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Burnout and older workers' intentions to retire

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Abstract

Purpose – The central theme of this article is early retirement intentions and burnout among older workers. The paper aims to investigate whether there is a relationship between the burnout dimensions exhaustion, cynicism and competence and retirement intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – The data were taken from a survey held among Dutch older workers (50 +) and their spouses ($n = 2,892$).

Findings – The results show that a high workload, heavy physical work, lack of challenge, autonomy and social support from colleagues and managers are related to burnout complaints, although in a different way for the three dimensions. The results show that besides the effect of burnout, retirement intentions are related to the level of marital quality. Older workers who report a higher level of marital quality report a stronger intention to retire. Burnout and retirement intentions are related, but appear to have partly different predictors. While burnout can generally be explained by the work environment, non-work related factors enhance the understanding of retirement intentions.

Originality/value – This study shows that actual retirement is often preceded by feelings of burnout, in particular a mental detachment from work and feelings of exhaustion.

Keywords Burnout, Retirement, Older workers, The Netherlands, Work psychology

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Raising the labor force participation of older workers is a cornerstone of government policy in The Netherlands aimed at mitigating the costs of an aging population and guaranteeing sufficient labor force (see also the recent report of the Bakker Committee (2008). A number of measures have been introduced in recent years to promote the labor force participation of this group. These measures were formalized in the Early Retirement, Pre-pension and Life-course Savings Scheme Act (VPL), which took effect on 1 January 2006, and are designed to make early retirement (VUT), pre-pension and bridging pensions fiscally less attractive. That said, the Life-course Savings Scheme can also be used to retire early (Wapperom *et al.*, 2006). Recently, the Dutch government decided to gradually raise the age people are eligible for a public pension (AOW) to 67 years for everybody younger than 55 years of age.

Retirement is no longer an abrupt transition from a working to a non-working life. These days, more people tend to continue to participate in the labor market in some form or another after they have retired (Shultz, 2003; Wang *et al.*, 2008; Wang and Shultz, 2010 – see also Pengcharoen and Shultz in this issue). At the same time, however, there are signs that people embark on the retirement process long before they



reach retirement age. This means that the moment at which they call it a day may constitute the end of a gradual process of mental withdrawal from the labor force that began many years earlier. In this respect managers speak of people who “get in lane for retirement”, who are “mentally retired” or who have already “disconnected themselves”. Hanisch and Hulin (1990) assume that early retirement can be seen as a form of withdrawal from the organization in an effort to avoid unsatisfactory work situations, which could be compared to other forms of withdrawal such as absenteeism or psychological withdrawal. Dutch research carried out by Henkens and Van Solinge (2003) shows that 8 percent of employees take “mental” leave from their jobs long before they reach retirement age and that psychological withdrawal of this kind becomes stronger as one approaches retirement age. To date, however, little is known about what determines the tendency of people to “get in lane” or to withdraw from the labor force and about the relationship between these processes and people’s retirement intentions.

The process of psychological withdrawal from the job and decreasing productivity have been well studied in the literature of burnout, but hardly in the relationship to (early) retirement. This article focuses on the relationship between burnout and the intention to retire early. Maslach and Jackson (1981) define burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of ineffectiveness or to say it another way a lack of accomplishment. Burnout results in reduced productivity, higher absenteeism and an intention to quit one’s job (Kickul and Posig, 2001; Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

Of the demographic variables age turns out to be most related to burnout: burnout is ascertained more with younger employees than it is with older ones (Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998). Although Finnish research recently suggested burnout increases with ageing (Ahola *et al.*, 2006).

Studies into the determinants of burnout among older workers are few and far between. This is surprising as increased burnout is assumed to be linked to continual changes in one’s job and to the work environment (Kickul and Posig, 2001; Maslach, 2000; Shirom, 2003) and as the stereotypical image of older workers is that they find it difficult to cope with changing organizational requirements (Henkens, 2005). Studying the relationship between burnout and retirement can deepen our insight into the process of retirement as withdrawing from the labor force may be preceded by reduced labor productivity as a result of burnout.

Research into the retirement process has closely studied the factors that influence the retirement intentions of older workers (Adams, 1999; Beehr *et al.*, 2000; Wang and Shultz, 2010). Many studies have shown that retirement decisions are influenced by the financial-economic constraints, health, job characteristics such as monotony or a lack of challenge (Henkens and Tazelaar, 1997), career prospects (Adams, 1999; Koloski *et al.*, 2001), autonomy (Beehr *et al.*, 2000) and the relationship with one’s partner (Davey and Szinovacz, 2004; Henkens, 1999; Smith and Moen, 1998). Poor health has been found to be one of the major determinants of early retirement, and the poorer the health of older workers, the stronger their intentions appear to be to withdraw from the labor force early (Wang and Shultz, 2010).

Most research into early retirement, however, focuses on people’s general state of health (Adams, 1999; Adams *et al.*, 2002; Beehr *et al.*, 2000; Henkens and Tazelaar, 1997; Koloski *et al.*, 2001; Taylor and McFarlane Shore, 1995). The role played by

psychological problems has hardly been studied to date, which is surprising as the number of people – in The Netherlands at least – who retire early because of psychological complaints has been found to be higher than the number of employees who become unfit for work because of physical problems (Houtman *et al.*, 2007).

This article first looks into the theoretical backgrounds of burnout and its most important determinants. The methods section describes the data and measuring instruments used and the next section presents the results. We end the article with the most important conclusions and a discussion of the major implications for organizational policy.

1.2 Theoretical framework

1.2.1 Burnout. Burnout is a reduced ability to cope with stress and is related to chronic dysfunctioning at work (Maslach, 1993). It is considered to be the result of prolonged exposure to chronic stress at work (Shirom, 2003). The most widely used and validated measure of burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory, MBI (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). The MBI consists of items that measure clusters of symptoms related to the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment (Shirom, 2003). Schaufeli and Van Dierendonck (2000) developed a Dutch version of Maslach and Jackson's MBI, the Utrecht Burnout Scale (UBOS), including a general version, which can be used for professions outside the service industry. These authors define burnout as a syndrome characterized by three dimensions:

- (1) feelings of exhaustion;
- (2) increased cynicism with respect to one's job; and
- (3) a negative perception of one's own professional efficacy.

Feelings of exhaustion relate to feelings of being overly tired and to the exhaustion of people's emotional and physical resources. Cynicism relates to a negative, indifferent attitude or to an excessively detached response to different aspects of one's job and represents the interpersonal component of burnout (Shirom, 2003). Reduced efficacy represents the self-evaluation component of burnout and relates to feelings of incompetence and a lack of performance and productivity at work (Maslach and Jackson, 1981).

1.3 Determinants of burnout

1.3.1 Job characteristics. A theoretical model that seeks to explain what causes burnout is Hobfoll and Freedy's (1993) "conservation of resources" theory (COR). Hobfoll and Freedy posit that job demands and factors seen as opportunities (job resources) determine people's motivation to take part in the workforce. The essence of this model is that the work environment and characteristics of the job, such as the degree of autonomy, challenges and growth perspectives (resources) as well as the workload and physical aspects of the job (demands) play a large part in explaining burnout (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004).

A second theoretical model used in research into burnout is the Job-Demands-Resources model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). This model assumes that burnout develops when the job demands are high and the job resources are limited. Job demands are the physical, social and organizational aspects of a job that require

constant physical and mental effort and are therefore associated with psychological costs (such as exhaustion). Job resources are aspects that may contribute to the achievement of personal goals, that help reduce the demands of the job and that stimulate personal growth and development (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). In our research we assumed that the more physically demanding the job, the higher the workload and the lower the challenge, the growth opportunities and the degree of autonomy, the greater the likelihood of burnout (hypothesis 1).

1.3.2 Social support. Another important cause of burnout is a lack of social support (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2007). Social support from various sources such as one's manager, colleagues and partner are relevant factors in explaining burnout (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Halbesleben, 2006). The relationship people have with their managers can serve as a buffer against work stress, for example by giving feedback or by offering the employee challenging work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2007). Burnout may arise as a result of problems employees may have with others. A lack of peer support may heighten the risk of burnout (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2007). Whereas burnout is a job-related phenomenon, it goes beyond the work realm (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993). A good marriage can help employees cope with work stress because the situation at home is supportive, burnout can, conversely, influence marital quality (Halbesleben, 2006). Based on the assumptions in the literature about the relationship between social support and burnout, we formulate the following hypothesis: the weaker the social support of colleagues, managers and spouses/partners, the greater the likelihood of burnout among employees (hypothesis 2).

1.3.3 Burnout and the intention to retire early. For most people the process of early retirement is complicated and there are many factors having an effect on this process. Powers that are attractive are the so called "pull"-factors (e.g. more time off) and powers that strengthen the intention to early retirement, the "push"-factors (e.g. dissatisfaction with or problems about the present work situation) (Greller and Simpson, 1999; Shultz *et al.*, 1998). Beehr (1986) has put factors that could play a role in the decision to retire in a model in which he made a difference between personal and environmental factors. Environmental factors encompass work features (work characteristics) and non-work factors (family, marriage, leisure time and health). Health is traditionally one of the most important determinants of the early retirement and it turns out to be that older employees have a stronger intention to leave the labor market premature as health diminishes. Most research has focused on the general health situation as a predictor of retirement. Few researchers have addressed the extent to which psychological complaints play a role.

An important question is the extent to which psychological health is related to retirement plans. Is burnout linked to a strong desire to stop working as soon as possible or is this relationship less strong than may be assumed? There are various reasons why people with burnout complaints may have a stronger desire to withdraw from the labor force. One of the reasons is that burnout decreases people's job commitment. People who have a weaker commitment to their work are assumed to be more likely to decide to retire. Retirement offers older workers the opportunity to escape unsatisfying situations at work. Another reason why burnout may result in a stronger desire to retire is that the burnout complaints are expected to diminish after the older worker has stopped working. We know that many older workers opt for retirement because they believe this will be good for their health (Henkens, 1999), in

which case retirement is seen as a health investment strategy. This could apply particularly well to employees who suffer from burnout. Maestas and Li (2007) assume a positive link between burnout and the intention to retire early under the assumption that burnout complaints will diminish after retirement. It is difficult to say it will assert for the different dimensions of burnout. Feelings of exhaustion will lessen more after the workload passes away than it will for a lack of competence. Based on the above reasoning, we expect that the more serious the burnout complaints among older workers, the stronger their early retirement intentions (hypothesis 4).

2. Method

2.1 Data

This article is based on information gathered during a survey conducted in 2001 by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) in The Hague (Henkens and Van Solinge, 2003). A total of 2,927 employees aged 50-plus and their partners took part in the survey. The employees worked for four private sector companies and one organization of the Dutch government. They were sent one envelope containing a questionnaire for themselves and one for their partner, if any. The questionnaire was sent with an accompanying letter in which the researcher explained the goal of the survey and a letter of recommendation written by the directors of the participating companies or government organization. The questionnaires addressed a number of aspects of retirement. Information was gathered about the employees' demographic background variables, as well as their job situation, job satisfaction, health and retirement intentions. The total response rate among the employees themselves, after two reminders, was 63 percent. Almost all spouses/partners (94 percent) sent back the questionnaire. The various categories of employees were adequately represented in the survey: both the low and high educated, fulltime and part-time employees, male and female. The total group consisted of 2,195 men (76 percent) and 697 women (24 percent), 41 percent of whom had a low level of education, 28 percent an intermediate level and 31 percent were highly educated. In 2001 their ages varied from 50 to 65 years ($M = 54.6$, $SD = 2.81$). A total of 35 questionnaires were invalid because respondents had missed out more than three of the seven burnout items on the dimensions exhaustion and cynicism. As a result, the research population totaled 2,892 respondents.

2.2 Measurement

2.2.1 Burnout. The three dimensions of burnout were measured using an abridged version of the Utrecht Burnout Scale, UBOS (Schaufeli and Van Dierendonck, 2000) originally consisting of the 15 items. In this research we used, because of limited space in the questionnaire, 12 instead of 15 items.

Exhaustion was measured using four items: "I feel working a full day is really a strain for me", "I feel burned out by my work", "I feel used up at the end of the working day" and "I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job" ($M = 1.5$, $S = 1.1$). Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$.

Cynicism was measured using three items: "I question the value of my work", "I feel I've become too detached from my work" and "I'm not as enthusiastic about my work as I used to be" ($M = 1.2$, $S = 1.0$). Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$.

Competence was measured by the next five items: “On my work I am able to solve my problems well”, “I find I do my work well”, “When I finish something on my work it brightens me up”, “In this job I reach a lot of valuable things” and “On my job I glow with self-confidence”(M = 4.3, S = 0.88). Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.68$.

For the three dimensions, respondents were asked to indicate where they stood on a seven-point answer scale ranging from 0 = “never”, 1 = “sporadically”, 2 = “now and then”, 3 = “regularly”, 4 = “often”, 5 = “very often” to 6 = “always”. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s α) of the three subscales was satisfactory. Although they are lower in comparison with other research. The reason possibly was the fact that we used four, three and five items instead of the usually five, four and seven items. Unstandardized scores were used for the burnout dimensions. The frequency distribution for all burnout items are presented in Table I.

2.2.2 Retirement intentions. Early retirement intentions were measured using four questions (Henkens, 1999):

- (1) “Do you intend to retire before you reach the age of 65?”;
- (2) “At what age do you want to retire?”;
- (3) “Do you want to continue working after age 61?”; and
- (4) “At what age would you ideally like to retire if you had a say in matters?”.

The answer categories varied per item: respondents were able to respond to item 1 by answering either “yes”, “I don’t know yet”, or “no”. In answer to item 2, respondents had to fill in an age, item 3 provided six answer categories ranging from “no, certainly not” to, “yes, absolutely” and “I already am”, and item 4 required respondents to fill in the age at which they would like to retire. As the answer categories in the four items differed, the items in the scale were standardized and subsequently added up. This

Items	Never- seldom Score 0-1	Regularly score 2-3	Often score 4-6
<i>Exhaustion</i>			
I feel working a full day is really a strain for me	56	36	8
I feel burned out from from my work	58	34	8
I feel used up at the end of the working day	39	48	13
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job	60	34	6
<i>Cynicism</i>			
I question the value of my work	80	18	2
I feel I’ve become too detached from my work	72	24	4
I’m not as enthusiastic about my work as I used to be	47	39	14
<i>Competence</i>			
On my work I am able to solve my problems well	2	10	88
I find I do my work well	1	7	92
When I finish something on my work it brightens me up	3	18	79
In this job I reach a lot of valuable things	14	38	48
On my job I glow with self-confidence	3	28	69

Notes: Frequencies of the responses to the burnout items for older workers ($n = 2.892$)

Table I.

standardized scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$) was then linearly transformed to a scale with scores ranging from 1 to 10. A score of 1 was equivalent to "a weak intention to retire" and score 10 to "a very strong intention to retire". The average score on the retirement intentions was $M = 7.32$ indicating that most older workers intended to retire early and the standard deviation was $SD = 1.80$.

2.2.3 Job characteristics. Workload was measured using four items: "How often do the following items cause problems in your work: workload?" Respondents were able to answer on a scale ranging from "very often" (1) to "never" (4). The second item consisted of the statement "The workload is sometimes too heavy to be able to do everything well"; the statement in item three was "I often have to push myself to the limits to be able to do my job well" and item four was "At times, the workload is so high that it creates tension". The five-point scale for these statements ranged from "fully agree" (1) to "totally disagree" (5). The scores for all items in this scale were reversed, standardized and summed. A high score on workload meant a high workload. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$.

The physical demands of the job were measured using one item. The statement used for this item was "My work is physically taxing". Respondents were able to provide their answer on a five-point scale ranging from "fully agree" (1) to "totally disagree" (5). Scores on this item were reversed so that a high score was indicative of physically taxing work.

Challenge consisted of three items, which were scored on a five-point scale ranging from "fully agree" (1) to "totally disagree" (5). The statement in the first item was "I haven't found my work very challenging these past years", item two was "I find many of my responsibilities challenging", and the third item was "The work I do has become routine in recent years". The score for item two was reversed for this scale; a high score meant that the employees found their work very challenging. The items for this scale were first standardized at individual item level and subsequently summed. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$.

Growth opportunities was measured using two items:

- (1) "My work offers ample opportunities for promotion", and
- (2) "My work no longer offers opportunities for growth", where the score for item 1 was reversed.

The answer category for this statement ranged from "fully agree" (1) to "totally disagree" (5). A high score was indicative of good opportunities for growth. Both items were first standardized and subsequently summed. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.61$.

Autonomy was measured using one item: "I have a large say in how I organize my work". The answers for this item were scored on a five-point scale ranging from (1) "fully agree" to (5) "totally disagree". The score for this item was reversed. A high score was indicative of a large degree of autonomy.

2.2.4 Social support. Relationship with colleagues was measured using two items, which were first standardized and summed at item level before being incorporated into the scale:

- "How often do the following items cause problems in your work: relationship with colleagues?"; and
- "I get on extremely well with my colleagues".

The answer categories for item 1 ranged from “very often” (1) to “never” (4). The answer to item 2 was scored on a five-point scale ranging from “fully agree” (1) to “totally disagree” (5). For this scale, the score for item 2 was recoded so that a high score for support meant strong support. Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.59$.

Social support received from the supervisor was measured using one item: “My boss/manager encourages me to keep my skills up to date”. The answers were scored on a five-point scale ranging from “fully agree” (1) to “totally disagree” (5). The score for this item was reversed: a high score was indicative of strong social support.

Interaction with one’s partner was measured using dummy variables indicating how many joint activities employees and their partners engaged in. This is seen to be indicative of marital quality (Davey and Szinovacz, 2004). The question that was put to the employees’ partners was: “Which of the following activities do you do *together*?” and consisted of a total of 14 activities:

- (1) hobbies;
- (2) family;
- (3) grandchildren (if any);
- (4) travel/vacation;
- (5) volunteer work;
- (6) reading;
- (7) studying/training courses;
- (8) watching television;
- (9) shopping;
- (10) hiking/cycling/sports;
- (11) family visits;
- (12) home improvement/gardening;
- (13) caring for/assisting parents, children or other relatives; and
- (14) going out, theatre, movies.

Respondents were able to answer “yes” or “no”. The results show that 8 percent of the respondents engaged in less than six joint activities, 29 percent in seven to nine joint activities, 31 percent of the total group in ten to 11 activities and 14 percent jointly engaged in 12 to 15 activities. A separate dummy variable was admitted for 6 percent of the employees of who the partner did not complete the questionnaire. The reference category consisted of older workers without a partner (12 percent).

2.3 Analyses

Regression analyses were carried out to determine which factors are correlated with exhaustion, cynicism and competence. The three dimensions of burnout were the dependent variables, and job characteristics and social support were the independent variables. Regression analyses were also used to examine the relationships between the three burnout dimensions and early retirement intentions. We examined with the help of the Barron and Kenny method in what way the relationship between job characteristics and retirement intentions will be mediated by burnout. The control variables in this study were age (measured as a continuous variable), sex (measured as

a dummy variable: male = 0, female = 1) and education (measured as a continuous variable), with an answer scale ranging from 1 (elementary school) to 7 (university or college), sector (measured as a dummy variable: 0 = public sector and 1 = private sector), tenure (measured as a dummy variable: 0 = full time and 1 = part time), position (measured as a dummy variable: 0 = executive function and 1 = no executive function) and the replacement rate, indicating the level of retirement benefits as a percentage of the last earned wage. This last variable was provided by the salary administration.

3. Results

Table II shows the results of the regression analyses to explain the burnout among older workers for the dimensions exhaustion, cynicism and competence. Column 1 presents the results of the effects of job characteristics and social support on the dimension exhaustion. As the “workload” becomes higher, employees feel more exhausted ($\beta = 0.50, p < 0.001$). The role played by the physical demands of the job was found to be much smaller ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.001$). Challenging work was found to be the most important job incentive ($\beta = -0.17, p < 0.001$). The less challenging the

	Model 1 exhaustion		Model 2 cynicism		Model 3 competence	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
<i>Control variables</i>						
Age	-0.03	-1.57	-0.01	-0.63	0.01	0.35
Sex	-0.04*	-2.14	0.09***	4.50	-0.05*	-2.25
Education	0.05**	3.07	0.15***	8.69	-0.05**	-2.64
Organization	-0.01	-0.34	0.04*	2.03	-0.05*	-2.28
Tenure	0.00	0.20	0.04*	2.13	0.02	0.95
Position	-0.02	-1.07	-0.03*	-2.00	0.08***	4.53
Social security	0.01	0.43	0.07**	2.77	0.04	1.44
<i>Job characteristics</i>						
Workload	0.50***	31.38	0.24***	14.71	-0.21***	-12.09
Physical demanding job	0.10***	5.88	-0.02	-1.28	0.03	1.39
Challenge	-0.17***	-9.36	-0.42***	-22.95	0.29***	5.04
Opportunities of growth	-0.06***	-3.44	-0.06***	-3.75	0.01	0.42
Autonomy	0.00	-0.26	-0.01	-0.88	0.15***	8.79
<i>Social support</i>						
Colleagues	-0.06***	-3.90	-0.12***	-7.94	0.16***	9.77
Manager	-0.03*	-1.99	-0.07***	-4.36	0.01	0.65
<i>Marital quality</i>						
No partner (ref. cat.)						
Few joint activities	-0.03	-1.75	-0.02	-1.26	-0.02	-0.72
Average joint activities	-0.02	-1.05	0.01	0.46	-0.03	-1.15
Many joint activities	-0.05*	-2.15	-0.01	-0.40	-0.01	-0.21
Very many joint activities	-0.06**	-2.75	-0.02	-0.94	0.05*	2.14
No questionnaire partner	-0.02	-1.28	-0.02	-1.30	0.01	0.55
<i>n</i>	2,892		2,892		2,892	
<i>R</i> ² (%)	39		35		27	
Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$						

Table II. Regression analysis to explain the burnout dimensions – exhaustion, cynicism and competence – based on job characteristics and social support

job, the more exhaustion employees report. Whereas perceived opportunities for growth reduce feelings of exhaustion, the effect was relatively small ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.001$). Fewer perceived opportunities for growth are associated with more feelings of exhaustion. In the case of social support, support given by colleagues ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.001$) and executives ($\beta = -0.03$, $p < 0.001$) was found to have a significant – albeit slight – negative effect on exhaustion. Those employees who engage in a moderate amount of activities with their spouse also report less exhaustion. The total explained variance for the model is 39 percent.

The second column in Table II presents the results of the regression analysis carried out to explain cynicism. In the category job characteristics, a challenging job was found to have the greatest effect on the dimension cynicism ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$). A lack of challenge in one's job enhances the likelihood of cynicism and detachment from work. Workload was also found to have an effect on cynicism among older workers ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). Employees with a high workload tend to be more detached towards their work than those with a lower workload. The effect of opportunities for growth was also significant ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.001$). Employees with more opportunities for growth keep aloof less from work than employees with fewer opportunities. In the category social support the role of colleagues ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.001$) and the executives ($\beta = -0.07$, $p < 0.001$) was found to be the most relevant: employees who receive more support from their colleagues and executives are less cynical about their work than those who receive less support. The effect of social support received from one's partner was not significant. The explained variance for cynicism is 35 percent.

The third column of Table II shows the results of the effect of work features and social support on competence. Significant effects are found for challenge ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), autonomy ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$) and workload ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.001$). Older employees feel more competent as they have more challenge, more autonomy and less workload than employees with less challenge, less autonomy and more workload in their jobs. The effect from the social support from colleagues is significant ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and also of the partner with whom the employees do a lot of leisure time activities together ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). As employees receive more social support from their colleagues and when they engage in a lot of things together they feel more competent than colleagues who receive less support.

The results suggest that exhaustion, cynicism, and competence are reactions to different aspects of people's jobs and their (social) environment: exhaustion is largely explained by a high workload and to a lesser extent by a lack of challenge, the physical demands of the job, opportunities of growth and social support. Cynicism is explained primarily by a lack of challenge and a high workload and to a lesser extent by opportunities of growth, a lack of colleague support. Competence is explained by challenge, a heavy workload, autonomy, and social support from colleagues.

Table III presents the results of the regression analysis to explain retirement intentions. In the first column of this table the retirement intentions are related to the basic variables with relation to the work situation and the experienced social support. In model 2 until 4 we continuously add one dimension of burnout to the basic model. In model 5 we admitted all the burnout dimensions in the model to explain burnout. The table shows in column two to four that employees who feel exhausted ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), detached from their jobs ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) and who feel less competent ($\beta = -0.08$, $p < 0.001$) have a stronger intention to withdraw from the labor force

Table III.
Regression analysis to explain early retirement intentions in relation to the dimensions of burnout and the determinants job characteristics and social support

	Model 1 intention	Model 2 intention	Model 3 intention	Model 4 intention	Model 5 intention
	β	β	β	β	β
	t	t	t	t	t
<i>Burnout dimensions</i>					
Exhaustion		0.22***	0.18***	-0.08***	0.17***
Cynicism		10.62	8.91	-3.71	0.11***
Competence					-1.02
<i>Control variables</i>					
Age	-0.39***	-17.43	-0.38***	-17.56	-0.38***
Sex	0.05*	2.06	0.03	1.33	0.04
Education	-0.05*	-2.50	-0.06**	-3.15	-0.07***
Organization	-0.09***	-3.96	-0.10***	-4.35	-0.10***
Tenure	-0.04	-1.64	-0.04*	-2.02	-0.04*
Position	0.03	1.92	0.04*	2.28	0.04*
Social security	0.22***	7.98	0.20***	7.62	0.21***
<i>Job characteristics</i>					
Workload	0.13***	7.29	0.09***	4.77	0.12***
Physical demanding job	-0.01	-0.55	-0.03	-0.34	-0.02
Challenge	-0.15***	-7.57	-0.12***	-3.55	-0.07**
Opportunities of growth	-0.07***	-3.72	-0.06**	-3.14	-0.05**
Autonomy	0.01	0.73	0.01	0.88	0.02
<i>Social support</i>					
Colleagues	-0.02	-0.92	0.01	0.38	0.01
Manager	-0.02	-1.22	-0.01	-0.51	-0.01
<i>Marital quality</i>					
No partner (ref. cat.)					
Few joint activities	0.02	0.85	0.02	1.07	0.03
Average joint activities	0.14***	5.39	0.14***	5.39	0.14***
Many joint activities	0.16***	5.90	0.16***	6.05	0.17***
Very many joint activities	0.12***	5.24	0.12***	5.47	0.13***
No questionnaire partner	0.04*	2.04	0.04*	2.29	0.05**
Difference R^2 compared to model 1 (%)	2.892	2.892	2.892	2.892	3.6***
n	23	26	25	23	27
R^2 (%)					

than employees who do not have these complaints. The explained variance for the three dimensions of burnout on retirement intentions is, together with the other independent variables, 26 percent for exhaustion, 25 percent for cynicism and 23 percent for competence.

For every model the Sobel-mediation test in Stata demonstrated what part of the effects of workload, challenge and opportunities of growth have on the retirement intention will be mediated by the different dimensions of burnout. The results show that exhaustion significantly mediated the effect of workload, challenge and opportunities of growth on the retirement intention for respectively 84 percent ($p < 0.01$), 24 percent ($p < 0.01$) and 18 percent ($p < 0.01$). Cynicism mediate the effect of these work characteristics for respectively 33 percent ($p < 0.01$), 50 percent ($p < 0.01$) and 17 percent ($p < 0.01$). Competence forms less a mediating factor for the work characteristics (work load, 12 percent ($p < 0.01$) and challenge 14 percent ($p < 0.01$)). The effect of opportunities of growth was not mediated significantly (1 percent; $p > 0.05$).

The result of the joint influence of exhaustion, cynicism, competence and the retirement intentions are presented in column five. We find that exhaustion and cynicism have a distinct positive relationship with the retirement intentions. Competence is not significant any more if the three dimensions of burnout are included in the model. Based on the results, we establish that the effect of workload on retirement intentions is fully mediated by burnout. Burnout partly mediates the effects of work challenge and perceived opportunities for growth. Marital quality is among the most important predictors of retirement intentions and this effect seems to operate independently from the level of burnout reported by the older workers. A high level of coupled leisure activities increases the intention to retire substantially. The explained variance for the fully model amounts to 27 percent.

4. Discussion

This article reports on a survey held among 2,892 Dutch older workers to examine burnout and its influence on employees' intentions to leave the labor force. The international literature addresses the fact that for many people retirement is no longer an abrupt transition from a working to a non-working life. These days, people tend to continue to participate in the labor market in some form or another after they have retired. At the same time, however, we see that some people take mental leave from their jobs long before they actually retire. Burnout could be seen as a specific manifestation of mental withdrawal from the labor force. This study has examined the relationships between job characteristics and social support and older employees' burnout. In addition this study examined the relationship between the different aspects of burnout and the retirement intentions of older workers. The results show that burnout of older employees can be explained by a high workload and a lack of challenge and physical demands of the job, less opportunities for growth and a lack of social support, especially from colleagues. Other variables, such as physical demands of the job and social support from the executive and the partner, seem to play a more modest role in explaining burnout.

In line with our expectations we found employees who experience more feelings of exhaustion and who detach more from their work have a stronger intention to leave the labor force than employees who don't have such complaints. Moreover it turned out to be from the analyses that besides the effects of exhaustion and cynicism on the

retirement intention, especially marital quality has an effect on this intention. Employees taken together with their spouses very many leisure time activities do have a stronger intention to leave the labor force than employees who undertake less activities. These results support the results of other research (Henkens, 1999; Van Dam *et al.*, 2009) and imply the importance of the partner in the process of retirement.

To an extent, burnout and early retirement intentions appear to be two different processes. The burnout process seems to be influenced primarily by work-related factors such as such as a high workload and a lack of challenge and, to a somewhat lesser extent, by a lack of social support from colleagues. Retirement intentions, on the other hand, appear to be explained to a large extent by non-work related factors. Older workers' retirement intentions were in particular strongly influenced by the relationship with their partners.

If employers want to keep employees longer in the labor force, interventions to reduce burnout complaints can align upon three levels: the level of the organization, work and individual, for instance what changes will reduce the risk of exhaustion and what will improve feelings of competence (Maslach, 2003). Until recently employers were relatively indifferent about efforts to retain older workers. They saw retirement decisions as a private matter and assumed that employees would in principle make use of the possibility to retire early (Henkens *et al.*, 2009). For employees who had taken leave of their jobs mentally, the door to early retirement was wide open and their voluntary or forced retirement was common practice. This situation seems to have come to an end with the retrenchment in early retirement schemes. This article has shown that employers can no longer take for granted that employees whom they expect to retire early (or perhaps even hope they will do so), will in actual do so. Older workers can decide to stay in the labor force – for instance because of lack of financial means – with a certain “mental” distance to work. In this situation organizations have to deal with employees who are difficult to encourage and whose presence may lead to diminishing labor productivity.

Our study has a number of limitations. First, it is a cross-sectional study, so we have to be careful to set causal relations. The second limitation is selection bias: if the healthiest employees are still in the labor force, our results could underestimate the effects of burnout on retirement intentions. A third limitation is the generalizability of the research results to other groups of older employees. This study was conducted at four large private sector companies and one government organization. Further research is needed into the extent to which older workers in small companies suffer from burnout and their retirement intentions. A fourth limitation has to do with the measurement of some of the constructs. In a few cases only one item was used to measure independent, resulting in scales with unknown reliability. In this case further research deserves to use measuring instrument base on more items.

The current ageing work force is continuous changing. While older employees are expected to work longer, employers struggle with current labor market challenges such as a declining demand of workers and increasing global pressures. Current public policies are characterized by the aim to close the traditional exit pathway that older workers used (with the support of their employers) to retire early. These policies may result in extended career, but it does not automatically extend the number of productive years. Therefore is will be necessary to put the management of older workers and their retirement processes higher up the agenda than it has until now.

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