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Are Men or Women More Unsettled by Fixed-Term Contracts? Gender Differences in Affective Job Insecurity and the Role of Household Context and Labour Market Positions

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Abstract

This study investigates differences in the causal effect of fixed-term contracts on affective job insecurity by gender and household context in Germany. Research shows that workers in fixed-term employment are more unsettled about their job security than are permanent employees. We contribute to the literature on subjective job insecurity by explicitly modelling the causal effect of fixed-term employment and by examining how women and men differ in this effect. We argue that gender differences in the labour market positions and a gendered division of labour in the household account for gender differences in the subjective vulnerability to fixed-term employment. We apply linear fixed effect probability models based on the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) with a sample of employees aged between 20 and 45 years. Results show that a fixed-term contract doubles the probability of big job worries compared to a permanent contract. Women are substantially more unsettled by fixed-term contracts than men across all household types. These gender differences cannot be explained by unfavourable labour market positions of women. Fixed-term employment thus seems to add to existing gender inequalities on the labour market.

Introduction

In modern economies, fixed-term contracts are a standard tool used to provide for employer-oriented flexibility on the labour market. However, from an employee's perspective, increased flexibility exposes people to the risk of social exclusion (Gundert and Hohendanner, 2014). In Germany, fixed-term contracts have consistently made up

approximately 12 per cent of employment relationships, apprenticeships included, over the past decade. This is very close to the European average (Eurostat, 2019).

Research has demonstrated that the quality of labour market integration varies between permanent employees and employees on fixed-term contracts, especially when it comes to subjective job insecurity (Keim *et al.*, 2014).

The literature differentiates between an affective and a cognitive component of subjective job insecurity. Whereby cognitive job insecurity captures the perceived likelihood of job loss, affective job insecurity captures the fear of job loss (Borg and Elizur, 1992; Huang *et al.*, 2012). This study focuses on the affective component of subjective job insecurity. Not surprisingly, there is clear evidence that people working on fixed-term contracts experience higher levels of affective job insecurity (Muñoz de Bustillo and de Pedraza, 2010; Kirves *et al.*, 2011; Keim *et al.*, 2014). Studies also show that affective job insecurity deteriorates health, well-being, and productivity (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall, 2002; Cheng and Chan, 2008; László *et al.*, 2010; Lee, Huang and Ashford, 2018).

However, not every fixed-term employee fears job loss (De Witte and Näswall, 2003). On the one hand, the probability to lose one's job after fixed-term employment varies by occupational characteristics and education (Gebel, 2010; Reichelt, 2015; Kiersztyn, 2016) and among countries (Gash and McGinnity, 2007; Gash, 2008; Gebel, 2010). On the other hand, there is research indicating that the experience of affective job insecurity in general differs according to individual characteristics such as gender and household situation (Näswall and De Witte, 2003). Against this background, studies have shown that the fear of job loss is more relevant for detrimental outcomes such as poor well-being and health than the formal employment contract (De Witte and Näswall, 2003; Origo and Pagani, 2009; Jahn, 2015). It is therefore crucial to examine the social gradient in the relationship between fixed-term employment and affective job insecurity. In light of prevailing gender inequalities on the labour market and within households, gender should substantially moderate this relationship.

This study investigates, first, whether there are gender differences in the effect of fixed-term employment on the probability of worrying about one's job security and, second, how these gender differences can be explained. Research considering gender differences in job insecurity shows mixed results and, to the best of our knowledge, there is no research on gender differences in the effect of fixed-term contracts on affective job insecurity (Keim *et al.*, 2014). Some scholars do not find any significant gender differences in cognitive or affective job insecurity when controlling for labour market characteristics (Kinnunen and Nätti, 1994; Erlinghagen, 2008; Muñoz de Bustillo and de Pedraza, 2010; Hank and Erlinghagen, 2011; Mau, Mewes and Schöneck, 2012; Hipp, 2016; Gallie *et al.*, 2017). Others show that the occurrence of gender differences in affective job insecurity depends on the welfare state model and gender

equality on the labour market (Muñoz de Bustillo and de Pedraza, 2010). Thus, gender-specific selection into different economic sectors (Lengfeld and Hirschle, 2009) and occupations (Stier and Yaish, 2014) seems to account for differences in affective job insecurity. However, there is no clear evidence that fixed-term contracts lead to different future employment prospects for men and women (Gash and McGinnity, 2007).

We argue that gender differences in the affective experience of fixed-term employment in Germany stem from gender inequalities in the labour market position and in the division of labour in the household. Although qualification differentials between men and women have vanished with educational expansion (Helbig, 2012), women still work in different jobs compared to men of equal qualification levels and choose different occupations. This is not only a major source of income inequality between men and women (e.g., Fitzenberger and Kunze, 2005; Ochsensfeld, 2014) but also associated with differences in the likelihood and usage of fixed-term employment (Reichelt, 2015). We assess whether these differences translate into different affective job insecurity levels when one works on a fixed-term contract. We also expect that differences are rooted in the household context. Family formation often triggers a traditional division of household labour (e.g., Grunow, Schulz and Blossfeld, 2012; Kühhirt, 2012), which means that men are often the main breadwinners and women tend to fulfil the role of the main carer and secondary earner (Rosenfeld, Trappe and Gornick, 2004; Trappe, Pollmann-Schult and Schmitt, 2015). Thus, a fixed-term contract may threaten men's role as family providers, but less so for women because of their lower financial contribution to the households. On the contrary, women bear the risks of career interruptions when children are born, which can be aggravated when working on fixed-term contracts. Employment uncertainties are likely to jeopardize the desire to start a family on a secure basis and are shown to delay parenthood (Kreyenfeld, 2010; Hofmann and Hohmeyer, 2013; Barbieri *et al.*, 2015; Glavin, Young and Schieman, 2020). In particular, fixed-term employment makes it more likely for women than for men to postpone parenthood (Auer and Danzer, 2016; van Wijk, de Valk and Liefbroer, 2021). The desire to start a family from a secure employment position could heighten job worries on fixed-term employment especially for women with childbearing intentions.

We add to the literature in several ways: (i) We analyse the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity with a causal claim applying fixed effects (FE) models to data from the German Socio-Economic Panel

from 1994 to 2016. (ii) We are the first to analyse the heterogeneity of this effect by gender. (iii) We discuss the connection between gender inequalities on the labour market and those in the household to explain gender differences in the subjective consequences of fixed-term employment.

Theory

The Relationship between Fixed-Term Employment and Affective Job Insecurity

Socio-psychological stress theory, based on the work of [Lazarus and Folkman \(1984\)](#), offers explanations why fixed-term employment has an impact on affective job insecurity and why some individuals feel more worried than others ([Näswall and De Witte, 2003](#)). Employees with fixed-term contracts face higher uncertainty about their future employment than permanent employees do. They cannot be certain whether their employer will extend their contract, and if not, whether and when they will find a new job. According to stress theory, anticipating the life event of job loss and loss of financial resources implied by a fixed-term contract can trigger stress and thus make people worry.

However, the extent to which stressors lead to a stress reaction is largely determined by the individual's cognitive appraisal of the situation ([Folkman et al., 1986](#)). With regard to fixed-term employment, this depends on whether, first, individuals assess their contract situation as a potential threat to their well-being, values, or goals (primary appraisal) and, second, whether they evaluate themselves as having appropriate resources or abilities to handle the threat (secondary appraisal).

With regard to the first aspect, fixed-term employment can appear in very different forms: it can function as a screening device or as an instrument of external flexibility ([Reichelt, 2015](#)). If a worker is aware of the function that fixed-term employment fulfils for the employer, this affects to what extent he or she considers a fixed-term contract as potentially harmful. Furthermore, individual labour market attachment affects the degree to which stressors in the work sphere are considered harmful. The individual degree of labour market attachment may depend on the individual's values and goals as well as on social expectations. It can be assumed that intentions and decisions in family life also play a role, for example when the desire for economic security and individual employment stability before starting a family is strong for individuals ([Kreyenfeld, 2010](#)).

With regard to the second aspect, the resources and abilities for coping with the potential threat posed by fixed-term contracts can stem from the individual's labour market position, the availability of other non-labour income, or the household situation: Individual qualification level, labour market experience and occupation influence the likelihood of finding a new job on the labour market and the wage level. The wage level is important because it affects the potential to accumulate savings and determines the level of state benefits, such as unemployment insurance or basic income benefits that may help bridge job search periods. Furthermore, having a partner in a secure employment position who can provide a stable income source for the household can buffer phases of individual unemployment and function as a resource and social support that helps coping with one's own employment insecurity ([Näswall and De Witte, 2003](#)).

The Role of Gender Inequalities on the Labour Market

One major source of gender inequalities is the horizontal and vertical segregation of the labour market by gender ([Aisenbrey and Brückner, 2008](#); [Busch, 2013](#); [Blau, Ferber and Winkler, 2014](#); [Ochsenfeld, 2014](#)), which also implies that female and male employees in Germany differ regarding the functions that their fixed-term contracts fulfil and the resources they have to cope with potential job loss.

Horizontal segregation means that women and men systematically work in different occupations and different industries. Women work more often in education and teaching, public and private service and the health sector, where fixed-term contracts are more frequent ([Bechmann et al., 2013](#); [Hohendanner, 2019](#)). In these labour market segments, fixed-term employment is often used to ensure external flexibility for firms ([Hohendanner and Gerner, 2010](#)). Additionally, some of the fixed-term positions are created when substitute staff must be organized during parental leave. In male-dominated industries, such as the manufacturing sector, external flexibility is more often ensured by other means, such as temporary agency work ([Hohendanner and Gerner, 2010](#)), while fixed-term employment serves as a screening device ([Reichelt, 2015](#)). Furthermore, descriptive evidence suggests that the probabilities of conversion into a permanent contract are lower in female-dominated sectors and occupations ([Hohendanner, 2019](#)). These insights hint at higher labour market insecurities for fixed-term employees in female-dominated industries and occupations.

Regarding vertical segregation, male- and female-dominated occupations differ in wage levels (Aisenbrey and Brückner, 2008; Hausmann, Kleinert and Leuze, 2015) and thereby in aspects of social security, such as levels of unemployment benefits, and in labour market re-entries after unemployment (Hägglund and Bächmann, 2017). Furthermore, occupational choice and the segregated labour market are strong context factors for career advancements meaning that men more often fill leading positions than women (e.g., Manzoni, Härkönen and Mayer, 2014; Dämmrich and Blossfeld, 2017). This accounts for the actual gendered distribution of higher positions as well as the gendered mobility from lower occupational positions to higher occupational positions (Gundert and Mayer, 2012).

The Role of Gender Inequalities in the Household Context

The gendered structure of the German labour market puts men and women at different risks of being unsettled by fixed-term employment. The arguments become more complex when we look at men and women in couples and as parents.

In joint households couples can pool resources and have to address the question of the division of labour regarding paid employment, housework, and care work. Particularly, as soon as there are children in the household, the division of labour is a crucial question for couples, as their care and upbringing create new time demands. Childless men and women in Germany have almost similar employment rates (Hobler, Pfahl and Hentschel, 2017). After the birth of the first child, a shift to a traditional division of labour with men as the main earners and women as main carers can be observed in many partnerships (Grunow, Schulz and Blossfeld, 2012; Kühhirt, 2012). According to both household economics (Becker, 1981) and bargaining theory (e.g., Ott, 1992; Lundberg and Pollak, 1996), this is a result of the fact that women mostly earn less and that career investments offer less returns for women than for men. The division of roles is also reinforced by cultural norms, social expectations, and related institutional frameworks about gender-appropriate behaviour (Aboim, 2010; Grunow, Schulz and Blossfeld, 2012; Edlund and Öun, 2016). With educational expansion and shifts in gender norms, a modernized male breadwinner model has become predominant in Germany over the past decades, in which women are still the main carers of the family but earn an additional income, mainly in part-time employment (e.g., Trappe, Pollmann-Schult and Schmitt, 2015).

It can thus be assumed that the potential risk from job loss associated with a fixed-term contract varies by household context for men and women. Although, in principle, job loss for either partner threatens the well-being of the household, men's job loss often leads to higher income losses for the household than the job loss of women (Jacob and Kleinert, 2014). This discrepancy is particularly large when men work full-time and women part-time. Moreover, fixed-term employment can be a counter-normative situation for a husband and father because the potential job loss also entails a loss in the man's socially expected role. For women, on the contrary, non-employment and care work can be a socially accepted alternative in the life stage of family formation. This could result in a higher stress potential of fixed-term employment for men in family contexts (van der Meer, 2014; Knabe, Schöb and Weimann, 2016).

At the same time, fixed-term employment can undermine the plans for starting a family, as individuals often consider a secure labour market situation a prerequisite (Kreyenfeld, 2010). Not only in view of their limited fertile phase, but also because women in particular interrupt their careers with the birth of a child, it may be more important for women to get a permanent job before starting a family than for men. In Germany, claims for parental leave, parental allowance, and return to work guarantees are related to a running employment contract. In this context, fixed-term employment may be a stronger threat for women who want to have children than for men. So far, there is evidence that fixed-term employment affects fertility decisions of women, but not equally strong of men (Auer and Danzer, 2016; van Wijk, de Valk and Liefbroer, 2021). While achieving a stable employment position is a pressing issue for parents-to-be in particular, the career interruptions around childbirth and reduced labour force participation when the children are young are accompanied by further consequences for the mothers. Mothers become increasingly dependent on their partner's employment situation. Their more unstable careers are linked to limited access to state benefits and reduced levels of benefits in case of job loss (Hofmeister, Blossfeld and Mills, 2006).

Hypotheses

Taken together, there are several lines of argument to assume that women are more unsettled by fixed-term employment than men are. Women face poorer structural conditions on the labour market regarding wages and prospects for permanent employment in their occupational sectors. Furthermore, career interruptions because

of childbirth represent additional aspects of employment insecurity for women. How these arguments play into gender differences in affective job insecurity by fixed-term employment depends on the household context—whether one is without partner, whether a desire for children has to be coordinated with the employment situation in couples, or whether there are already children. Along the line of argument, we present hypotheses separately by household context. For each household type, we formulate a hypothesis for the expected gender difference and hypotheses for the expected change in this gender difference when controlling for individual labour market position and relative household resources.

As long as men and women do not have a partner and children and are only responsible for themselves, they mainly rely on their individual labour market position.

H1a: The effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity is stronger for single women than for single men.

H1b: The gender difference in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity decreases when controlling for the individual labour market position.

In couple households, having a partner provides a safety net for both men and women. Although women are still more vulnerable to fixed-term employment than men according to their more unfavourable individual labour market positions, women may benefit more from having a partner because the safety net provided by men is in most cases stronger. The potential threat from her job loss is lower because women are likely to contribute relatively less to household income than their partners. However, even if this potentially attenuates the threat of fixed-term employment for women, the higher risk of career interruptions for women with fertility intentions in fixed-term employment is likely to become more relevant in partner households. In sum, women should thus still be more affected by fixed-term employment.

H2a: The effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity is stronger for women with a partner in the household than for men with a partner in the household.

H2b: The gender difference in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity increases when controlling for the household resources provided by the partner.

H2c: The gender difference in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity decreases when controlling for the individual labour market position.

In family households, the predominant model is that men secure the family income, whereas women are the main carer and the additional earner. The perceived risk of her potential job loss in relation to a father's job loss is again likely to be lower. Therefore, the higher potential threat from a fixed-term contract for women in family households should be compensated to some extent.

H3a: The effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity is stronger for mothers than for fathers, although the difference is smaller than for men and women in single households or partner households.

H3b: The gender difference in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity increases when controlling for the household resources provided by the partner.

H3c: The gender difference in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity decreases when controlling for the individual labour market position.

Data and Models

Data

We employ the German Socio-Economic Panel to test our hypotheses (SOEP v.33) (Goebel *et al.*, 2019). The SOEP is an annual representative longitudinal study of households in Germany that samples approximately 10,000 households at each wave since 1984. It comprises a large set of data covering socio-demographics, as well as variables on individual well-being, employment status (including job and firm characteristics), and the household context.

Our sample for the analysis contains the working population excluding marginally employed persons, students, apprentices, and retirees as well as all those working in workshops for people with disabilities. We restrict the sample to those of so-called early and prime working age, between 20 and 45 years, for three reasons: firstly, fixed-term employment rates are highest in this age range (Eurostat, 2019), which indicates that fixed-term employment is a more common (re-)entry position in this career stage than in the later career. Secondly, the meaning of fixed-term employment for individuals also likely varies over the life course. In the prime working age, fixed-term employment and transitions to permanent employment are part of common labour market integration processes. Fixed-term employment among older workers, particularly among older male workers, conflicts norms of career stability. The focus on a specific age range thus allows for analyses that are more concise. Lastly, we are interested in gender differences in the context of entangled career and family formation processes

which mainly takes place in the observed age range. We also exclude the relatively small group of single parents that consists predominantly of women.¹ We employ the waves 1994 to 2016 to include both East and West Germany. In total, our sample consists of 22,312 persons and 88,966 person-year observations. In the mean, we observe every person over a time period of 4 years.

Our dependent variable, individual affective job insecurity (Lee, Huang and Ashford, 2018), is based on the question whether survey participants are very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not concerned about their job security. We construct a binary variable separating the very concerned from the somewhat or not concerned employees.² Our central independent variable is a binary variable indicating whether respondents have a fixed-term or permanent working contract. Descriptive statistics of our sample are displayed in [Supplementary Tables SD1.1 to SD1.3](#).

Method

To test the causal effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity, we run linear FE probability models.³ In simple ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models, potential unobserved heterogeneity might critically bias the true causal effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity. Unobserved personality characteristics such as doubtfulness or general anxiety might influence chances on the labour market and heighten the risk of working on a fixed-term contract as well as strongly affect affective job insecurity. We therefore make use of FE models that rule out unobserved heterogeneity by looking at within-changes in the central variables.

The FE models make use of a total of 4,926 observed changes between permanent and fixed-term contracts, with approximately 60 per cent being changes from a fixed-term to a permanent contract and approximately 40 per cent being changes in the opposite direction.⁴ Testing asymmetric effects shows that our results are robust for both directions of change (see [Supplementary Data SD4](#)). This means that the likelihood of having severe worries about job loss decreases when moving from fixed-term to permanent employment about as much as it increases when moving from permanent to fixed-term employment. The same holds true for the gender differences in our analyses.

Analytical Strategy

We develop our analysis in three steps. First, we examine whether working on a fixed-term contract (*FTC*) has an effect on affective job insecurity (*y*) at all. We use a

simple FE model including selected control variables (*CV*) to identify the main effect.

$$y_{it} - \bar{y}_i = \tau(FTC_{it} - \overline{FTC}_i) + \sigma(CV_{it} - \overline{CV}_i) + \alpha_i + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

The FE model focuses on within-changes, examining whether an intra-individual deviation from the person-specific ‘mean’ of the working contract ($FTC_{it} - \overline{FTC}_i$) goes along with an intra-individual deviation from the person-specific ‘mean’ of one’s job insecurity ($y_{it} - \bar{y}_i$). To establish causality in the FE model, we must assume that a change in the properties of the working contract—namely, being on a permanent or fixed-term contract—is uncorrelated with the person-specific error term in the same time period and all other time periods. For the assumption to hold, we integrate a set of potential confounders. Thus, we include selected control variables (*CV*) to rule out that the change in the working contract is accompanied by other work-related changes that confound the effect on job insecurity ($CV_{it} - \overline{CV}_i$). To address issues of serial correlation and heteroscedasticity, we include time FE and calculate cluster robust standard errors.

The following set of basic control variables is integrated: We add an indicator of part-time work and weekly hours of overtime to consider degrees of organizational integration that may affect probabilities of working on a fixed-term or a permanent contract and may affect worries about one’s job security. The tenure in the firm captures the formation of firm-specific human capital that heightens one’s chances of getting a permanent contract and generates subjective security about keeping one’s job. Furthermore, the size of the company is controlled for. Bigger firms offer more likely job positions and internal career paths that may translate into lower affective job insecurity. The company size will also impact the prevalence and functions of fixed-term employment. Finally, we add the regional unemployment rate, which captures the contextual economic situation that might heighten the probability of becoming employed on a fixed-term basis and affect job insecurity independent of the type of contract.⁵

Second, we investigate the variation in the main effect by household and gender, setting men as reference category (*FEM*). We calculate models separately by household type and moderate the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity by gender (*FTC · FEM*). We differentiate among single-person households, couple households, and couple households with children.

For each household type:

$$y_{it} - \bar{y}_i = \tau(FTC_{it} - \overline{FTC}_i) + \beta((FTC \cdot FEM)_{it} - (\overline{FTC \cdot FEM})_i) + \sigma(CV_{it} - \overline{CV}_i) + \alpha_i + u_{it} \quad (2)$$

As gender is time-constant in our sample, our model rules out a potential gender effect because it is part of the time-constant fixed-effect α_i . In our model, β nonetheless identifies the difference in the effect between men and women. Precisely, β entails the difference in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity for women compared to men. The models include the basic variable set described before.

Third, we evaluate whether β stems from gender inequalities on the labour market and within households. Technically speaking, we test whether the moderating effect of gender is actually mediated by relative household resources and labour market position. Figure 1 illustrates the idea of the analysis.

We first include information on relative household resources: we add the employment status of the partner—unemployment, fixed-term, or permanent employment—and the share of one's labour income in the total household income in percentage points. These resources are eligible only in the estimations for couple and family households and mirror the gendered division of labour in the household. Next, we include two indicators for the individuals' positions on the labour market: first, we consider the industry the respondents work in using the 'Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community' (NACE), version 1.1., entailing 16 different sections of economic activity (Agriculture and fishery are merged into one category as in version 2).

Second, we use the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP) class scheme (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero, 1979), which entails the following categories in our sample: higher managers and professionals, lower managers and professionals, routine clerical workers, routine service and sales workers, skilled manual workers, semi- and unskilled manual workers, and agricultural workers.

We need to include the explanatory variables (EV) on the same level of the analysis as the moderation we want to address to test the potential mediation mechanism. Therefore, we hierarchically add interaction terms of fixed-term employment with the variables of interest to our Model 2, separately for each household type. In FE models, the interaction between two time-varying variables includes the within- as well as between-variation of the variables in the interaction term (Giesselmann and Schmidt-Catran, 2020). We are interested in identifying the role of between-variation in labour market positions and household responsibilities as indications of gender inequalities. We do not expect that potential within-variation of these indicators drive or bias the changes in the gender difference of the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity.

For each household type:

$$y_{it} - \bar{y}_i = \tau(FTC_{it} - \overline{FTC}_i) + \beta((FTC \cdot FEM)_{it} - (\overline{FTC \cdot FEM})_i) + \gamma(EV_{it} - \overline{EV}_i) + \theta((FTC \cdot EV)_{it} - (\overline{FTC \cdot EV})_i) + \sigma(CV_{it} - \overline{CV}_i) + \alpha_i + u_{it} \quad (3)$$

If gender inequalities on the labour market and within households are responsible for gender differences in the subjective effect of fixed-term employment, β should decrease or increase in the course of adding the

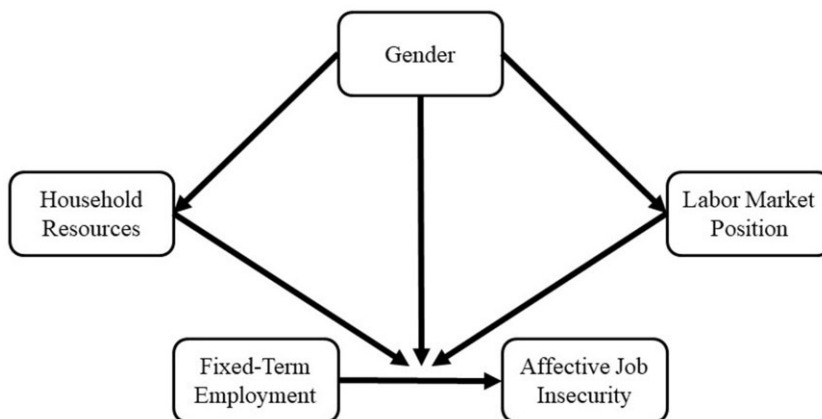


Figure 1. Illustration of the analytical strategy

Source: Own depiction.

Table 1. Effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity

	Coefficient
Fixed-term contract (Ref.: Permanent)	0.12*** (0.007)
Constant	0.16 (0.02)
<i>n</i> (person-years)	88,966

Note: *t* statistics in parentheses; * $P < 0.1$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.01$; linear fixed effect probability model; cluster-robust SEs; controls: local unemployment rate, year dummies, part-time, overtime, tenure, company size; full model in [Supplementary Table SD5.1](#).

Source: SOEP v33 1994–2016, own calculations.

interactions of fixed-term employment and the explanatory variables.

Results

We find a substantially large overall effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity. Having a fixed-term contract increases the probability of having major job worries by 12 percentage points in comparison to having a permanent contract (model specification 1; [Table 1](#)).

From this starting point, we turn to the heterogeneity of the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity across gender and different household compositions. Therefore, we integrate interactions of fixed-term employment with gender and estimate separate models for each household type (model specification 2; for full regression tables, see [Supplementary Table SD5.2](#)).

The first panel of [Figure 2](#) shows the size of the interaction effects for each household type. These are the differences in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity between women and men. Across all household types, we find that women are more affected by fixed-term employment than men. The differences range from a 5-percentage-point higher probability of job worries when working on a fixed-term contract for women in family households to approximately 10 percentage points in couple households. These gender differences prove substantial when we consider the overall mean effect of fixed-term employment for women (middle panel, [Figure 2](#)) and men (right panel, [Figure 2](#)): While the probability of single men to have major job worries is increased by approximately 10 percentage points when employed on a fixed-term basis, the probability for single women is increased by approximately 17 percentage points. For men in couple households, the effect is approximately 6 percentage points, while it is approximately 16 percentage points for women in couple households.⁶ For men in family

households, the effect is approximately 8 percentage points, while it is approximately 12 percentage points for mothers. These results are in line with hypotheses H1a and H2a, stating that women in these household contexts are more vulnerable to fixed-term employment than men. We find a slightly stronger gender difference for couple households compared to single households. The results also support hypothesis H3a. We find mothers to be still more troubled by fixed-term employment but the gender difference is less pronounced in family households than in single- and partner households.

In the third step, we investigate whether gender inequalities within households and on the labour market contribute to the explanation of gender differences in the effects of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity. We assume that the moderation of the effect by gender and household composition is partly mediated by the unequal distribution of resources. We incrementally add control indicators to model specification 2 interacted with fixed-term employment. [Figure 3](#) displays the gender differences in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity in three different model specifications. The first one shown in the left panel is the same as in the left panel of [Figure 2](#) without any further moderating variables added to the basic control variables. The second one additionally controls for the labour income share in the household income and the employment status of the partner interacted with fixed-term employment. The third one additionally controls for the labour market position—industry and occupational class—interacted with fixed-term employment.

As [Figure 3](#) shows, the household resources do not change the gender differences for individuals in couple households. Thus, we find no support for hypothesis H2b. In couple households, the resources of the partner and the relative contribution of one's income do not seem to have an impact on the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity. However, controlling for household resources does considerably change the gender difference for those living in family households. The gender difference increases to approximately 9 percentage points and thus reaches a similar level as the gender differences observed for individuals in single households and couple households. The higher vulnerability of women to fixed-term employment is thus suppressed in the context of family households by the greater importance of resources provided by the male partner. The results support our hypothesis H3b.

Against our expectations, gender differences in labour market positions do not explain the gender differences in the vulnerability to fixed-term employment. As the third panel in [Figure 3](#) shows, the gender differences

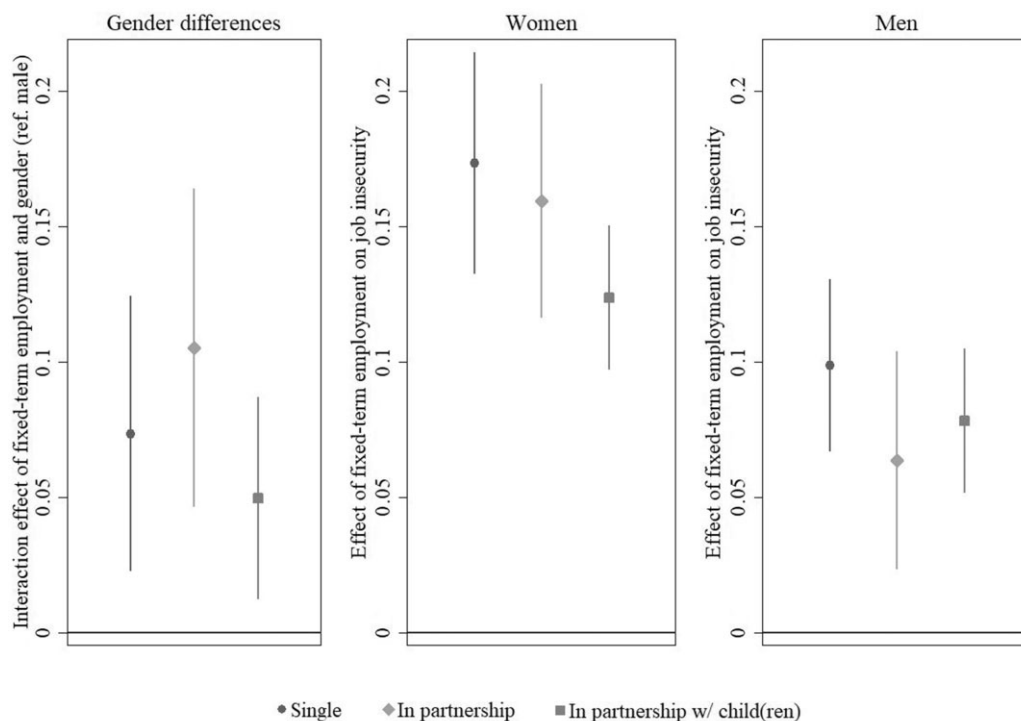


Figure 2. Effects of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity across household types with basic controls—gender differences and main effects for each gender

Notes: Pooled models with gender interaction term for each household type and separate models for each gender within each household type; linear fixed effects probability models; cluster-robust SEs; lines represent the 95% CIs; full models in [Supplementary Table SD5.2](#). *n* (person-years): 19,795 for singles, 19,579 for those in partnership, 49,592 for those in partnership w/child(ren) (pooled models); 8,063 for single women, 10,513 for women in partnership, 20,070 for women in partnership w/child(ren); 11,732 for single men, 9,066 for men in partnership, 29,522 for men in partnership w/child(ren).

Source: SOEP v33 1994–2016, own calculations.

remain robust with slight increases for each household type. We would have expected a decrease in gender differences, now that we are comparing the effect of fixed-term employment for men and women in the same industry and occupational class. The results provide no support for hypotheses H1c, H2c, and H3c.

After controlling for partner resources and individual labour market position, we still find a significantly higher vulnerability of women to fixed-term employment regardless of the household situation. According to the theoretical reasoning, this can be taken as evidence that women in the age group studied are more unsettled by fixed-term employment than men because for them, starting a family is likely to be accompanied by further career interruptions, especially when being on a fixed-term contract. Moreover, the findings indicate that issues of anticipated career interruptions and their disadvantages for women are not only associated with gender differences among couples, where they

may be considered directly relevant, but presumably also among singles.

Robustness Checks

While we do not measure intentions to have (more) children directly, we assume they relate to life age, especially for women. To that end, we assess the robustness of our results and compare the gender differences in the effects of fixed-term employment on affective job security for three age groups: 20–35, 36–45, and 46–65 (see [Supplementary Data SD7](#)). The robustness tests provide further indication that fertility intentions and family formation are important contextual factors for the perception of fixed-term employment: in the highly fertile phase, from ages 20 to 35, women across all household types are more strongly worried by fixed-term employment than men. Gender differences are most pronounced in couple households. Furthermore, gender

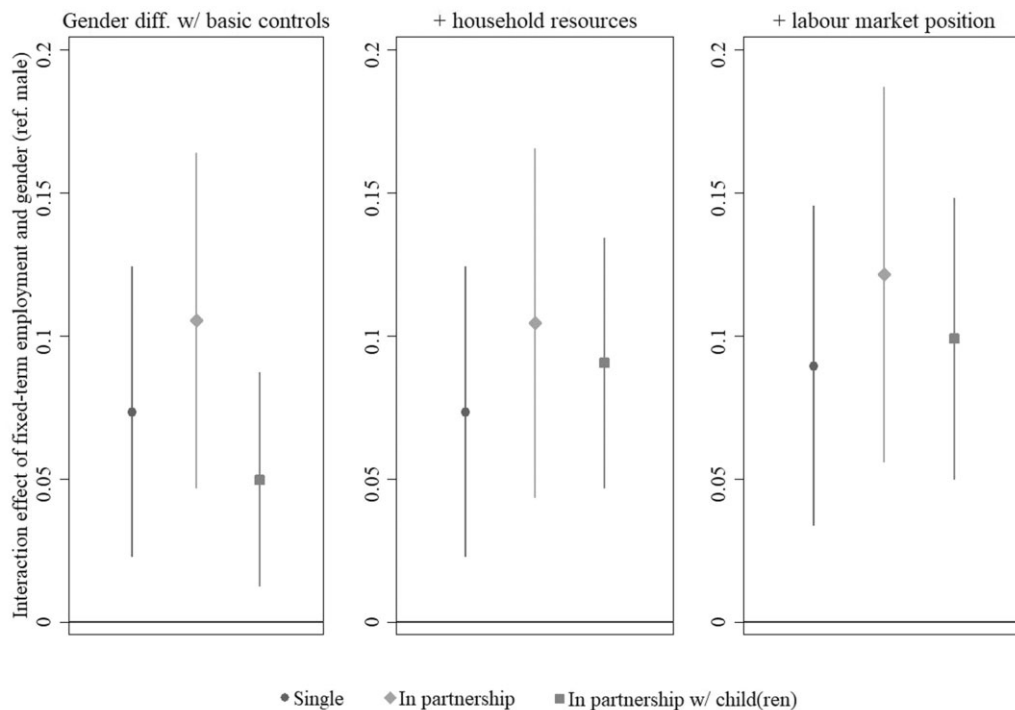


Figure 3. Gender differences in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity across household types with incrementally added controls

Notes: Household resources: share of own labour income in household income, employment status of partner; labour market position: EGP class, NACE v1.1 economic sector; all interacted with fixed-term employment; linear fixed effects probability models; cluster-robust SEs; lines represent the 95% CIs; full models in [Supplementary Table SD6](#). *n* (person-years): 19,795 for singles, 19,579 for those in partnership, 49,592 for those in partnership w/ child(ren).

Source: SOEP v33 1994–2016, own calculations.

differences are particularly evident after controlling for household resources and individual job position. In the post-fertile age from 46 to 65, there are no gender differences in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity at all. In the age range from 36 to 45, the gender differences with a higher vulnerability of women are strongest in single households followed by family households. Unexpectedly, there are only small and insignificant gender differences in couple households.

Also, our results may be biased by gendered selection processes. Our main results apply to women and men in the main working population. Although employment rates of men and women have converged over time, women are still more likely to be non-employed and do family care work (Trappe, Pollmann-Schult and Schmitt, 2015; Dieckhoff *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the results of our study may be limited by gender-specific labour force participation, but only if it is not yet accounted for by the covariates in our models. Experimental studies show that

women on average tend to avoid risks and competitive situations more often than men (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007; Gneezy, Leonard and List, 2009), which is presumably related to differences in female and male labour force participation (Vesterlund, 1997). We argue that those personality traits also likely raise affective job insecurity when confronted with fixed-term employment (see also Muñoz de Bustillo and de Pedraza, 2010: p. 8). Against this background, gendered labour force participation would rather enlarge our found gender differences, as especially women with potentially higher affective job insecurity due to fixed-term employment are expected to select into non-employment. Nevertheless, dynamic sample selection might be a limitation of our analysis if fixed-term employment causes women and men to drop out of the labour market differently. A robustness check does not find any gender differences in the probability to leave the labour market into non-employment or unemployment after fixed-term employment when controlling for

the same covariates as in our models (see [Supplementary Data SD8](#)). Taken together, we consider it unlikely that the found gender differences are driven by gendered selection processes on the labour market. We rather might underestimate them.

Lastly, our results may be biased by gender-specific personality traits or gender differences in employment characteristics we do not control for in our models. These might account for women being more worried about fixed-term employment than men. Further robustness checks suggest, however, that neither gender-specific personality traits, such as risk aversion, nor further job characteristics, such as working hours, can explain the remaining gender differences (see [Supplementary Data SD9 and SD10](#)).

Conclusions

Adding to the debate on the detrimental subjective consequences of fixed-term employment, this article provides an analysis of the influence of gender differences on the effects of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity, that is the fear of job loss. Focusing on the age group between 20 and 45, it particularly considers that the subjective experience of fixed-term employment of men and women may be moderated by the household context. This study provides important evidence that fixed-term employment causes affective job insecurity and that women in Germany are generally more unsettled by fixed-term employment than men are. It shows for the first time that there are heterogeneous effects in the intertwined context of gender and household. In family households, the partner's resources and the higher economic responsibility of men partly buffer the greater vulnerability of women to fixed-term employment. However, differences in the effect of fixed-term employment between women and men cannot be explained by gender differences in the labour market position, with women being more likely in low-status positions and working in different industries. Overall, the results indicate that the risk of job loss from fixed-term contracts translates into a subjective facet of gender inequality on the labour market.

Female vulnerability to fixed-term employment is lower for women with a partner and children. Prevailing traditional gender roles and the division of labour in the household still provide economic security for women to some extent. The threat of losing the additional income when fixed-term employment may end is lower for women in the role of the additional earner in the household and when issues of career progression and starting a family have already been resolved, at least in part.

These results suggest that women in part benefit subjectively from taking on the socially accepted alternative care role—although this also means that their labour market attachment and economic independence is reduced, fostering traditional patterns of gender inequality. Nevertheless, after controlling for partner resources and labour market position, women are still 9 to 12 percentage points more likely to have major concerns about their job security.

A key explanatory approach for the remaining gender difference is that women have a higher pressure to get a permanent employment position when they intend to have children. The exposure to fixed-term employment is particularly risky for becoming mothers as fixed-term contracts can expire during parental leave and the likelihood that employers offer a follow-up contract is reduced. In addition, women may experience or fear that employers prioritize men for the core workforce because they expect them to work full-time and overtime more often and to be less often absent due to family-related issues ([Hipp, 2020](#)). Mothers also remain more economically vulnerable than men in the face of potential repeated breaks in career investments. Career interruptions after childbirth reduce access to and levels of financial state support in case of job loss. Robustness tests across age groups provide some further support for the results and conclusions. However, this study cannot conclusively answer the question of what drives gender differences in the effect of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity.

Further research should aim to clarify why women are more unsettled by fixed-term contracts than men. It would be important to examine in more depth how the individual consequences of fixed-term employment vary over the life course of men and women. Firstly, this relates to gendered patterns of re-entry into employment after career interruptions and their relationship with affective job insecurity in fixed-term employment. Secondly, it would be important to examine the role of childbearing intentions with regard to the anticipated roles in the household—in particular with respect to career interruptions and gender discrimination on the labour market. Qualitative research can be particularly fruitful in this context (e.g., [Bass, 2015](#)). Also, studies found that the effect of employment insecurity on fertility decisions strongly varies by educational background ([Kreyenfeld, 2010](#); [Barbieri et al., 2015](#); [Auer and Danzer, 2016](#); [Glavin, Young and Schieman, 2020](#)). Therefore, class differences and differences between educational groups need to be considered because the labour market attachment, the costs of career interruptions, and the level of security

women gain through a partner may differ (e.g., Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001; Jacob and Kleinert, 2014). Lastly, it would be interesting to learn about within-female differences in the subjective consequences of fixed-term employment by household context that also include single mothers or the effect of separation and divorce on subjective job insecurity.

Notes

- 1 We employ a heteronormative perspective in our analyses for the sake of theoretical and empirical simplicity. Nonetheless, there are 356 same-sex couples in our sample. As analyses without them reveal, they do not change our results.
- 2 A robustness check repeating the following analyses with the alternative coding of the dependent variable—very concerned and somewhat concerned versus not concerned—yields results of similar direction but slightly weaker effects of fixed-term employment on affective job insecurity (see [Supplementary Data SD2](#)). The difference between single men and women becomes insignificant. Although the results stay basically the same, the critical difference is apparently the one between those being very concerned about their job and those being somewhat or not concerned.
- 3 As we are not interested in predicting values, which would be problematic with a binary dependent variable and a linear probability model, this is feasible. We employ robust standard errors and test the robustness of our results by repeating the analyses in a conditional logit framework. There are no substantial differences (see [Supplementary Data SD3](#)).
- 4 Descriptive evidence reveals that changes from permanent to fixed-term employment are more often linked to job changes than changes from fixed-term employment to permanent employment are. Furthermore, employees who change from permanent to fixed-term employment are more often male, manual workers in the construction, trade and reparation sectors, and have more labour market experience, but less formal education than employees who change from fixed-term to permanent employment (see [Supplementary Table SD1.3](#)).
- 5 In contrast to OLS regression models, FE models do not rely on strict exogeneity assumptions, which makes it important to consider overcontrol bias when choosing control variables (Angrist and Pischke, 2009). Our results show very little impact of the use of varying control variables on our main effect.
- 6 For these results, we additionally estimate separate models for women and men within each household

type. These models and their results are not exactly the same as they imply interactions of every variable with gender. They still convey an idea of the effect sizes the gender differences are based on.

Supplementary Data

[Supplementary data](#) are available at ESR online.

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