Abstract to be submitte to
SOEP 2014 - 11th International German Socio-Economic Panel User Conference

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Short-term or chronic worries? Studying the duration of self-perceived job insecurity in the life course

The spread of self-perceived job insecurity in Germany has received great attention from researchers and the general public. In particular the worries about maintaining employment increased in the last decades. Thus, it is not surprising that a large body of research addresses individual as well as societal causes and consequence of job insecurity. In this context one important, but under-investigated aspect is the duration of self-perceived job insecurity in the life course. So far, we do not know how often workers fear of losing their jobs. From a theoretical angle, however, it makes a difference whether job insecurity is a short-term or chronic experience.

As a short-term experience it may affect a lot of people sometime in their life course but also passes quickly and should therefore only have a limited impact on the individual. It is a different matter when the feeling of worry lasts for a longer time as the negative consequences (e.g. for health or family) should increase with the persistence of job insecurity. Furthermore, chronic job insecurity could be an indicator of a social inequality as it is limited to a certain social group.

Using survey data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (1985-2012), sequence and cluster analysis reveal seven clusters of typical patterns of self-perceived job insecurity which will be described in more detail, including also objective labour market indicators. Furthermore, the development of these clusters across age and birth cohort is studied. In conclusion, there is indeed a group of workers that is affected by job insecurity chronically, while a great part of the population only gains short-term experience with this. Furthermore, these patterns of self-perceived job insecurity have changed across cohorts. Especially for older workers, chronic worries gain in relevance and patterns dominated by the persistent absence of job insecurity become less common.