lost its direct influence. It is apparently mediated by individual work valence. In block 5, only job search attitude adds predictive power and the total explained variance rises to 41 per cent. From the variables from earlier blocks, only job search requirement remains. This suggests that the expectation of finding a job and individual work valence are both mediated by job search attitude.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. MAIN RESULTS COMPARED TO FINDINGS OF OTHER STUDIES

We studied the job search behaviour of persons receiving welfare for one year or more. As shown in the previous section, seven out of fourteen independent variables were found to explain job search behaviour. Summarising these results the other way around, from inner to more external factors, we found that job search behaviour was strongly influenced by job search attitude. The individual work valence and the expectation to find a job both contributed to job search behaviour, partially mediated by job search attitude. A strongly influential factor, not mediated by others, was the job search requirement enforced by the welfare agency. Next, an intimate social network encouraging the individual to search for a job had a moderate influence on job searching, partially mediated by individual work valence. Finally, the two variables being a non-Western immigrant and being a recent welfare recipient both had a positive influence on job searching, partially mediated by the encouragement of the intimate social network to find a job. Being a woman or a single parent were negatively related to job searching, but these factors disappeared in the first step of the hierarchical regression. Maybe the effects of sex and single parenthood were mediated by duration of welfare.

How do the study results compare to those of previous studies on job search behaviour, most of which concern recently unemployed individuals? We found, as expected, but contrary to the findings of Feather (1992) and Vansteenkiste *et al.* (2005), that positive expectations of re-employment success lead to more enthusiastic job searching. The explanation of Vansteenkiste *et al.* for the negative relationship they found, that persons may be so optimistic that some of them postpone job searching, does not hold for our research population of long-term unemployed. We did not find a confirmation for the hypothesis that self-efficacy in job searching is related to job search activity. Self-efficacy was measured with Rosenberg's general self-esteem scale, which may account for these results. In future studies, job search self-efficacy should be measured in a more specific way. Following the self-determination theory as defined by Deci and Ryan (2000), we separate controlled motivations into feelings of shame, conceptualised as an internalised controlled motivation, and the job search requirement, conceptualised as an externally controlled motivation. Deci and Ryan did not expect there to be a relationship between controlled motivations and behaviour, and we found, in line with the theory, that feelings of shame were not related to job searching. However, and in line with Blundell *et al.* (1997), job search requirement was one of the variables most strongly and directly correlated to job searching. Apparently, if individuals are obliged to apply for jobs, perhaps at the risk of losing their welfare benefit if they don't comply, this will lead to job search activities.

Only two social-demographic characteristics, duration of welfare assistance and being a non-Western migrant, contributed to the explanation of job searching, with a long duration of welfare assistance influencing job searching negatively and being a non-Western immigrant influencing it positively. Vansteenkiste *et al.* (2005) did not find a relationship between unemployment duration and job searching. A review by Gelderblom *et al.* (2007) reports inconsistent findings in this respect. Kanfer *et al.* (2001) reviewed twenty years of research on the impact of social-demographic characteristics on job search behaviour. In a meta-analytical analysis of fifty-nine studies, they found that age, gender, education and race were weakly yet significantly correlated with job searching, with younger, male, higher educated, non-white persons found to be more active in this respect. In an earlier study, Wanberg *et al.* (1999) found that non-whites undertook more job searching activities than whites. By contrast, a recent Dutch study on job searching among unemployed persons concluded that non-Western immigrants undertake less job search behaviour (SCP 2010b). Whether the discrepancies concerning the role of ethnicity are the result of true differences between ethnic groups, diverse operationalisation of job search behaviour or high non-response rates which affect representativeness, is something that needs to be resolved in future research.

An intriguing finding from our study for which the three theories offer no explanation is that the majority of welfare recipients combined a rather high commitment to employment and a positive job search attitude with mediocre scores on job search behaviour. The same results were found in a recent Dutch study (SCP

2010b). Actually, job search intensity in European countries is substantially lower than in the US (Wanberg 2012). The authors of the Dutch report offered an explanation for the discrepancy between attitudes and behaviour which makes use of social rationality theory: persons may have a positive job search attitude, but daily unemployed life has a slowing down effect on activities, which often results in plans that will be carried out 'tomorrow'.

4.2. A CULTURE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY?

Although only a minority of our respondents had both low work valence themselves and perceived their intimate social network to have low work valence, we found a definite albeit moderate normative influence of the intimate social network on job search behaviour. This issue concerns the discussion about whether being unemployed and in receipt of welfare is a structural phenomenon only or a cultural phenomenon as well. Findings in this field are contradictory (Engbersen 1990; Nordenmark 1999; SCP 2010b; Koen *et al.* 2013). In order to make sense of this inconsistency, it is necessary to disentangle two issues: (a) do intimate social network characteristics relate to individuals' job search behaviour?; and (b) is low commitment to employment widespread in the intimate social network of welfare recipients? We found that after controlling for social-demographic factors, job search attitude and behaviour were indeed moderately correlated with the encouragement of the intimate social network to search for work. We have to bear in mind that a normative influence of the social network can be either positive or negative. The answer to the second question is that it is clear that the majority of welfare recipients in our study were not characterised by an 'unemployment culture'. However, it appeared to be present among a minority. An intriguing issue here, found by van Hooft *et al.* (2004b), is that ethnic minorities perceive more social pressure to find a job than the native Dutch. Our results point in the same direction.

4.3. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY

Our research has a number of strong features. We combined the insights of three psychosocial behavioural theories in a logical order and were able to develop a framework to understand the job search behaviour of individuals who have been on welfare for one year or more.

One limitation of this study concerns the low response rate of 8.6%. However, this is common in studies of unemployed workers and welfare recipients (Van Hooft *et al.* 2004a). It is reasonable to assume that non-response is related to job search attitudes, motivation and behaviour, which means that the representativeness of our study is definitely an issue. However, the correlations we found will be similar to those we would have found if we had studied a larger group of respondents because representativeness relates to the bias in the composition of the respondents and the

non-respondents. We cannot exclude such a bias for the variable job search behaviour. However, the correlations between job search behaviour and the independent or mediating variables will hold even within a larger and more representative sample. The explanatory factors will remain the same, and would only change if an additional moderating variable were added.

A second limitation concerns the cross-sectional design, which makes it more difficult to identify causal relations (Gelderblom *et al.* 2007). Nonetheless, logical reasoning may allow some causality to be identified: most social-demographic variables definitely precede motivations, expectations or behaviour. Hence one can safely conclude that these social-demographic variables do influence other variables. Job search behaviour was the outcome measure in our cross-sectional study. The correlation between job search behaviour and re-employment success is contested, and we have to be aware that correlations between the kind of psychosocial factors we studied and actually finding a job are substantially lower (Kanfer *et al.* 2001; Gelderblom *et al.* 2007). As a matter of fact, Boswell *et al.* (2012) point to motivations for job searching that are quite opposite to finding a job, such as meeting job search requirements in order to receive welfare benefits or staying out of work. For that reason, it is important to investigate whether the independent variables that we found to be relevant for job search behaviour are also relevant for finding and keeping a job. A third limitation is that we measured self-efficacy in job searching with a variable measuring general self-esteem. In future research this should be measured more specifically. If a positive influence can be established then, low scores on self-efficacy in specific aspects of job searching can offer leads for job counselling.

Can any practical implications be derived from the research results? Active labour market policies (ALMP) targeted at long-term welfare recipients aim to improve their employability and to prevent lifelong joblessness. ALMP is legitimised by the need to reduce national social security costs and the philosophy that employment contributes to quality of life. Our study shows that, where employability is the main concern, activation efforts should focus more on the job search attitude of long-term welfare recipients. When this motivation is low, social workers or case workers should focus not only on recent and better motivated welfare recipients but also aspire to enhance motivation of long-term welfare recipients, for instance by discussing the valence of employment. In these cases it also makes sense to take into account the fact that individuals are embedded in social networks, and to discuss barriers within the individual's social network to finding employment. If the social network is characterised by a low commitment to employment, even greater efforts are required to improve individual commitment to employment and job search attitude. Apart from working on motivation, it makes sense for social workers or case workers to check whether welfare recipients are actually trying to find work, or whether they fail to carry out their plans, in which case social or case workers could provide assistance with welfare recipients' plans and check whether they are executed. Officially requiring people to apply for jobs appears to help. On the other hand, one should realise that

searching for jobs can be complicated because individuals seeking jobs may need help with handling rejections and the negative feelings this generates (Wanberg *et al.* 2012b).

These measures will help welfare recipients in situations where jobs are available and employers eager to hire. In the case of obsolete skills, economic crises or discriminating employers, other measures, such as retraining, reduction of working hours, quotas for hard-to-place workers, or other measures targeting employers, may be more appropriate. Recent Dutch research shows that specific groups of ethnic minorities are discriminated against in the labour market, making attempts to enhance the already positive motivations of non-Western immigrants somewhat senseless (SCP 2012).

When improving the quality of life of welfare recipients is a key policy issue rather than reducing unemployment, it is not really clear what the best policy measures are. If the chances of finding a job are low, due to an economic crisis, obsolete skills or other factors, motivating unemployed people to search for jobs may not be the best way to improve their quality of life. In that case, some welfare recipients may benefit more from precisely the kind of intimate social network that is characterised by a high unemployment rate, as was found by Clark (2003). He concluded: 'Heuristically, unemployment always hurts, but it hurts less when there are more unemployed people around.'

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