Job search intensity and wage flexibility among different age groups

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AMONG DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how wage flexibility and job search intensity evolve with search duration among young, middle-aged and older job seekers. It moreover investigates whether financial hardship and reemployment efficacy mediate the relationships. Multi-group structural equation modeling on a sample of 1205 Belgian unemployed job seekers showed that search duration affected both wage flexibility and job search intensity, and that effect sizes differed across age groups. Wage flexibility did not evolve with search duration among young and middle-aged job seekers. Yet, our analyses revealed a direct, negative relationship between search duration and wage flexibility among older job seekers. While financial hardship and reemployment efficacy fully mediate the positive relationship between search duration and search intensity for middle-aged seekers, they only partially mediate the relationship for older job seekers. We discuss implications for theory, practice and future research.

KEYWORDS

Job search intensity, wage flexibility, age
INTRODUCTION

Although the hiring rate of older workers differs greatly across countries, generally, older individuals are less likely to find employment (OECD, 2006). Data from the European Union (2004-2007) show that younger individuals (aged 25-34) are almost nine times more likely to find employment after one year of being without a job than older individuals (aged 55-64) (European Commission, 2010).

Since job search behavior is an important predictor of finding employment (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001), it is important to know whether age differences exist with respect to search behavior. At the moment, the role of age in job seeking is still unclear. In their meta-analysis of the job search literature, Kanfer and colleagues (2001) concluded that it is unclear if job search models apply for young, middle-aged and older job seekers as several studies solely focus on college and university graduates and no studies are based on samples involving job seekers aged 55 or older. Although several more recent studies use samples including job seekers older than 55 (e.g. van Hooft, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2005; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002; Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005), more than once, the focus is exclusively on graduates (e.g. Côté, Saks, & Zikic, 2006; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, & Boswell, 2003; Saks, 2006) and it is still unclear whether results vary across different age groups. Therefore, this study examines the moderating role of age in relationships between job search concepts.

We study two dimensions of job search behavior: job search intensity and wage flexibility. While job search intensity is one of the most often studied job search dimensions (Saks, 2005), wage flexibility has only recently been introduced in the psychological job search literature (Wanberg, Zhang, & Diehn, 2010a). Wage flexibility refers to the gap between the wage of job seekers’ last job and their ‘reservation wage’, i.e. the minimum wage that they are prepared to accept (cf. McFadyen & Thomas, 1997). Similar to search
intensity, wage flexibility correlates positively with employment success (Wanberg et al., 2010a). It is highly relevant to study wage flexibility in different age groups since especially older individuals are associated with higher labor costs (OECD, 2006; Posthuma & Campion, 2009) and higher labor costs may negatively affect employment prospects (Adler & Hilber, 2009). Studying both wage flexibility and search intensity integrates the psychological and economic literatures on job search. This integration rarely happens in empirical studies (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999).

Specifically, this study investigates the relationship between the length of the search period and job search behavior for three age groups (18-34, 35-49 and 50-59). Previous research showed that individuals’ search behavior is time dependent; it relates to the stage of their search (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg et al., 2005). Yet, the extent to which the relationship between time spent in job search and job search behavior differs between diverse age groups has not been investigated yet. Osberg (1993) notes that while younger job seekers are often stigmatized when they reduce their attempt to find employment, older job seekers ending their search are labeled retired, which is socially more acceptable. This may affect their search intensity and wage flexibility. Therefore, job seekers from diverse age groups may react differently to a continuing, unsuccessful job search.

In order to gain insight in the relationship between the time spent looking for work and job search behavior, we include two mediators into the model, namely financial hardship and reemployment efficacy. Financial hardship refers to the extent of economic difficulties one is having due to insufficient financial resources to meet personal and family needs (Sverko, Galic, Maslic Sersic, & Galesic, 2008; Ullah, 1990; Wanberg et al., 2010a), whereas reemployment efficacy concerns “the confidence in one’s ability to find an acceptable job” (Wanberg, Zhu, & van Hooft, 2010b: 789). These factors are likely to change over the search
period and have repeatedly been linked to job seekers’ search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987; van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004; Wanberg et al., 2010a) and reservation wage (Bloemen & Stancanelli, 2001; Pannenberg, 2007; Prasad, 2000, 2003), both in a theoretical and empirical way. It is relevant to study financial hardship and reemployment efficacy among different age groups as financial resources and obligations tend to differ across life stages (Eurostat, 2010) and efficacy beliefs evolve over the life span (Bandura, 1994).

In the following section, we present the general research model and elaborate on the possible moderating effect of age. After going into the methodology and results, the paper concludes with a discussion about the main findings and the key implications of the research.

**GENERAL RESEARCH MODEL**

Figure 1 shows our conceptual model. In what follows, we describe the components of the model and how they relate to each other. We begin by describing the anticipated link between time spent in job search, job search intensity and wage flexibility.

Search duration and job search behavior

Several studies have investigated the relationship between time spent in job search and job seekers’ search behavior. They find that both search intensity (Barber et al., 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg et al., 2005) and wage flexibility (Hogan, 2004; Devine & Kiefer, 1991; Nattrass & Walker, 2005) are affected by search duration. Although little is known about the underlying process, various interpretations are available.

**Search intensity.** From a theoretical point of view, a longer search period can result in both higher and lower search intensity depending on which of three job search models apply to the relationship (Barber et al., 1994). According to the *sequential stages model* of job search,
job seekers may reduce their search intensity after some time to explore the identified job leads and then, if the leads turn out to be unsuccessful, search again with higher intensity and restart the search cycle. Since a longer period of job search may cover multiple cycles, longer search duration is likely to imply more intensive search behavior. The *learning model of changes* implies that job seekers learn to search in a more efficient and effective way as their search continues. They are likely to experience that a more intensive search yields better results (cf. Kanfer et al., 2001). While these two models suggest that search intensity increases with search duration, the *emotional response model* states that job seekers may react emotionally to the search process and reduce search intensity as a way to avoid stress and possible rejections. Barber et al. (1994) stress that these models may influence job seekers simultaneously and reinforce or cancel out each other’s effect.

Research on student samples shows that job seekers’ search intensity increases over the search period (Barber et al., 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000). Yet, in both studies, the authors emphasize that older job seekers may assess their job prospects less optimistically and hence be more liable to negative emotional influences. Additionally, individual wealth is found to increase with age (Bloemen & Stancanelli, 2001). Since older individuals may perceive less financial pressure to persevere despite setbacks during the search process, they may more easily give in to feelings of discouragement. Consequently, different age groups are likely to have different search processes.

**Wage flexibility.** Wanberg et al. (2010a) define wage flexibility as the gap between the wage of job seekers’ last job and their desired or ‘reservation wage’, i.e. the minimum wage that they are prepared to accept (cf. McFadyen & Thomas, 1997). Since several economic studies examined to what extent reservation wages are stationary over time, we turn to this stream of the job search literature to hypothesize the relationship between search duration and wage flexibility. From a theoretical point of view, a person’s reservation wage is assumed to
decline as the unemployment spell lengthens. Human capital theory (Becker, 1964) for instance states that skills may depreciate as unemployment duration increases and according to signaling theory (Spence, 1973), longer duration may signal lower productivity to future employers. As a way to compensate for their weaker position in the labor market, unemployed job seekers may lower their reservation wages – and thus increase their wage flexibility – as the unemployment spell lengthens. Yet, empirical studies are inconclusive. Some studies confirm that the reservation wage declines as the unemployment spell lengthens (Hogan, 2004; Hui, 1991; Nattrass & Walker, 2005). In their survey of existing studies using direct evidence of reservation wages, Devine and Kiefer (1991) also conclude that the reservation wage declines at least over a part of the unemployment spell. Yet, the authors stress that their inferences must be approached with care as the results of the different studies are difficult to compare and integrate (e.g. because they study other populations and use different econometric techniques). Other studies find that reservation wages are stationary over time (Addison, Centeno, & Portugal, 2008; Christensen, 2001; Haurin & Sridhar, 2003). They ascribe this finding to the absence of rapidly declining or exhausting unemployment benefits since job seekers may be less motivated to lower their demands in order to find a job if they do not feel financial pressure. Again, financial issues and personal beliefs about one’s capability of finding employment seem to play a role.

As financial hardship and efficacy beliefs are likely to change over the search period (Kinicki, Prussia, & McKee-Ryan, 2000; Wanberg et al., 2010b) and depend on the life stage one goes through (Bandura, 1994, Eurostat, 2010), financial hardship and reemployment efficacy may help to explain how job search intensity and wage flexibility relate to search duration among different age groups.
The mediating role of financial hardship

**Search duration and financial hardship.** Job loss implies losing a regular source of income. Although individuals may have various financial resources, they also have to deal with financial obligations while being unemployed to support themselves and their family (Wanberg et al., 2002). Furthermore, alternative sources of income, like savings, may get depleted as the unemployment spell lengthens and the level of unemployment benefits is also likely to decrease over time (OECD, 2006). Empirical evidence shows a link between search duration and financial hardship. Financial hardship refers to the extent of economic difficulties one is having due to insufficient financial resources to meet personal and family needs (Sverko et al., 2008; Ullah, 1990; Wanberg et al., 2010a). Multiple studies indicate that financial hardship increases as unemployment duration extends (Gallie, 1994; Kinicki et al., 2000; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005).

Sources of income and financial obligations tend to differ across age groups (Eurostat, 2010). Since individual wealth is found to increase with age (Bloemen & Stancanelli, 2001) older job seekers may be less likely to experience higher financial hardship as search duration increases (Wanberg et al, 1999, 2002). Additionally, unemployment benefits are frequently more generous as people grow older since they are often based on the wage in the former job (OECD, 2006). Consequently, older job seekers may be relatively wealthier and less prone to financial hardship than young and middle-aged unemployed job seekers. However, while young adults generally have less financial resources at their disposal, they also tend to have fewer obligations than middle-aged individuals. As individuals age and leave young adulthood, they may make transitions that increase the liability to financial hardship, like leaving the parental home, starting to live with a partner or becoming a parent. While not everyone makes these transitions, most individual make some in their twenties or thirties. European data (Eurostat, 2010), for instance, show that half of the young adults are still living
in the parental home in their mid to late twenties. The figures moreover show that the cost of raising children is mainly borne by middle-aged individuals. As middle-aged individuals are financially responsible for themselves and their family and they generally are financially independent from their parents, we expect this age group to be most prone to financial hardship as their search spell lengthens.

Hypothesis 1a. Search duration relates positively to financial hardship.

Hypothesis 1b. The positive relationship between search duration and financial hardship is strongest for middle-aged job seekers.

Financial hardship and search intensity. In the job search literature, it is widely accepted that financial hardship is a prominent motive to engage in job search (Kanfer et al., 2001, Saks, 2005; Wanberg et al., 2010a). According to Leana and Feldman (1995) greater financial obligations or insufficient financial resources tend to enlarge the need to find employment. Because of the perceived economic pressure, job seekers may attribute higher value to employment as it would provide a secured income. Hence, financial hardship can be considered an extrinsic aspect of goal valence (Wanberg et al., 2010b). Job seekers may view employment as a means to solve their financial hardship. In support of this reasoning, Kinicki et al. (2000) found that individuals experiencing financial hardship engaged in problem-focused coping behavior, i.e. they attempt to directly deal with the problem by means of more proactive search behavior. Generally, research shows that greater financial hardship results in more intense job search (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001; van Hooft & Crossley, 2008; Wanberg et al., 1999).

For younger and middle-aged individuals, obtaining employment may be a structural solution for their financial problems as they have the prospect of a (quite) lengthy career. As older workers only have a certain amount of time before retiring, they may see employment as a temporal solution and therefore show less problem-focused coping behavior.
Additionally, young adults with financial problems may get support from their parents, for instance, by moving back home (Eurostat, 2010). This would reduce the urge to find employment for younger job seekers. As middle-aged individuals are likely to highly value a secure income when they have to deal with financial strain, we expect them to increase the intensity of their search the most as their financial situation worsens.

_Hypothesis 2a. Financial hardship relates positively to search intensity._

_Hypothesis 2b. The positive relationship between financial hardship and search intensity is strongest for middle-aged job seekers._

**Financial hardship and wage flexibility.** Since financial hardship can be viewed as an extrinsic indicator of employment valence, individuals with higher financial hardship may be more motivated to find employment. Therefore, we expect them to set lower reservation wages and be more flexible since, according to economic search theory (McFadyen & Thomas, 1997), higher wage flexibility allows them to target a larger set of jobs and so increase their chance of finding a job. Moreover, people experiencing a substantial amount of pressure to find a job for financial reasons may not have the luxury to wait for the ‘optimal’ offer and be desperate to find employment (Wanberg et al., 2002). They may immediately accept the first job offer and so show maximum wage flexibility. Several studies examine the impact of liquidity constraints on people’s reservation wage (Alexopoulos & Gladden, 2006; Nattrass & Walker, 2005). Bloemen and Stancanelli (2001) for instance found that general financial wealth is positively related to job seekers’ reservation wage and thus negatively related to their wage flexibility.

As middle-aged individuals have to earn enough in their future job to meet both personal and family needs, they are likely to be the least able to increase their wage flexibility and so the probability of finding a job. Older job seekers on the other hand, have been found to be less willing to work for a reduced wage (Ahn & García-Pérez, 2002). This suggests that they
may be the least willing to increase their wage flexibility as means to increase their chance of finding and deal with their financial difficulties. Since research shows that especially young adults highly value obtaining employment and are willing to make substantial financial sacrifices to achieve that goal (McFadyen & Thomas, 1997), we expect them to be most likely to increase their wage flexibility in response to higher financial hardship.

Hypothesis 3a. Financial hardship relates positively to wage flexibility.

Hypothesis 3b. The positive relationship between financial hardship and wage flexibility is strongest for young adults.

The mediating role of reemployment efficacy

Search duration and reemployment efficacy. While little is known about the relationship between job search duration and reemployment efficacy, i.e. jobseekers’ confidence in their ability to find an acceptable job (Wanberg et al., 2010b), theory suggests that reemployment efficacy declines as the search period lengthens. Social cognitive theory, for instance, suggests that limited perceived progress towards the goal of getting a job is likely to reduce job seekers’ confidence in their ability to find employment (Bandura, 1986, 1994; Wanberg et al., 2010b). Since a longer, unsuccessful search period implies that the progress towards the goal is (still) inadequate, search duration may negatively influence job seekers’ reemployment efficacy. Disappointing results from the efforts made during search may get people discouraged and accumulated negative experiences with potential employers are likely to make them question their ability to find a job. Additionally, job seekers may believe that longer unemployment duration signals lower productivity to future employers (Spence, 1973), which would make it harder for them to leave unemployment as the spell lengthens.

Because of the specific labor market situation of older unemployed job seekers, their reemployment efficacy may be affected by various factors irrespective of the time they spent in unemployment. They may, for instance, question their capability of finding employment
because of confrontations with age-related stereotypes and discrimination (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Roscigno, Mong, Byron, & Tester, 2007). Alternatively, since physical abilities tend to decline with age (Nuñez, 2010), health issues may limit the number of jobs one can do and do reduce the probability of finding a suitable job. Consequently, we expect search duration to be a more important predictor of reemployment efficacy for younger age groups. While unemployment is generally accepted for young adults as it can be viewed as ‘job-shopping’ behavior and looking for the right match (Mortensen & Pissarides, 1999), research indicates that, as the unemployment spell lengthens, young individuals are more likely to accept any job than middle-aged or older persons (McFadyn & Thomas, 1997). This suggests that search duration has the strongest, negative impact on reemployment efficacy for young unemployed job seekers.

**Hypothesis 4a.** Search duration relates negatively to reemployment efficacy.

**Hypothesis 4b.** The negative relationship between search duration and reemployment efficacy is strongest for young adults.

**Reemployment efficacy and search intensity.** Multiple theories apply to the relationship between reemployment efficacy and search intensity. Social cognitive theory and expectancy value theory predict that higher reemployment efficacy stimulates job search intensity as it positively affects job seekers’ affect and motivation to engage in job search (Bandura, 1994). Similarly, job seekers with low reemployment efficacy may feel discouraged and demotivated. They may expect failure and reduce search intensity as a way to avoid difficult tasks. On the other hand, control theory (Carver, 2003, 2006; Klein, 1989) states that higher confidence in one’s ability to find employment is likely to reduce the perceived risk that the goal will not be achieved. As a result, job seekers may give priority to other goals in their lives, like taking care of the household. Hence, job seekers who are confident about getting a job may search less intensively and postpone search behavior (McFadyn & Thomas, 1997).
Alternatively, job seekers with low reemployment efficacy may believe that extra effort is needed to remove the discrepancy between their current state of unemployment and the goal state of finding employment. Since job seekers with lower reemployment efficacy may perceive themselves as less marketable, they may increase the intensity of their job search as a compensatory measure. This reasoning is in line with economic rational choice theory (cf. McFadyen & Thomas, 1997), which argues that job seekers invest as little time and effort in job search activities as necessary to find an acceptable job. Consequently, individuals with high reemployment efficacy will invest less time and effort in job search activities than individuals with low reemployment efficacy. Empirical studies seem to support the latter theories. Although Wanberg et al. (2010b) found no effect of a job seeker’s reemployment efficacy on the time he or she spent in job search the next day, some studies discovered a negative impact of outcome-related job search expectations on search intensity. For instance, Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte and Feather (2005) found that people’s expectations about finding a job were negatively related to the intensity of their job search. Similarly, van Hooft et al. (2004) found that lower expectations about one’s chance to find a job resulted in higher job search intensity for unemployed job seekers.

Giving other goals priority to job search may be especially an issue for older job seekers since the value attributed to leisure time is likely to increase with age (Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, & Dikkers, 2008). As people age and face a shorter time horizon, they may prefer to use the ‘time left’ for hobbies and relaxation (Higgs, Mein, Ferrie, Hyde, & Nazroo, 2003). The desire to spend more time with one’s family may also increase with age, especially if the partner is retired (Gauthier & Smeeding, 2003). Furthermore, the roles a person has to fulfill may change over the lifespan. For instance, as people age, they may want to or have to take care of grandchildren or a sick family member (Gielen, 2009). Older job seekers feeling less marketable may therefore be less inclined to invest time and effort in the search process.
Consequently, older job seekers may be more likely to postpone search behaviour and search less intensively than younger age groups.

*Hypothesis 5a. Reemployment efficacy relates negatively to job search intensity.*

*Hypothesis 5b. The negative relationship between reemployment efficacy and job search intensity is weakest for older job seekers.*

**Reemployment efficacy and wage flexibility.** Since reemployment efficacy reflects job seekers’ confidence in their ability to find employment, higher reemployment efficacy is likely to strengthen the belief of having a strong negotiating position with future employers. This may result in higher wage claims and lower wage flexibility. The idea of having a high ‘market value’ may lead one to believe it is justified to demand a higher wage and be less flexible (cf. value based pricing theory, e.g. Hinterhuber, 2004). On the contrary, job seekers perceiving their labor market situation as weak, may have the intention of accepting the first job offer they get, even if this implies settling with an inferior, lower paying job. Therefore, job seekers with low reemployment efficacy may search for any job they can get a hold of by increasing their wage flexibility in order to target a wider range of jobs and increase their chance of finding employment. In the economic job search literature, a few studies have examined how individuals’ perceived re-employment chances influence their reservation wage. While Walker (2003) finds that the difficulty job searchers expect when looking for work does not affect the reservation wage, Christensen (2001) and Pannenberg (2007) conclude that unemployed job seekers set a higher reservation wage when they expect to have good re-employment chances. We hypothesize that wage flexibility is negatively associated with a job seeker’s reemployment efficacy.

Since older job seekers have limited time left in the labor market, they may want to get the financial maximum out of their remaining years, irrespective of their perceived labor market position. Moreover, they may consider themselves entitled to higher wages (and thus
lower wage flexibility) based on their record of service or structural pay increases throughout their career, for instance, because of seniority wages. Therefore, we assume that, compared to young and middle-aged job seekers, the wage flexibility of older job seekers will depend on their reemployment efficacy only to a limited extent. Furthermore, as middle-aged job seekers are likely to have more experience than young job seekers, they may claim higher wages and be less flexible based on their stronger labor market position. Furthermore, as we indicated before, a period of unemployment is generally accepted for younger individuals, while it may signal lower productivity for middle-aged job seekers (McFadyen & Thomas, 1997). Consequently, the latter may be more likely to show higher flexibility when efficacy beliefs are low as a way to become more attractive for future employers.

Hypothesis 6a. Reemployment efficacy relates negatively to wage flexibility.

Hypothesis 6b. The negative relationship between reemployment efficacy and wage flexibility is strongest for middle-aged job seekers.

METHODS

Data and sample
In May and June 2010, a large-scaled media campaign invited all Belgian unemployed job seekers to participate in an online survey on job search behaviour. The study, organized by the Research Centre for Organisation Studies (K.U.Leuven), targeted only unemployed individuals reporting that they were actively looking for work at the time of the survey. Respondents that did not meet the requirements did not get access to the questionnaire.

In sum, 2430 respondents completed the survey, of whom 1938 used to be employed. They deliver the data for this study since wage characteristics of the last job are needed to measure wage flexibility (cf. infra). The sample contains 1894 respondents aged between 18 and 60 years old. Workers aged 60 or above were not included in the sample as they are only a few years away from the mandatory retirement age. Moreover, 117 observations were
excluded due to missing values regarding their age or the constructs of the research model. As search intensity was measured over a period of three months, only individuals who had been searching for at least three months were included in the final sample. It consists of 1205 unemployed, Belgian job seekers that were actively looking for work for at least three months.

Since we want to estimate our model for different age groups, we assigned the respondents into one of three age groups: 34 and under, 35-49, and 50 and older. As Van der Heijden (2001, 2003a, 2003b) notes, these age groups make it possible to cover the whole professional career by contrasting job seekers in early, mid and late career. This distinction between young adults (18-34), middle-aged (35-49) and older (50+) individuals is consistent with previous research (e.g. Ahola, Honkonen, Virtanen, Aromaa, & Lönnqvist, 2008; Felstead, 2010; Kooij et al., 2008; Peracchi, 2001; Van der Heijden, 2001, 2003a, 2003b).

The average age of the respondents in the full sample is 41 years; 30% is between 18 and 34 years old, 43% between 35 and 49, and 27% is 50 years or older. The sample includes 588 men (49%) and 617 women (51%). In terms of education, 17% of the respondents did not have a high school degree, 33% had a high school degree, and 50% had a bachelor’s or master’s degree. The respondents had been searching for work for 15 months on average at the time of the survey; 60% had been searching for 3 to 11 months, and 40% for at least one year. Most respondents (38%) entered unemployment because of reorganizations within the company, while 28% was dismissed for another reason. Another 24% became unemployed since their contract expired and 10% chose to leave their employer. Table 1 shows the composition of the three subsamples concerning gender, level of education and search duration.

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Insert Table 1 about here
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Measures

Search duration. Individuals were asked to indicate how many months they had been searching for work. In the analyses, we use the logarithm of search duration (in months) to control for any scale effects resulting from the wide variation in the search duration variable compared to other variables (see Tables 2 to 4).

Financial hardship. When studying financial hardship as a job search barrier, Wanberg et al. (2010a: 445) recommend the following item to measure financial hardship: “I must find a job very quickly as I need the money”. We used a similar item to assess job seekers’ perceived financial hardship. Respondents had to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree; 5=totally agree) to what extent they agreed with the proposition ‘I am looking for work because I have difficulties to manage financially.’

Reemployment efficacy. Consistent with the measure used by Wanberg et al. (2010b), reemployment efficacy was assessed by means of five items. The items ask about the expected difficulty to (1) find another job, (2) find a job corresponding to one’s knowledge, skills and expertise, (3) find a job that matches one’s interests, (4) find a job paying as much as the current job, and (5) find a job of the same level as the current job. The response scale ranged from 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed one factor with a good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha > .80$ as indicated on the diagonal of the correlation matrices in Tables 2 to 4).

Wage flexibility. We used multiple steps to measure individuals’ wage flexibility. First, we asked respondents at what percentage of a full time job they would like to work. They answered one hundred per cent when they were looking for fulltime employment. This information was used to convert wages for part time jobs to their fulltime equivalent. In a second step, we asked respondents about their reservation wage, using the question: “How high does the net monthly salary of such a job (fulltime or part time) at least have to be for
you to accept the job?”. This question is consistent with other studies using self-reported reservation wages (e.g. Bloemen & Stancanelli, 2001; Haurin & Sridhar, 2003; Nattrass & Walker, 2005). Next, we subtracted the reservation wage from the last wage in accordance with the definition of Wanberg et al. (2010a) for wage flexibility. Yet, we use the logarithm of the reservation wage and the last wage (both fulltime equivalents in euros) to control for any scale effects resulting from the wide variation in the wage variables compared to other variables. Moreover, we prefer a relative measure over an absolute measure to see how job seekers’ wage claims relate to their last wage in terms of percentage. Therefore, we divided the difference by the last wage.

**Search intensity.** Job search intensity was assessed with a ten-item measure based on the validated job search scale developed by Blau (1994), yet, we added one item on the use of the Internet to include new job search methods. Sample items are ‘prepared or revised my resume’, talked with friends or relatives about possible job leads’, ‘sent out resumes to potential employers’ and ‘contacted an employment agency’. Respondents had to indicate on a 5-point scale how many times they had performed the various search activities over the preceding three months: never, rarely (1 or 2 times), occasionally (3 to 5 times), frequently (6 to 9 times) or very frequently (at least 10 times). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed one factor with a good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha > .80$ as indicated on the diagonal of the correlation matrices in Tables 2 to 4).

**Control variables.** Several control variables were used in the analyses. Gender, educational level, the partner’s labor market position and the number of children one is financially responsible for were included because of their known associations with job-search intensity and the reservation wage. Research for instance indicates that male, higher educated job seekers with more financial responsibilities searched more intensively (Kanfer et al., 2001;
Accordingly, male, higher educated job seekers with more financial responsibilities registered higher reservation wages (Christensen, 2001; Prasad, 2000, 2003).

The gender variable was dichotomous with 0 = female and 1 = male. The partner variable consisted of three categories: (1) not having a partner, (2) having a working partner, (3) having a partner who is currently unemployed, retired or not active on the labor market. The number of children one is financially responsible for was included as a continuous variable. We coded three educational levels: (1) low, i.e. no high school degree, (2) average, i.e. a high school degree, (3) high, i.e. a bachelor’s or master’s degree.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

While Table 2 shows basic statistics and the correlation matrix for the full sample, Tables 3 to 5 show the descriptive statistics for the younger, middle-aged and older sample respectively. Note the respondents’ quite high financial hardship (mean\(_{18-34}\) =3.92, SD\(_{18-34}\) =1.17; mean\(_{35-49}\) =3.96, SD\(_{35-49}\) =1.17; mean\(_{50+}\) =3.82, SD\(_{50+}\) =1.25) and low reemployment efficacy (mean\(_{18-34}\) =1.96, SD\(_{18-34}\) =0.71; mean\(_{35-49}\) =1.91, SD\(_{35-49}\) =0.68; mean\(_{50+}\) =1.76, SD\(_{50+}\) =0.65). Tables 3 to 5 further show that search duration is negatively related to search intensity, yet, only for older job seekers (r\(_{50+}\) = -.18). Search duration also relates to wage flexibility, but contrary to what we expect, in a negative way and only in the 35-49 and 50 and older age groups (r\(_{35-49}\) = -.10; r\(_{50+}\) = -.22). While the correlation between search duration and financial hardship is not significant in the youngest and oldest age groups, search duration relates to financial hardship in the hypothesized way among middle-aged job seekers (r\(_{35-49}\) = .12). In line with our expectations, tables 3 to 5 show a negative correlation between search duration and reemployment efficacy (r\(_{18-34}\) = -.06; r\(_{35-49}\) = -.18; r\(_{50+}\) = -.14), yet, the correlation is not significant in the youngest age group. Wage flexibility does not appear to be influenced by financial hardship and reemployment efficacy. As we expected,
financial hardship is positively related to search intensity ($r_{18-34} = .12$; $r_{35-49} = .17$; $r_{50+} = .16$), while reemployment efficacy relates to search intensity in a negative way ($r_{18-34} = -.14$; $r_{35-49} = -.17$; $r_{50+} = -.13$).

Path analyses

The research model was tested using structural equation modeling, which allows testing multiple relationships in a simultaneous way. Multiple group analysis was used to study the moderating role of age in the model. For all predictor-outcome relationships, a series of $\chi^2$-difference tests were conducted to investigate whether path estimates differed between age groups.

The analyses show an excellent fit between the research model and the observed data for the 18-34 age group ($\chi^2(1)= 1.14$ (n.s.); SRMR= .00; RMSEA = .01; CFI = .99; NFI = .99), and an acceptable fit for the 35-49 age group ($\chi^2(1)=3.99$ (p<0.05); SRMR = .01; RMSEA = .08; CFI = .99; NFI = .99) and the 50 and older age group ($\chi^2(1)=8.66$ (p<0.01); SRMR = .02; RMSEA = .15; CFI = .99; NFI = .99). Table 6 shows standardized path estimates for the three age groups.
to younger job seekers (hypothesis 2b). Furthermore, we did not find empirical support for the positive relationship between financial hardship and wage flexibility (hypotheses 3a and 3b).

Hypotheses 4 to 6 relate to the expected effect of search duration on wage flexibility and search intensity via reemployment efficacy. Table 6 confirms that reemployment efficacy decreases with search duration ($\beta_{18-34} = -.10, p<.10; \beta_{35-49} = -.17, p<.001; \beta_{50+} = -.13, p<.05$). Hypotheses 4b, stating that the negative relationship is strongest for the 34 and under age group, is not supported. Hypothesis 5a is fully supported as reemployment efficacy is negatively related to search intensity ($\beta_{18-34} = -.14, p<.01; \beta_{35-49} = -.17, p<.001; \beta_{50+} = -.11, p<.05$). Contrary to what we expected, the relationship is not weakest in the 50 and older age group, so hypothesis 5b is not supported. We did not find empirical support for the negative relationship between reemployment efficacy and wage flexibility (hypotheses 6a and 6b).

Table 6 shows that, for some age groups, search duration is directly related to wage flexibility and search intensity as well. As job seekers have spent more time in search, they show lower wage flexibility in the 35-49 age group and the 50 and older age group ($\beta_{35-49} = -.08, p<.10; \beta_{50+} = -.22, p<.001$), for reasons other than lower financial hardship or higher reemployment efficacy. The strong direct relationship indicates that the model does not explain through which mechanism search duration relates to wage flexibility.

Moreover, job seekers search less intensively after a longer search period ($\beta_{18-34} = -.10, p<.10; \beta_{35-49} = -.08, p<.10; \beta_{50+} = -.16, p<.01$), for reasons other than higher financial hardship or lower reemployment efficacy. In the 18-34 age group, the effect of search duration on search intensity is not significant at a .05-level. In the 35-49 age group, the (indirect) duration effect is very small, but positive ($=.03$). Since the negative direct effect of search duration on search intensity outweighs the positive indirect effect via reemployment efficacy, the total duration effect is clearly negative in the oldest age group ($= -.14$).
relationship between search duration and search intensity for older job seekers is statistically different in magnitude than for the younger age groups (for younger and older job seekers: $\beta = -.05$ and -.22, respectively, $\chi^2$-difference(1) = 5.404, p<.05; for middle-aged and older job seekers: $\beta = -.08$ and -.22, respectively, $\chi^2$-difference(1) = 5.197, p<.05).

**DISCUSSION**

This paper examined how job search behavior evolves with search duration among different age groups. More specifically, we investigated to what extent search duration impacts job search intensity and wage flexibility via financial hardship and reemployment efficacy. In line with previous studies (e.g. Ahola et al., 2008; Felstead, 2010; Kooij et al., 2008; Peracchi, 2001; Van der Heijden, 2001, 2003a, 2003b), we made a distinction between young (aged 18 to 34), middle-aged (aged 35 to 49) and older job seekers (aged 50 and older) that used to work before they entered unemployment. Our analyses showed that search duration relates differently to search intensity and wage flexibility via reemployment efficacy and financial hardship among different age groups.

**Main findings**

**Search duration, financial hardship and search behavior.** We do not find support for the mediating role of financial hardship as our analyses show that search duration is not related with financial hardship. While the absence of a positive relationship between search duration and financial hardship is in contrast with previous research (e.g. Kinicki et al., 2000; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), our results confirm the positive relationship between financial hardship and search intensity among middle-aged and older job seekers (Kanfer et al., 2001; van Hooft & Crossley, 2008; Wanberg et al., 1999). As we did not find a relationship between financial hardship and wage flexibility, job seekers appear to search more intensively to find employment as a way to deal with increasing financial hardship, yet, it does not induce them to increase their wage flexibility and be less selective in their job search. Possibly, higher
financial hardship increases the need for work, but prevents middle-aged and older job
seekers to accept lower-paying jobs as the offered wages would not suffice to live on without
having financial problems.

We presume that the Belgian institutional context may play a role because of the
specificity of the Belgian unemployment system. Eligible job seekers are granted
unemployment benefits for an unlimited period of time. According to administrative records
provided by the Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS), which collects data from the
different Belgian Social Insurance institutions, approximately 4 out of 5 unemployed job
seekers were entitled to benefits in 2008. Moreover, unemployment benefits are relatively
generous as beneficiaries receive 60 per cent of a reference wage (with ceiling) during the
first year of unemployment and they are quite stable for unemployed job seekers living
together with a family (i.e. partner and children) or living alone. This benefit system may
explain why we did not find a relationship between search duration and financial hardship in
our sample. Moreover, a limited gap between wages and benefits may discourage job seekers
to be more flexible with respect to wages or search more intensively in order to deal with
financial difficulties.

**Search duration, reemployment efficacy and search behavior.** As regards the mediating
role of reemployment efficacy, we find a negative effect of search duration on reemployment
efficacy for the three age groups, resulting in higher search intensity. Previous studies also
found a negative relationship between reemployment efficacy and search intensity (van
Hooft et al., 2004; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). In line with control theory (Carver, 2003,
2006; Klein, 1989) and economic rational choice theory (cf. McFadyen & Thomas, 1997),
job seekers with lower reemployment efficacy are assumed to believe that extra effort is
needed to remove the discrepancy between their current state of unemployment and the goal
state of finding employment. The negative relationship between reemployment efficacy and
search intensity is similar across all three age groups. Additionally, we did not find the hypothesized negative relationship between reemployment efficacy and wage flexibility. Job seekers seem to act on lower reemployment efficacy beliefs by searching more intensively for a particular type of job.

**Direct versus indirect paths.** We found a direct, negative relationship between search duration and search intensity among job seekers aged 50 and older, which outweighs the indirect, positive effect via reemployment efficacy. Since the total effect of search duration on search intensity was small but positive for middle-aged job seekers and negative for older job seekers, our results confirm Barber et al.’s (1994) supposition that positive duration effects on search intensity are weaker for older job seekers. Possibly, older job seekers decrease the intensity of their search as time passes by since they may experience more social pressure to find employment (van Hooft et al., 2004, 2005). Alternatively, intrinsic indicators of goal valence, like employment commitment, may play a role (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005). The negative relationship between unemployment duration and search intensity is in line with previous findings (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001; Sverko et al., 2008), yet, it is not generally accepted (see for instance Wanberg et al., 2005). Our analyses show that job seeker’s age account for differences in the relationship between search duration and search intensity.

An important finding of this study concerns the relationship between search duration and wage flexibility. While wage flexibility turned out not to depend on the time spent in search among young and middle aged job seekers, our analyses revealed a direct, negative relationship between search duration and wage flexibility for older job seekers. Search duration related negatively to wage flexibility for other reasons than lower financial hardship or higher reemployment efficacy. This negative relationship is not consistent with human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and signaling theory (Spence, 1973). Moreover, previous
research (Hogan, 2004; Hui, 1991; Nattrass & Walker, 2005) found a negative relationship with people’s reservation wage – and thus a positive relationship with wage flexibility -, or no relationship at all (Addison et al., 2008; Christensen, 2001; Haurin & Sridhar, 2003). Still, it is possible that job seekers get discouraged when a certain level of flexibility does not result in finding employment. Consequently, they may not find it useful to target a wide set of jobs and be more selective in their search. Alternatively, job seekers may adapt their lifestyle to the situation of unemployment and get used to the extra time they can spend with friends and family. If they attribute greater value to non-work activities, they may be less flexible with respect to wages since the trade-off between work and leisure may change over the unemployment spell. Furthermore, as we only found a relationship for job seekers aged 50 and older, we presume that wage structures may play a role. For instance, in comparison to other countries, the average age-earnings profile is steep in the Belgian labor market. In 2004, wages for full time male workers aged 55 to 59 years were about 60 percent higher than those for workers aged 25 to 29 years (OECD, 2006). Consequently, structural wage-setting practices, like the common use of seniority wages for non-manual workers (OECD, 2006), may give individuals the impression that it is self-evident to receive higher wages as one gets older. However, since this study uses cross-sectional data, we cannot test predictions about causality; it is possible that lower wage flexibility leads to longer search periods and that the longer unemployed in our sample are therefore found to be less flexible.

**Contribution to theory and practice**

This study contributes to the job search literature in multiple ways. First of all, it examines the moderating role of age in relationships between job search concepts. Previous studies focus exclusively on college and university graduates (e.g. Côté et al., 2006; Moynihan et al., 2003; Saks, 2006) or analyze samples including all age groups (e.g. van Hooft et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 2002, 2005) so it is unclear whether results vary across different age groups.
As we found both similarities and differences among age groups regarding the relationships between search duration and search behavior via financial hardship and reemployment efficacy, this study shows the need to study relationships between job search concepts among different age groups.

Moreover, this study integrates two dimensions of job search behavior: job search intensity and wage flexibility. While job search intensity is one of the most often studied job search dimensions (Saks, 2005), wage flexibility has only recently been introduced in the psychological job search literature (Wanberg et al., 2010a). Studying both wage flexibility and search intensity integrates the psychological and economic literatures on job search. This integration rarely happens in empirical studies (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 1999).

Furthermore, this study adds to the job search literature by investigating the relationship between the length of the search period and job search behavior for younger, middle-aged and older job seekers. Empirical studies investigating this relationship are rare (Barber et al., 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg et al., 2005) and the extent to which the relationship between time spent in job search and job search behavior differs between diverse age groups has not been investigated yet. This study shows the need to look into this matter as job seekers from diverse age groups react differently to a continuing, unsuccessful job search.

From a practical point of view, it is remarkable that higher financial hardship and lower reemployment efficacy incite job seekers to search more intensively, but not to become more flexible with respect to wages. Job counselors may stimulate job seekers to consider a wider set of jobs and so increase the possibility of finding employment. Additionally, the strong negative link between search duration and search intensity among older job seekers suggests that they may need extra encouragement to continue their search for work. This may be achieved by pointing out advantages of having a job, like opportunities for skill utilization or contact with other people (cf. Warr’s vitamin model, 1987).
Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations that should be taken into account in future research. First, although the cross-sectional design of the study allows us to include both short-term and (very) long-term unemployed, longitudinal data are necessary to test the causality implied by the model. An optimal design would examine individuals’ job search behavior from the first day of their search until they find reemployment. Longitudinal data would moreover make it possible to make a distinction between age-related differences and cohort differences.

Second, the results apply to unemployed adult job seekers who used to be employed and should not be generalized to graduates looking for work or to employed job seekers. Moreover, self-selection bias may be at play. We cannot rule out the possible that only highly motivated job seekers visited the survey website and voluntarily participated in the study. Descriptive statistics indicate that long-term unemployed and lower educated job seekers are underrepresented in our sample.

Third, our study has been conducted in Belgium. Several characteristics of the Belgian labor market, like its relatively generous benefit system and steep age-earnings profiles, may influence our results about financial hardship and wage flexibility. Future research could examine the effect of different institutional settings on the relationship between search duration and search behaviour via financial hardship. Additionally, our 1-item measure of financial hardship may not fully capture job seekers’ financial motive to engage in job search. A more detailed measure of financial hardship might generate more accurate results.

Finally, future research may seek to unravel the relationship between search duration and wage flexibility as our model does not explain through which mechanism search duration relates to wage flexibility. A focus on institutional factors and indicators of intrinsic goal valence may generate valuable insights in the relationship between search duration, search intensity and wage flexibility.
REFERENCES


## TABLE 1
Sample Composition

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<th></th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>18-34</th>
<th>35-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
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<td>n=358</td>
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<td>39%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Search duration</td>
<td>Mean 15</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-12 months</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>At least 1 year</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>41%</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>0.15 ***</td>
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<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.07 *</td>
<td>-0.08 **</td>
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<td>5. Number of kids</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.13 ***</td>
<td>-0.05 (*)</td>
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<td>6. Log(months in search)</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.15 ***</td>
<td>-0.07 *</td>
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<td>7. Financial hardship</td>
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<td>1.19</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.08 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reemployment efficacy</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>-0.12 ***</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Wage flexibility (%)</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.11 ***</td>
<td>0.06 *</td>
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<td>10. Search intensity</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.09 **</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Chronbach’s alpha for reemployment efficacy and search intensity are denoted on the diagonal. 

 (*) p<.1; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>2. Education</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>3. Working partner</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.23 ***</td>
<td>-0.09 (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Number of kids</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>-0.18 ***</td>
<td>-0.29 ***</td>
<td>-0.17 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Log(months in search)</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.28 ***</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.14 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Financial hardship</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-0.18 ***</td>
<td>-0.10 (*)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reemployment efficacy</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.10 (*)</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.11 *</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.19 *** (64)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Wage flexibility (%)</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Search intensity</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>-0.18 ***</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.16 **</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.09 (*)</td>
<td>0.12 *</td>
<td>-0.14 **</td>
<td>0.03 (83)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Chronbach’s alpha for reemployment efficacy and search intensity are denoted on the diagonal.

(*) p < .1, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
### TABLE 4
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for Respondents Aged 35 to 49 (n=524)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
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<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Working partner</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-.08 (*)</td>
<td>.08 (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Number of kids</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>-.13 **</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.22 ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Log(months in search)</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.14 **</td>
<td>-.24 ***</td>
<td>-.14 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Financial hardship</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.16 ***</td>
<td>-.18 ***</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.12 **</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Reemployment efficacy</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.10 *</td>
<td>.12 **</td>
<td>-.10 ***</td>
<td>-.10 *</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Wage flexibility (%)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.09 (*)</td>
<td>.13 **</td>
<td>.09 *</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.10 *</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
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<td>9. Search intensity</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.17 ***</td>
<td>-.17 ***</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Chronbach's alpha for reemployment efficacy and search intensity are denoted on the diagonal.

(*) $p<.1$, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<th>1</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Working partner</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Number of kids</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Log(months in search)</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
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<td>-0.13</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Financial hardship</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reemployment efficacy</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Wage flexibility (%)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Search intensity</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chronbach's alpha for reemployment efficacy and search intensity are denoted on the diagonal.

(*) *p < 0.1; * *p < 0.05; ** *p < 0.01; *** *p < 0.001
### TABLE 6
Results of the Path Analysis (Standardized Coefficients; n=1205)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Financialhardship</th>
<th>Reemployment efficacy</th>
<th>Searchintensity</th>
<th>Wage flexibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-34  35-49  50+</td>
<td>18-34  35-49  50+</td>
<td>18-34  35-49  50+</td>
<td>18-34  35-49  50+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male ^a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree ^b</td>
<td>-19 *** -0.3 -0.3</td>
<td>0.3 0.3 0.1</td>
<td>-15 ** 0.0 -0.11</td>
<td>-0.3 0.11 0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s or master’s degree ^b</td>
<td>-17 * -0.14 ** -0.05</td>
<td>-15 * -0.02 0.10</td>
<td>-15 * 0.06 0.13</td>
<td>0.11 0.05 0.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No partner ^c</td>
<td>0.04 0.08 0.09</td>
<td>0.04 0.08 -0.14(*)</td>
<td>0.10 0.08 -0.10</td>
<td>0.03 0.13 ** 0.35***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working partner ^c</td>
<td>0.05 0.11(<em>) -0.17</em></td>
<td>-0.02 0.11 -0.15(*)</td>
<td>18 * 0.04 0.01</td>
<td>0.08 0.13 * -0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child(ren)</td>
<td>-0.07 0.05 0.10</td>
<td>0.11(<em>) 0.10</em> 0.03</td>
<td>-0.01 0.02 0.07</td>
<td>-0.06 0.03 -0.12*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log(months in search)</td>
<td>0.03 0.06 0.05</td>
<td>-0.10(<em>) -0.17</em>** -0.13*</td>
<td>-0.10(<em>) -0.08(</em>) -0.16**</td>
<td>-0.05 -0.08(<em>) -0.22</em>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial hardship</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.06 ** 0.18*** 0.15**</td>
<td>0.05 0.01 0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reemployment efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>-14 ** -0.17*** -0.11*</td>
<td>-0.05 -0.06 -0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05 0.06 0.07</td>
<td>0.04 0.05 0.04</td>
<td>0.09 0.07 0.09</td>
<td>0.03 0.04 0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all predictor-outcome relationships, a series of $\chi^2$-difference tests were conducted to find out if path estimates differed between age groups. Underlined estimates are significantly different from one another (i.e. $\chi^2$-difference (1) > 3.84). Dotted lines refer to estimates that differ at a .10 level (i.e. $\chi^2$-difference (1) > 2.706).

*Reference category: female

^Reference category: no high school degree

*Reference category: having a partner that is unemployed, retired or not active on the labor market

(*) p<.1; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
FIGURE 1

The Research Model

Search duration

Financial hardship

Wage flexibility

Reemployment efficacy

Search intensity

H1: +
H2: +
H3: +
H4: -
H5: -
H6: -