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Personal and work-related predictors of early exit from paid work among older workers with health limitations

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Abstract

Personal and work-related predictors of early exit from paid work among older workers with health limitations

Due to the current strict retirement regulations, workers are expected to continue working to increasingly older ages, regardless of their health status. To achieve extension of working lives, insight into both personal and work-related predictors of early exit from paid work (EEPW) is needed. So far, research on predictors has addressed on the overall working population and has not specifically focused on the group of older workers with health limitations. Our study is intended to address this gap.

Using data from the 2013 cohort of the Dutch population-based Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (ages 55–64, $n=1,023$), we selected workers with at least one chronic disease and/or a physical performance test score below the median. Among those who had not reached the statutory retirement age at the time of follow-up three years later ($n=297$), we first examined the bivariate association between independent variables and EEPW using logistic regression adjusted for age. Second, we constructed a multivariable prediction model.

By the time of the follow-up, 22.9% had exited from work. Informal caregiving, a larger social network, low self-esteem, and a low educational level were predictors of EEPW. Persistence in the face of adversity (a component of self-efficacy), repetitive movements at work, and variation of activities at work were not selected into the final prediction model, but they showed bivariate associations with EEPW.

Our findings suggest that EEPW in older workers with health limitations may be prevented by enhancing the self-esteem and self-efficacy of workers, adapting the work environment of informal caregivers, increasing social contacts at work, providing higher variation in activities, and ensuring less repetitive movements at work.

Samenvatting

Persoonlijke en werkgerelateerde voorspellers van vervroegde uittreding uit de arbeidsmarkt bij ouderen met gezondheidsbeperkingen

Het huidige pensioenbeleid verwacht van werknemers dat zij tot op hogere leeftijd doorwerken, ongeacht hun gezondheidstoestand. Om te kunnen beoordelen of langer doorwerken mogelijk is, is inzicht nodig in zowel individuele als werkgerelateerde voorspellers ("predictoren") van vervroegde uittreding uit de arbeidsmarkt (VUAM). Het bestaande onderzoek naar predictoren is gericht op oudere werknemers in het algemeen, maar niet specifiek op oudere werknemers met gezondheidsbeperkingen. Het doel van ons onderzoek is deze lacune op te vullen.

Onze gegevens komen van het cohort dat is gestart in 2013 in de context van de landelijk representatieve Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (leeftijden 55–64, $n=1023$), met vervolgmeting in 2016. Wij hebben deelnemers met betaald werk geselecteerd die ten minste één chronische ziekte en/of een score onder de mediaan op een lichamelijke prestatietest hadden, en die bij de vervolgmeting nog niet de AOW-leeftijd hadden bereikt ($n=297$).

Na drie jaar was 22,9% gestopt met betaald werk. Het verlenen van mantelzorg, een groot sociaal netwerk, een lage zelfwaardering en een laag opleidingsniveau waren voorspellers van VUAM. Doorzettingsvermogen (een aspect van eigen-effectiviteit), herhalende bewegingen en variatie in activiteiten tijdens het werk toonden een (bivariate) samenhang met VUAM maar werden niet in het multivariate predictie-model geselecteerd.

Onze resultaten suggereren dat VUAM bij oudere werknemers met gezondheidsproblemen voorkomen zou kunnen worden door hun zelfwaardering en eigen-effectiviteit te versterken, voor mantelzorgers de arbeidsvoorwaarden aan te passen, sociale contacten op het werk te bevorderen, de variatie in werkactiviteiten te vergroten, en herhalende bewegingen tijdens het werk te minimaliseren.

Executive summary and recommendations

Study aims

Due to current strict retirement regulations, older workers are expected to work up to an older age than in the past, also in the Netherlands. This applies equally for workers who are healthy and for workers with health limitations. Our earlier research has shown that in the 2010s, older workers with health limitations continue to work up to an older age than their counterparts in the 1990s and 2000s. One reason is that, in the past, workers could exit from the workforce with a disability pension, but the criteria for such pension have been made stricter. The changes in policies and regulations were enacted to keep up with the longer life expectancy of the general population.

So far, some research has been done on the question what motivates older workers to continue working. This revealed a range of factors that impact the continuation of paid work and/or early exit from paid work, including personal factors as well as work-related characteristics. Most studies, however, focused on older workers in general or reported on differences between workers with and without health limitations. Little is known about the variations within the group of older workers with health limitations and the factors that might predict early work exit among this group. In other words: the question "What makes one person with health limitations exit from work and another continue?" remains unanswered. This study aims to address the question: *What personal and work-related factors predict an early exit from paid work (EPPW) in older workers with health limitations?*

Using prospective data from the nationally representative Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (2013–2016), we selected older workers aged 55 and over with health limitations who had a paid job at baseline and had not reached the statutory retirement age at the time of follow-up. We addressed potential predictors both at the personal and at the work level. These factors are based on the aforementioned studies; they include education, lifestyle, psychological factors, and social environment on the one hand, and income, work conditions, and working hours on the other hand. Insight into such factors will provide direction for workplace policies to overcome early work exit of older workers with health limitations.

Summary of findings

At the time of follow-up, 22.9% of the selected workers had exited from work. Informal caregiving, a larger social network, low self-esteem, and a low educational level were predictors of EPPW. Persistence when facing adversity (a

component of self-efficacy), repetitive movements at work, and variation of activities at work were not selected into the final prediction model, but they showed bivariate associations with EEPW.

Policy recommendations

This study provides new insights into factors that predict and are associated with EEPW in older workers with health limitations. To overcome EEPW in older workers with health limitations, it seems important to adapt work policies and the work environment in several regards. Enhancing the self-esteem and self-efficacy of workers may lead to a smaller number of older workers with health limitations exiting the workforce early. For those who provide informal care it is important that they receive support at work and gain more job control; this may help to overcome EEPW. Also, employers are advised to strengthen the social coherence and to stimulate the social contacts between employees at work. A higher variation in work activities and less repetitive movements during work might decrease the number of older workers with health limitations who exit early from the workforce. Further research should examine whether these proposed changes in policy and work environment will help to overcome EEPW in older workers with health limitations in practice.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Worldwide, average life expectancy is rising [1]. In the Netherlands, average life expectancy increased from 75.2 years in 1980 to 81.3 years in 2015 and is expected to increase further, to 86.2 years by 2040 [2]. Furthermore, the percentage of the population older than 65 is rising and the percentage of people of working age is decreasing. Considering these trends, it is expected that in the European Union by the year 2060 there will be only two people of working age for every person aged 65 and over, whereas this ratio was four to one in 2013 [3]. A similar trend can be seen in the Netherlands, where the percentage of people of working age (15–64) decreased from 68.6% in 1985 to 65.3% in 2015, and this is expected to decline further to 57.1% by 2040 [2, 4]. The aging of the population and the reduction of the working age population put pressure on pension schemes and put the sustainability of financing systems at risk.

In response to the aging of the population and its effects on the economy, policies regarding pension and statutory retirement age are changing in most European countries. Due to these reforms, older workers in Europe are nowadays compelled to work up to an older age than in the past [5]. This is also the case in the Netherlands [6], where in 2006 early retirement schemes were discontinued. After this reform a gradual rise in the actual retirement age to over 64 years has been observed [7]. Furthermore, the statutory retirement age was reformed in 2012 with the enactment of the Raising of the State Pension Age and Standard Pension Retirement Age Act (*Wet verhoging AOW- en pensioenrichtleeftijd*). Because of this new law, the statutory retirement age will gradually increase from 65 in 2013 to 66 in 2018 and 67 in 2021. After 2021, the statutory retirement age will increase in line with average life expectancy [8]. In addition to the changes in the statutory retirement age, the criteria for receiving a disability pension have been tightened over the past several decades [9]. One of the results of this change in policy is that older workers with health limitations in the 2010s are continuing to work up to an older age than their age peers in the two prior decades [10].

The stated policy interventions, the rise in the actual retirement age, and the growth of the number of older workers are likely to lead to a further rise in the number of employees with health limitations. In the "new" older working population, aged 65–68, the proportion of workers with chronic diseases is expected to rise from 63% in 2011 to 69% in 2030 [11]. The effect of health limitations on work and work exit has been the subject of extensive study. Studies have shown that chronic diseases

and poor self-perceived health are associated with early exit from paid work [12–14]. Chronic diseases and disorders have also been associated with lower work ability and less productivity at work [15]. Studies conducted by Boot et al. [16] and Sewdas et al. [17] have shown that several factors associated with early work exit differ between older workers with a chronic disease and older workers without a chronic disease. Boot et al. [16] investigated differences and similarities in predictors of having paid work at 3-year follow-up in Dutch workers aged 55–62 years at baseline, with and without a chronic disease, in the period 2003–2006. They found that a younger age, more working hours, absence of functional limitations, less neuroticism, higher sense of mastery, and fewer depressive symptoms were associated with having paid work at the time of follow-up, regardless of the presence of a chronic disease. Additionally, they found some differences in predictors between those with and without a chronic disease. Having low psychosocial work resources and high physical work demands were associated with exit from paid work for workers with a chronic disease but not for workers without a chronic disease. Boot et al. suggest that this difference may be due to the fact that having a chronic disease triggers the imbalance between work demands and resources and thus results in a higher job strain, which in turn is a predictor of early work exit. Sewdas et al. [17] investigated determinants of early retirement in Dutch workers aged 57–62 years with and without chronic diseases. They concluded that the majority of determinants appeared similar for workers with and without chronic diseases. Poor physical and mental health and more depressive symptoms were significant predictors of early retirement in both groups. However, two factors were associated with early retirement in workers with chronic diseases only: a low sense of mastery and low levels of autonomy at work. The results from these studies suggest that a distinction should be made between workers with and without health limitations when examining predictors of early work exit.

Workers with health limitations are thus an important target group for research. Chronic diseases are an important characteristic of this target group because of the stated increase of the percentage of older workers with chronic diseases. Functional limitations are also an important characteristic of this group. These are restrictions in basic functions such as walking or stooping [18]. Disability arises when a person experiences difficulty or needs help in performing an activity [18]. Because functional limitations may eventually lead to disability, health limitations can be captured in an earlier stage than disability by identifying functional limitations.

1.2 Earlier research on factors associated with early work exit among workers in general

Previous studies have identified several socio-demographic, lifestyle-related, social, emotional, work-related, and physical health factors associated with early exit from paid work among general older working populations. Socio-demographic factors that are positively associated with early exit from paid work in older workers are: higher age, having a partner, having a retired partner, being female, and a lower educational level [13, 16, 19–21]. Smoking, high alcohol intake, lack of physical activity, and obesity are lifestyle factors that are associated with early exit from paid work [13, 19, 20, 22, 23].

From a social perspective, it has been shown that some workers stop working in order to provide informal care [20]. Elovainio et al. [24] assessed the effect of social support on early retirement. In their study, social support was measured by the size of the social network and the heterogeneity of the network. They showed that a small social network size was associated with early retirement among women.

From an emotional perspective, fewer depressive symptoms and a higher sense of mastery are associated with continuation of work among older workers [16, 17, 19]. Firth et al. [25] showed that higher levels of stress contribute to the intention to quit work and that higher levels of self-esteem contribute to less intention to quit. Higher self-efficacy in older workers is related to higher job satisfaction and higher job motivation and might therefore lead to more work continuation among this group [26].

Also, several work-related factors are associated with work exit and work continuation among older workers. The financial aspects of work, the social contacts, more weekly working hours, and being challenged at work are important factors for work continuation [16, 21]. Low job control and low job rewards [13, 23], high psychological demands, high physical demands, lower autonomy at work, and low support at work are associated with early exit from paid work [12, 27]. Fleischmann et al. [28] showed that favorable psychosocial working conditions may reduce the risk of early work exit among workers with a chronic disease.

1.3 Aim of this study

So far, most studies have focused on the differences between workers with and without chronic diseases, the influence of health limitations on doing paid work, and the factors that predict work continuation among older workers in general. Little is known about the differences within the group of older workers with health limitations and the factors that predict early work exit in this group. In other words, the question is: what makes one person with health limitations exit work early and another continue?

Insight into factors predicting early exit from work can provide direction for workplace policies to overcome early work exit of older workers with health limitations. Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions: (1) Which personal and work-related factors are associated with early exit from paid work (EEPW) among older workers with health limitations? (2) What personal and work-related factors predict EEPW among older workers with health limitations?

2. Methods

2.1 Sample

We used data from the Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (LASA) [29, 30]. LASA is an ongoing, prospective cohort-sequential study, which examines the effects and consequences of aging in society at large in different domains: physical, emotional, cognitive, and social functioning. Older adults, aged 55–85 years, were selected in three different regions in the Netherlands, thus ensuring a nationally representative sample. The participants were randomly selected from the municipal registries. Since the start in 1992, measurement waves have been repeated every three years. In 2002/2003 and in 2012/2013, new cohorts of participants aged 55–64 years were recruited, using the same sampling frame. More detailed information on the sampling and data collection has been described elsewhere [29, 30]. The data used in this study are from the third cohort at baseline (2012/2013) and follow-up (2015/2016).

2.1.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The baseline cohort consisted of 1,023 participants. To be included in the study, participants had to meet four criteria. First, they needed to have a paid job at baseline ($n=627$). Second, they should not have reached the statutory retirement age at follow-up, which was 65 years and 3 months in 2015 and 65 years and 6 months in 2016 ($n=520$) [31]. Third, they had to have at least one chronic disease and/or a score below the median on a set of physical performance tests ($n=422$). Fourth, respondents had to have valid data on work status at follow-up ($n=297$). See appendix A for the flowchart of the inclusion procedure. When comparing the differences in baseline characteristics of the workers with follow-up data with the workers without follow-up data ($n=125$), four of the 36 variables used in this study showed significant differences. Participants without follow-up data had on average a lower educational level, provided less informal care, had a smaller social network, and smoked more often.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Outcome variable

The dependent variable, *paid work for one hour or more per week (yes/no)*, was measured at three-year follow-up. This variable is the dependent variable, with the response 'no' indicating EEPW and 'yes' indicating continuation of work. The variable is based upon self-reported information, obtained during the interview.

2.2.2 Health

Chronic disease was defined as the presence of one or more chronic diseases. During the interview, respondents were asked if they had diabetes mellitus, cardiac disease, chronic non-specific lung disease (asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), peripheral arterial disease, cerebrovascular accident or stroke, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer, or a maximum of two other chronic diseases. According to the inclusion criteria for our study, participants with one self-reported disease were included. To serve as an independent variable in the analysis, the dichotomous variable *multimorbidity (yes/no)* was created. People were categorized as having multimorbidity if they had two or more chronic diseases [32].

The *physical performance* tests are characterized by high sensitivity in the higher ability range. For this reason this test was chosen to use in this study as it might enable detection of functional limitations before respondents notice them themselves [33]. Physical performance was measured with a set of four individual tests: (1) walk 3 meters, turn around, and walk 3 meters back as quickly as possible, (2) crossing the arms across the chest, rise 5 times from a chair and sit back down at usual pace, (3) put on and take off a cardigan, and (4) maintain a tandem stand, i.e., placing one foot before the other, for 10 seconds. For the first three tests the time was recorded and categorized into four categories, based on quartiles: (1) low to (4) high performance. If a participant was not able to perform a test, he/she received a score of 0 on that test. In the fourth test, most participants were able to keep their balance during the entire 10 seconds. Therefore, three categories were used instead of four: (0) unable to perform, (2) able to hold balance up to 9 seconds, and (4) able to hold balance for 10 seconds. The sum score of these four tests was calculated, with scores ranging from 0 (poor performance) to 16 (good performance).

According to the inclusion criteria for our study, respondents were included when having a sum score below the median (<13) or when they were unable to perform in one of the performance tests due to health problems.

2.2.3 Potential predictor variables

The potential predictor variables consisted of personal and work characteristics. They were chosen based on the literature on the general older population and on consultation with professionals in the research field of aging. The variables were measured at baseline, in 2012/2013.

Socio-demographics

Socio-demographic predictors were *age*, *gender*, *having children (yes/no)*, *children living in house (yes/no)*, *partner (yes/no)*, *partner has a paid job (yes/no)*, *educational level (low/intermediate/high)*, *homeownership (homeowner without mortgage/ homeowner with mortgage/ renter)* and *income*.

Age and gender were derived from the population registry.

In the interviews, respondents were asked to indicate their highest level of education attained. Education was categorized according to the ISCED guidelines: (1) low (elementary not completed, elementary, lower vocational, general intermediate), (2) intermediate (intermediate vocational, general secondary), and (3) high (higher vocational, college, and university) [34, 35].

To assess the *income* of the household, respondents were asked to indicate their monthly income level, including the income of the partner. They could choose from 24 categories, with the lowest category being €454–€567 and the highest category being €5,446 or more. To ensure comparability of income between persons with and without a partner, the variable was adjusted by multiplying an income that was shared with a partner by 0.7. The resulting amounts were categorized into three commonly used income categories, namely (1) low, (2) middle, and (3) high. Low income was defined as an income of €1,569 or less, which was equal to the minimum wage + €100 on January 1, 2013 [36]. The upper 20% of the income range is often used as a cut-off for high income [37]. In 2013, income amounts above €2,608 per month represented this upper 20% in the Netherlands [38]. Respondents were categorized as having a middle income if they earned more than €1,569 and equal to or less than €2,608, and respondents who earned more than €2,608 were categorized as having a high income.

Lifestyle

Physical activity (kcal p/day) was measured during the interview using the LASA Physical Activity Questionnaire (LAPAQ). This measure was shown to have good concurrent and test-retest validity [39]. The questionnaire gathered information on which activities the respondents engaged in during the past two weeks. The activities assessed in the questionnaire were household activities, walking outdoors, biking, gardening, and two sports activities. Respondents were asked how long and how often they engaged in these activities. For every activity and sport the time spent in minutes per day was calculated. To obtain intensity levels, MET scores were assigned to every activity based on previously published MET scores lists [40, 41]. In this study, total activity in kcal per day was used. This was calculated by multiplying the assigned

MET score of an activity with the weight of the respondent, and then multiplying it by the duration (in hours) of the activity. The kcal of all activities were added up and divided by 14 to yield daily energy expenditure.

Alcohol use (no/moderate/heavy) was added as a categorical variable based on an index created by the Netherlands Economic Institute [42]. The categories were (1) no use (0 glasses per day), (2) moderate use (men 1–3 and women 1–2 glasses per day), and (3) heavy use (men >3 and women >2 glasses per day).

For *smoking* a dichotomous variable was created (smoker/non-smoker). Respondents who had never smoked or had stopped smoking more than 15 years ago were categorized as non-smokers. Respondents who currently smoked or who had stopped smoking less than 15 years before the main interview were categorized as smokers. This cut-off was chosen because earlier research has shown that, after 10 to 20 years, the mortality rates of smokers and non-smokers are almost equal [43].

Social

Informal caregiving (yes/no) was based on two questions: "Did you provide help with household tasks recently?" (yes/no) and "Did you provide help with personal care recently?" (yes/no). Respondents were coded as informal caregiver if they answered yes to one or both questions.

Loneliness was measured using the "De Jong-Gierveld Loneliness scale", which assesses social loneliness and emotional loneliness [44, 45]. The scale consisted of 11 items, positive and negative. The number of answers that are indicative of loneliness were counted and a total score, combining social and emotional loneliness, was calculated. Scores could range from 0 (no loneliness) to 11 (severe loneliness).

Network size was determined by asking respondents to name the persons they were in frequent contact with and who were also important to them [46]. By adding up all persons named, the size of the personal network was determined. A priori the network size was maximized at 80 persons; none of the respondents reached this limit. During the interview, further information on the nine persons in the network with the most frequent contacts was gathered. The interviewer asked how much emotional and instrumental support respondents received from each of these network members. Response options were (1) never, (2) seldom, (3) sometimes, and (4) often. This information was used to construct the variables *emotional support received* and *instrumental support received*. A sum score (0–36) was calculated, with higher scores indicating higher overall support.

Emotional

The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (CES-D) was used to measure *depressive symptoms*. This scale consists of twenty items that assess symptoms of depression experienced in the past week. Every item could be answered on a 4-point scale ranging from (0) 'rarely or never' to (4) mostly or always. The scale score is the sum of the answers and varies from 0-60, with higher scores indicating more symptoms of depression. Earlier research showed the CES-D to have good criterion validity in an older population [47].

Sense of mastery was measured using the Pearlin Mastery Scale [48]. This scale consists of seven questions: five negative items and two positive items, with answer categories ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Sum scores ranged from 7 to 35, with higher scores reflecting a higher sense of mastery.

For the measurement of *self-esteem*, a customized version of the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale [49] was used. In LASA, the scale consists of four items instead of the usual ten. Every statement has five response categories varying from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The scale score is the sum of the answers and varies from 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.

Self-efficacy was measured using an adapted version of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) [50]. It consists of twelve items and was validated among Dutch older people [51]. The twelve items cover three aspects: persistence when facing adversity, effort to complete behavior, and willingness to initiate behavior. Respondents could answer each item on a five-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. In our study the three aspects were analyzed separately. *Persistence when facing adversity* consisted of four of the twelve items, and scores could range from 4-20, with higher scores indicating higher levels of persistence. *Effort to complete behavior* consisted of five of the twelve items, and scores could range from 5-25, with higher scores indicating higher levels of effort. *Willingness to initiate behavior* consisted of three of the twelve items, and scores could range from 3-15, with higher scores indicating higher levels of willingness.

Perceived stress was measured using the perceived stress scale (PSS) [52]. Van Eck et al. [53] showed that the PSS is applicable for the Dutch population. The scale consisted of ten items that could be answered on a Likert scale from (0) never to (4) very often. Higher scores indicated higher levels of stress.

Work

In earlier LASA research a general population job-exposure matrix (GPJEM), applicable to older and retired workers, was developed and validated [54]. In LASA the jobs of

respondents were linked to the Netherlands Standard Classification of Occupations 1992 (NSCO92). Using the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey, physical and psychosocial work exposures were linked to NSCO92. The predictive validity of the GPJEM was shown to be good, as associations with health outcomes were in accordance with the literature. Further information on the GPJEM and its development and validation has been described elsewhere [54]. In this study, eight of the ten exposures are used as independent variables: *use of force* (low/moderate), *work in uncomfortable positions* (low/moderate), *repetitive movements* (low/moderate/high), *time pressure* (low/moderate/high), *task requirements* (low/moderate/high), *cognitive demands* (low/high), *autonomy at work* (low/high), and *variation in activities* (low/high).

Two self-reported work variables were also used in this study, the first variable being *regularity of working hours* (regular/irregular). The category regular working hours consisted of regular working hours (9 to 5) and regular working hours including night/weekend shifts. The category irregular working hours consisted of shift work without weekend shifts, shift work including weekend shifts, irregular working hours without weekend shifts, and irregular working hours including weekend shifts. The second variable used was *number of working hours per week*. This variable was assessed by asking respondents how many hours per week they worked. This variable was categorized into four categories: (1) ≥ 32 & ≤ 40 , (2) < 16 , (3) ≥ 16 & ≤ 31 , and (4) > 40 . The category ≥ 32 & ≤ 40 was chosen as the reference group, as this approximates fulltime work in the Netherlands.

2.3 Statistical analyses

All statistical analyses were performed in SPSS version 22.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). To overcome biased results due to missing data, multiple imputation (MI) was used to create a complete data set [55]. Predictive mean matching was applied during MI, and fifteen imputed datasets were created. Before imputation 1.2% of the values were missing, among 23.2% of the respondents. We reported pooled results.

All continuous variables were checked for linearity of their association with the outcome. Only one of the variables had a linear association with the outcome: persistence when facing adversity. All other continuous variables were added to the model as categorical variables. The variables age, network size, emotional support received, instrumental support received, depressive symptoms, mastery, effort to complete behavior, willingness to initiate behavior, perceived stress, and physical performance were categorized based on their quartiles. Loneliness and self-esteem were heavily skewed and categorized into tertiles.

2.3.1 Association model

First, bivariate associations of each of the potential predictors and EEPW were examined using logistic regression analyses, adjusted for age. Associations were considered statistically significant when $p \leq 0.05$.

2.3.2 Prediction model

Second, a prediction model was formed in three steps, again using logistic regression analysis. Step one involved a univariate pre-selection. Potential predictors were selected for further analysis when they met the criterion of $p \leq 0.2$ [55]. Step two involved a backward selection of predictors within the personal and work domains separately. Potential predictors were excluded stepwise from the model based on their p-value. In each step the variable with the highest p-value was excluded from the model until only variables with $p \leq 0.1$ were left. Step three consisted of a backward selection of all remaining predictors of the two domains combined. Stepwise exclusion was performed again in the same way as in step two, until only significant predictors were left in the model.

Before performing step two, the inter-correlation of all remaining variables was checked using the Spearman correlation test to avoid multicollinearity. If the correlation coefficient exceeded 0.6, one of the correlated variables was excluded. In step two, which involved backward selection, the likelihood-ratio test was performed to check whether exclusion was appropriate, after the exclusion of each variable [56]. This test compares the $-2 \log$ likelihood of the old and the new model; the likelihood-ratio was considered appropriate when $p > 0.1$.

2.3.3 Validation of the prediction model

The performance of the final model was assessed using so-called apparent validation methods, i.e., the performance of the model is tested in the same sample. The area under the ROC curve (AUC) was calculated [56], and the Hosmer-Lemeshow test was applied. The AUC is used to show the ability of the model to distinguish between the respondents with and without the outcome; an AUC > 0.7 is commonly regarded as good [55]. The Hosmer-Lemeshow test is used to assess the agreement between the observed probabilities of the outcome and the probabilities predicted by the model; this test should not be significant ($p > 0.05$) [57].

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample. In total, 297 respondents were included in this study, of whom 68 (22.9%) exited work early.

Table 1. Descriptive data for all potential predictors, by work status at follow-up

Variable	Categories	Paid work at follow-up (N=229) (%)	Early exit from paid work (N=68) (%)	Total (N=297) (%)
Sociodemographic				
Age	Years (M(sd))	58.3 (1.86)	59.5 (1.93)	58.5 (1.94)
Gender	Male	58.5	47.1	55.9
Has children	Yes	82.1	82.4	82.2
Children living at home	Yes	31.2	23.5	29.5
Partner	Yes	83.8	80.9	83.2
Partner has a paid job	Yes	79.2	72.2	77.5
Educational level (ISCED)	Low (ISCED 0-2)	31.0	39.7	33.0
	Middle (ISCED 3-4)	29.3	38.2	31.3
	High (ISCED 5-8)	39.7	22.1	35.7
Homeownership	No mortgage	9.3	15.4	10.7
	Mortgage	69.4	62.1	67.7
	Renter	21.3	22.5	21.6
Income	Low (\leq €1569)	21.5	26.3	22.6
	Moderate ($>$ €1569- \leq €2608)	39.3	41.3	39.8
	High ($>$ €2608)	39.2	32.4	37.6
Lifestyle				
Physical activity	Q1 (0-201 Kcal p/day)	21.9	19.3	21.3
	Q2 (204-405 Kcal p/day)	27.4	21.6	26.1
	Q3 (409-674 Kcal p/day)	25.2	21.8	26.1
	Q4 (676-2942 Kcal p/day)	25.0	30.3	26.6
Smoker	Yes	32.9	27.6	31.7
Alcohol use	None	11.6	15.0	12.4
	Moderate	71.2	73.1	71.6
	Heavy	17.2	11.9	16.0
Social				
Informal caregiving	Yes	21.8	29.4	23.6
Loneliness	No loneliness (0)	54.6	54.4	54.5
	Moderate loneliness (1-2)	25.3	29.4	26.3
	High loneliness ($>$ 2)	20.1	16.2	19.2
Network size	Q1 (2-12)	22.3	11.8	19.9
	Q2 (13-19)	25.8	22.1	24.9
	Q3 (25-28)	25.3	29.4	26.3
	Q4 (29-76)	26.6	26.8	29.0
Emotional support received	Q1 (1-20)	26.2	20.6	24.9
	Q2 (21-24)	21.8	25.0	22.6
	Q3 (25-28)	29.3	25.0	28.3
	Q4 (29-36)	22.7	29.4	24.2
Instrumental support received	Q1 (2-11)	25.8	26.5	25.9
	Q2 (12-15)	24.5	25.0	24.6
	Q3 (16-20)	26.6	23.5	25.9
	Q4 (21-32)	23.1	25.0	23.6

Variable	Categories	Paid work at follow-up (N=229) (%)	Early exit from paid work (N=68) (%)	Total (N=297) (%)
Emotional				
Depressive symptoms	Q1 (0-2)	28.4	26.5	27.9
	Q2 (3-5)	24.9	20.9	26.3
	Q3 (6-9)	19.7	23.5	20.5
	Q4 (10-34)	27.1	19.1	25.3
Mastery	Q1 (9-16)	23.1	19.1	22.2
	Q2 (17-19)	29.3	33.8	30.3
	Q3 (20)	24.5	25.0	24.6
	Q4 (21-35)	23.1	22.1	22.9
Perceived self-esteem	Low (<16)	27.9	41.2	31.0
	Moderate (16)	36.7	29.4	35.0
	High (>16)	35.4	29.4	34.0
Persistence when facing adversity	M (sd)	15.5 (2.3)	15.0 (2.2)	15.4 (2.3)
Willingness to initiate behavior	Q1 (3-8)	24.5	29.4	25.6
	Q2 (9-10)	24.9	23.5	24.6
	Q3 (11-12)	34.1	35.3	34.3
	Q4 (13-15)	16.6	11.8	15.5
Effort to complete behavior	Q1 (13-18)	24.9	22.1	24.2
	Q2 (19)	17.5	17.6	17.5
	Q3 (20)	30.1	22.1	28.3
	Q4 (21-25)	27.5	38.2	30.0
Perceived stress	Q1 (0-7)	23.7	28.1	24.7
	Q2 (8-10)	30.0	26.3	29.1
	Q3 (11-13)	20.8	21.6	21.0
	Q4 (14-29)	25.5	24.0	25.2
Work				
Use of force	Low	62.0	55.9	60.6
	Medium	38.0	44.1	39.4
Work in uncomfortable position	Low	62.4	55.9	60.9
	Medium	37.6	44.1	39.1
Repetitive movements	Low	54.6	36.8	50.5
	Medium	29.7	42.6	32.7
	High	15.7	20.6	16.8
Work with task requirements	Low	50.2	57.4	51.9
	Medium	40.2	35.3	39.1
	High	9.6	7.4	9.1
Time pressure	Low	49.8	57.4	51.1
	Medium	42.8	35.3	41.1
	High	7.4	7.4	7.4
Cognitive demands	Low	55.9	66.2	58.2
	High	44.1	33.8	41.8
Autonomy	Low	48.0	54.4	49.5
	High	52.0	45.6	50.5
Variation in activities	Low	58.5	66.2	60.3
	Medium	2.6	8.8	4.0
	High	38.9	25.0	35.7
Regularity of working hours	Regular hours	72.8	80.9	74.6
Working hours per week	0-15 hours per week	12.7	25.0	15.5
	16-31 hours per week	26.2	22.1	25.3
	32-40 hours per week	49.3	45.6	48.5
	>40 hours per week	11.8	7.4	10.8

Variable	Categories	Paid work at follow-up (N=229) (%)	Early exit from paid work (N=68) (%)	Total (N=297) (%)
Health				
Multimorbidity	Yes	49.8	47.1	49.2
Physical performance	Q1 (4-10)	22.4	26.3	23.3
	Q2 (11-12)	25.6	22.8	25.0
	Q3 (13-14)	29.2	33.1	30.1
	Q4 (15-16)	22.8	17.9	21.6

3.2 Association model

Table 2 shows the results of the bivariate association analyses, adjusted for age. Women had 2.00 times higher odds of EEPW than men ($p=0.02$). Those with a high educational level had lower odds of early work exit compared to those with a low educational level ($OR=0.39$, $p=0.01$). The odds of EEPW were 2.10 times higher for workers who provided informal care than for workers who did not provide informal care ($p=0.03$). The odds of EEPW were 2.77 times higher for workers with a large

Table 2. Association model of single predictors with work status at follow-up: logistic regression adjusted for age

Variable	Categories	β	OR	P value
Sociodemographic				
Gender	Male	R	R	
	Female	0.691	1.996	0.020*
Has children	Yes	R	R	
	No	-0.660	0.847	0.663
Children living at home	Yes	R	R	
	No	-0.160	0.852	0.634
Partner	Yes	R	R	
	No	0.085	1.088	0.821
Partner has a paid job	No	R	R	
	Yes	-0.380	0.684	0.259
Education level (ISCED)	Low (ISCED 0-2)	R	R	
	Middle (ISCED 3-4)	-0.031	0.969	0.927
	High (ISCED 5-8)	-0.954	0.385	0.011*
Homeownership	No mortgage	R	R	
	Mortgage	-0.643	0.526	0.141
	Renter	-0.530	0.588	0.293
Income	Low ($\leq\text{€}1569$)	R	R	
	Moderate ($>\text{€}1569$ - $\text{€}2608$)	-0.132	0.877	0.732
	High ($>\text{€}2608$)	-0.308	0.735	0.419
Lifestyle				
Physical activity	Q1 (0-201 Kcal p/day)	R	R	
	Q2 (204-405 Kcal p/day)	0.128	1.137	0.779
	Q3 (409-674 Kcal p/day)	0.487	1.627	0.270
	Q4 (676-2942 Kcal p/day)	0.669	1.952	0.135
Smoker	No	R	R	
	Yes	-0.384	0.681	0.264
Alcohol use	None	R	R	
	Moderate	-0.494	0.610	0.266
	Heavy	-0.940	0.391	0.116

Variable	Categories	β	OR	P value
Social				
Informal caregiving	No	R	R	
	Yes	0.740	2.097	0.028*
Loneliness	No loneliness (0)	R	R	
	Moderate loneliness (1-2)	0.184	1.201	0.582
	High loneliness (>2)	-0.261	0.770	0.515
Network size	Q1 (2-12)	R	R	
	Q2 (13-19)	0.418	1.519	0.398
	Q3 (25-28)	0.800	2.226	0.095
	Q4 (29-76)	1.017	2.765	0.029*
Emotional support received	Q1 (1-20)	R	R	
	Q2 (21-24)	0.444	1.559	0.299
	Q3 (25-28)	0.163	1.177	0.697
	Q4 (29-36)	0.741	2.099	0.078
Instrumental support received	Q1 (2-11)	R	R	
	Q2 (12-15)	0.133	1.142	0.743
	Q3 (16-20)	-0.199	0.888	0.769
	Q4 (21-32)	0.269	1.309	0.510
Emotional				
Depressive symptoms	Q1 (0-2)	R	R	
	Q2 (3-5)	0.334	1.397	0.383
	Q3 (6-9)	0.185	1.204	0.652
	Q4 (10-34)	-0.158	0.854	0.706
Mastery	Q1 (9-16)	R	R	
	Q2 (17-19)	0.291	1.338	0.477
	Q3 (20)	0.176	1.192	0.675
	Q4 (21-35)	0.160	1.173	0.711
Perceived self-esteem	Low (<16)	R	R	
	Moderate (16)	-0.727	0.484	0.039*
	High (>16)	-0.629	0.533	0.074
Persistence when facing adversity	Scale score	-0.136	0.873	0.034*
Willingness to initiate behavior	Q1 (3-8)	R	R	
	Q2 (9-10)	-0.261	0.770	0.518
	Q3 (11-12)	-0.108	0.897	0.766
	Q4 (13-15)	-0.515	0.598	0.289
Effort to complete behavior	Q1 (13-18)	R	R	
	Q2 (19)	0.132	1.141	0.773
	Q3 (20)	-0.182	0.834	0.667
	Q4 (21-25)	0.486	1.625	0.210
Perceived stress	Q1 (0-7)	R	R	
	Q2 (8-10)	-0.318	0.727	0.496
	Q3 (11-13)	-0.093	0.911	0.831
	Q4 (14-29)	-0.092	0.912	0.830
Work				
Use of force	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.176	1.192	0.548
Work in uncomfortable position	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.193	1.213	0.509
Repetitive movements	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.728	2.071	0.025*
	High	0.693	2.000	0.083
Work with task requirements	Low	R	R	
	Medium	-0.354	0.702	0.250
	High	-0.494	0.610	0.369

Variable	Categories	β	OR	P value
Time pressure	Low	R	R	
	Medium	-0.427	0.653	0.164
	High	-0.230	0.795	0.685
Cognitive demands	Low	R	R	
	High	-0.688	0.503	0.026*
Autonomy	Low	R	R	
	High	-0.284	0.752	0.324
Variation in activities	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.891	2.437	0.161
	High	-0.702	0.495	0.033*
Regularity of working hours	Regular hours	R	R	
	Non-regular hours	-0.578	0.561	0.106
Working hours per week	0-15 hours per week	0.865	2.375	0.026*
	16-31 hours per week	-0.011	0.989	0.976
	32-40 hours per week	R	R	
	>40 hours per week	-0.260	0.711	0.632
Health Multimorbidity	No	R	R	
	Yes	-0.047	0.954	0.870
Physical performance	Q1 (4-10)	R	R	
	Q2 (11-12)	-0.410	0.662	0.333
	Q3 (13-14)	-0.018	0.982	0.964
	Q4 (15-16)	-0.384	0.706	0.432

* $p \leq 0.05$; Q = quartile; R = reference category

network (Q4) than for workers with a small network ($p=0.03$). Workers with moderate self-esteem ($OR=0.48$, $p=0.04$) and workers with high self-esteem ($OR=0.53$, $p=0.07$) had lower odds of early work exit than workers with a low self-esteem. Every point higher on the "persistence when facing adversity" scale was associated with 0.88 times lower odds of EEPW. Those with medium repetitive movements at work ($OR=2.07$, $p=0.03$) or with high repetitive movements at work ($OR=2.00$, $p=0.08$) had higher odds of early work exit than those with low repetitive movements at work. Workers with high variation of activity at work had lower odds of early work exit than workers with low variation in activities at work ($OR=0.50$, $p=0.03$). Workers with high cognitive demands at work had lower odds of early work exit than workers with low cognitive demands at work ($OR=0.50$, $p=0.03$). Workers who worked 0-15 hours per week had higher odds of EEPW than workers who worked 32-40 hours per week ($OR=2.38$, $p=0.03$). High repetitive movements at work, a moderately-large network size (Q3), high self-esteem, and high emotional support received (Q4) all had a p-value lower than 0.1 but higher than 0.05.

3.3 Prediction model

Step one of building the prediction model involved examination of univariate associations between predictors and early work exit (Table 3). Thirteen predictors

Table 3. Association of single predictors with work status at follow-up: unadjusted logistic regression

Variable	Categories	β	OR	P value
Sociodemographic				
Age	Q1 (55.0–56.8)	R	R	
	Q2 (56.8–58.4)	0.431	1.539	0.358
	Q3 (58.4–60.1)	0.591	1.806	0.197†
	Q4 (60.2–62.4)	1.650	5.207	0.000†
Gender	Male	R	R	
	Female	0.462	1.587	0.096†
Has children	Yes	R	R	
	No	-0.018	0.983	0.961
Children living at home	Yes	R	R	
	No	-0.390	0.677	0.223
Partner	Yes	R	R	
	No	0.204	1.227	0.567
Partner has a paid job	No	R	R	
	Yes	-0.382	0.683	0.238
Education level (ISCED)	Low (ISCED 0–2)	R	R	
	Middle (ISCED 3–4)	0.020	1.020	0.950
	High (ISCED 5–8)	-0.836	0.433	0.020†
Homeownership	No mortgage	R	R	
	Mortgage	-0.610	0.544	0.145†
	Renter	-0.441	0.644	0.363
Income	Low (\leq €1569)	R	R	
	Moderate ($>$ €1569–€2608)	-0.151	0.860	0.670
	High ($>$ €2608)	-0.393	0.675	0.283
Lifestyle				
Physical activity	Q1 (0–201 Kcal p/day)	R	R	
	Q2 (204–405 Kcal p/day)	-0.155	0.891	0.790
	Q3 (409–674 Kcal p/day)	0.257	1.293	0.533
	Q4 (676–2942 Kcal p/day)	0.296	1.344	0.472
Smoker	No	R	R	
	Yes	-0.250	0.779	0.443
Alcohol use	None	R	R	
	Moderate	-0.229	0.795	0.586
	Heavy	-0.623	0.537	0.271
Social				
Informal caregiving	No	R	R	
	Yes	0.400	1.492	0.198†
Loneliness	No loneliness (0)	R	R	
	Moderate loneliness (1–2)	0.153	1.165	0.633
	High loneliness ($>$ 2)	-0.213	0.808	0.579
Network size	Q1 (2–12)	R	R	
	Q2 (13–19)	0.483	1.621	0.312
	Q3 (25–28)	0.788	2.198	0.087†
	Q4 (29–76)	0.960	2.613	0.032†
Emotional support received	Q1 (1–20)	R	R	
	Q2 (21–24)	0.376	1.457	0.357
	Q3 (25–28)	0.084	1.087	0.835
	Q4 (29–36)	0.500	1.684	0.208
Instrumental support received	Q1 (2–11)	R	R	
	Q2 (12–15)	-0.005	0.995	0.990
	Q3 (16–20)	-0.151	0.860	0.698
	Q4 (21–32)	0.050	1.051	0.897

Variable	Categories	β	OR	P value
Emotional				
Depressive symptoms	Q1 (0-2)	R	R	
	Q2 (3-5)	0.285	1.330	0.439
	Q3 (6-9)	0.250	1.284	0.526
	Q4 (10-34)	-0.278	0.757	0.492
Mastery	Q1 (9-16)	R	R	
	Q2 (17-19)	0.341	1.406	0.379
	Q3 (20)	0.197	1.218	0.624
	Q4 (21-35)	0.127	1.136	0.758
Perceived self-esteem	Low (<16)	R	R	
	Moderate (16)	-0.608	0.544	0.071†
	High (>16)	-0.572	0.564	0.090†
Persistence when facing adversity	Scale score	-0.095	0.910	0.115†
Willingness to initiate behavior	Q1 (3-8)	R	R	
	Q2 (9-10)	-0.241	0.786	0.531
	Q3 (11-12)	-0.149	0.862	0.670
	Q4 (13-15)	-0.529	0.289	0.259
Effort to complete behavior	Q1 (13-18)	R	R	
	Q2 (19)	0.131	1.140	0.765
	Q3 (20)	-0.191	0.826	0.638
	Q4 (21-25)	0.450	1.568	0.227
Perceived stress	Q1 (0-7)	R	R	
	Q2 (8-10)	-0.314	0.731	0.448
	Q3 (11-13)	-0.133	0.875	0.748
	Q4 (14-29)	-0.235	0.791	0.558
Work				
Use of force	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.254	1.289	0.365
Work in uncomfortable position	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.272	1.313	0.331
Repetitive movements	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.757	2.132	0.015†
	High	0.665	1.944	0.083†
Work with task requirements	Low	R	R	
	Medium	-0.262	0.769	0.373
	High	-0.400	0.670	0.449
Time pressure	Low	R	R	
	Medium	-0.334	0.716	0.255
	High	-0.151	0.860	0.780
Cognitive demands	Low	R	R	
	High	-0.434	0.648	0.133†
Autonomy	Low	R	R	
	High	-0.256	0.774	0.356
Variation in activities	Low	R	R	
	Medium	1.091	2.978	0.070†
	High	-0.564	0.569	0.074†
Regularity of working hours	Regular hours	R	R	
	Non-regular hours	-0.459	0.632	0.180†
Working hours per week	0-15 hours per week	0.797	2.218	0.031†
	16-31 hours per week	-0.094	0.911	0.791
	32-40 hours per week	R	R	
	>40 hours per week	-0.391	0.677	0.459

Variable	Categories	β	OR	P value
Health Multimorbidity	No	R	R	
	Yes	-0.109	0.897	0.693
Physical performance	Q1 (4-10)	R	R	
	Q2 (11-12)	-0.279	0.757	0.490
	Q3 (13-14)	-0.034	0.967	0.928
	Q4 (15-16)	-0.397	0.673	0.352

† $p \leq 0.20$; Q = quartile; R = reference category

met the criterion of $p \leq 0.2$: age, gender, educational level, homeownership, informal caregiving, network size, persistence when facing adversity, self-esteem, repetitive movements at work, cognitive demands at work, variation of activities at work, working hours per week, and regularity of working hours. Before further modeling, the inter-correlation of all remaining variables was checked to avoid multicollinearity (Table 4). Variation in activities at work correlated highly (≥ 0.6) with repetitive movements at work (-0.68) and with cognitive demands at work (0.79). Therefore, variation in activities was excluded from further analysis.

Table 4. Correlations between predictors that were bivariately significant for work status at follow-up

	Age	Gender	Education level	Homeownership	Informal caregiving	Network size	Perceived self-esteem	Persistence when facing adversity	Repetitive movements	Cognitive demands	Variation in activities	Working hours	Regularity of working hours
Age	1.000												
Gender	-0.156	1.000											
Education level	0.029	-0.041	1.000										
Homeownership	0.030	-0.028	-0.006	1.000									
Informal caregiving	-0.122	0.223	0.012	-0.021	1.000								
Network size	0.033	0.164	-0.051	-0.184	0.148	1.000							
Perceived self-esteem	0.009	-0.163	0.044	0.048	-0.083	0.018	1.000						
Persistence when facing adversity	0.116	-0.214	0.225	0.008	-0.111	0.006	0.539	1.000					
Repetitive movements	0.037	0.029	-0.561	0.081	-0.011	0.010	-0.036	-0.205	1.000				
Cognitive demands	0.127	-0.092	0.424	-0.065	-0.046	-0.066	0.010	0.143	-0.400	1.000			
Variation in activities	0.069	-0.110	0.563	-0.057	-0.022	-0.060	-0.002	0.199	-0.681*	0.785*	1.000		
Working hours	-0.090	0.232	-0.036	-0.127	0.067	0.068	-0.002	0.078	0.009	-0.052	-0.027	1.000	
Regularity of working hours	0.055	0.011	-0.124	0.033	-0.124	-0.034	-0.010	0.004	0.029	0.058	-0.039	0.059	1.000

In step two (Table 5), the remaining predictors were divided into two domains: the personal domain and the work domain. The personal domain consisted of age, gender, education, homeownership, informal care, network size, persistence when facing adversity, and self-esteem. The work domain consisted of repetitive movements at work, cognitive demands at work, number of working hours per week, and regularity of working hours. In the personal domain three of the eight variables were excluded from the starting model. First, persistence when facing adversity ($p=0.47$)

Table 5. Predictors remaining in multivariable analyses: personal characteristics, work characteristics, and both

Predictor	Categories	β	OR	P value
Personal domain		-2.082		
<i>Constant</i>				
Age	Q1 (55.0-56.8)	R	R	
	Q2 (56.8-58.4)	0.309	1.362	0.534
	Q3 (58.4-60.1)	0.667	1.948	0.167
	Q4 (60.2-62.4)	1.943	6.979	<0.001†
Education level (ISCED)	Low (ISCED 0-2)	R	R	
	Middle (ISCED 3-4)	-0.075	0.928	0.833
	High (ISCED 5-8)	-0.971	0.397	0.013†
Informal caregiving	No	R	R	
	Yes	0.644	1.904	0.070†
Network size	Q1 (2-12)	R	R	
	Q2 (13-19)	0.495	1.640	0.333
	Q3 (20-28)	0.826	2.285	0.096†
	Q4 (29-76)	0.959	2.609	0.049†
Perceived self-esteem	Low (<16)	R	R	
	Moderate (16)	-0.811	0.444	0.027†
	High (>16)	-0.674	0.510	0.066†
Work domain		-1.609		
<i>Constant</i>				
Repetitive movements	Low	R	R	
	Medium	0.757	2.132	0.015†
	High	0.665	1.944	0.083†
Final model		-2.082		
<i>Constant</i>				
Age	Q1 (55.0-56.8)	R	R	
	Q2 (56.8-58.4)	0.309	1.362	0.534
	Q3 (58.4-60.1)	0.667	1.948	0.167
	Q4 (60.2-62.4)	1.943	6.979	<0.001†
Education level (ISCED)	Low (ISCED 0-2)	R	R	
	Middle (ISCED 3-4)	-0.075	0.928	0.833
	High (ISCED 5-8)	-0.971	0.397	0.013†
Informal caregiving	No	R	R	
	Yes	0.644	1.904	0.070†
Network size	Q1 (2-12)	R	R	
	Q2 (13-19)	0.495	1.640	0.333
	Q3 (20-28)	0.826	2.285	0.096†
	Q4 (29-76)	0.959	2.609	0.049†
Perceived self-esteem	Low (<16)	R	R	
	Moderate (16)	-0.811	0.444	0.027†
	High (>16)	-0.674	0.510	0.066†

† $p \leq 0.1$; Q = quartile; R = reference category

was excluded, then gender ($p=0.29$), and lastly homeownership ($p=0.20$). The likelihood-ratio test showed that all exclusions were appropriate ($p>0.1$). The predictors remaining in the personal domain and included in the final model were age, education, network size, self-esteem, and informal care. In the work domain, three of the four predictors were excluded from the starting model: first, cognitive demands at work ($p=0.89$), then regularity of working hours ($p=0.16$), and, finally, number of working hours per week ($p=0.10$). The only predictor remaining in the work model was repetitive movements at work.

Step three involved construction of the final prediction model. Of the six predictors in the starting model, only one was excluded during the analysis: repetitive movements at work ($p=0.25$). The final prediction model is shown in Table 6. It consists of seven significantly associated predictors. Workers aged between 60.2 years and 62.4 years had 1.94 times higher odds of EEPW than workers aged between 55.0 years and 56.8 years ($p<0.001$). Workers with a high educational level had lower odds of EEPW than those with a low educational level ($OR=0.40$, $p=0.01$). Those who provided informal care had 1.90 times higher odds of EEPW than those who did not provide informal care ($p=0.07$). Workers with a larger network, i.e., the third and the fourth quartiles of network size, had higher odds of EEPW than workers with a small network (Q3; $OR=2.29$, $p=0.10$, and Q4; $OR=2.61$, $p=0.05$). Workers with moderate and high self-esteem had lower odds of EEPW compared to workers with low self-esteem (moderate; $OR=0.44$, $p=0.03$, and high; $OR=0.51$, $p=0.07$).

The performance of the final model was good, with an area below the ROC curve of 0.74 and a p-value of the Hosmer-Lemeshow test of 0.11.

In an additional analysis, to test whether the exclusion of the variable variation in activities at work was of influence on the final model, variation in activities at work was added to the work domain instead of repetitive movements at work and cognitive demands at work. In this additional analysis, variation in activities was again the last variable left in the work domain, but it was excluded from the final model. The final model did not differ in either analysis.

4. Discussion

So far research on predictors of early exit from paid work (EEPW) has mainly focused on the general working population and overlooked the growing group of older workers with health limitations. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine which personal and work-related factors are associated with and predictive of EEPW in older workers with health limitations. Results from our logistic regression analyses show that several personal and work-related factors are associated with and predictive of EEPW in older workers with health limitations.

4.1 Personal domain

This study showed that women are more likely to exit early from paid work than men, a finding that is consistent with the literature. Rice et al. [20] showed that among older workers, women had a higher risk of early exit from employment than men. It has been reported that gender differences in retirement decisions may be caused by factors such as partner retirement and health of the partner [58, 59]. To assess whether the association found with gender might be attributed to other variables, additional analyses were performed, in which we adjusted for covariates; see Appendix B for the tables of these additional analyses. The assessed covariates were informal caregiving, partner with no job, education, network size, and self-esteem. The explanatory effect of a partner with no job and self-esteem were negligible. When including informal caregiving, education, or network size, the coefficient of female gender changed by slightly over 10%, but the odds ratios still pointed in the same direction, and the effect of gender was still significant for education and network size and close to significance for informal care ($p=0.058$). When including informal caregiving, education, and network size at the same time, the coefficient of gender changed by 35% and was no longer significant ($p=0.16$). Thus, consistent with the earlier studies, the differences in EEPW between men and women can be explained by factors other than gender alone, such as educational level, informal caregiving, and network size.

Older workers with health limitations, with a high educational level, had lower odds of EEPW compared to those with a low educational level. This effect of education is in line with the literature (e.g., [13]). A low educational level is often associated with jobs with unfavorable working conditions, and often such jobs can be burdensome for older workers. This might especially be the case for those with health limitations.

Regarding informal caregiving, the literature is not consistent as to its effect on paid work. Several studies have shown that informal caregiving is associated with exit from paid work [20, 60, 61], while others show a positive effect of informal caregiving on continuation of paid work [62, 63]. All previously mentioned studies were conducted in the general working population, while this study specifically focused on older workers with health limitations. This study shows that for older workers with health limitations, informal caregiving is positively associated with and an important predictor of EEPW. Possibly, the combination of paid work with informal caregiving is too burdensome for older workers with health limitations, and it may be that they exit early from paid work because of this.

Another important predictor according to our study is network size: a larger network is positively associated with EEPW in older workers with health limitations. This result is contrary to what we expected a priori, based on the study of Elovainio et al. [24]. Their expectation was that workers with a smaller network would have higher odds of EEPW. An explanation for the difference in results is possibly found in the fact that the above study was cross-sectional, which makes it hard to draw any causal conclusions. It is not possible to assess whether the participants in that particular study had a small network because of retirement or that they had retired because of the small size of their network. Our study clearly shows that, for older workers with health limitations, having a larger network raises the likelihood of EEPW when compared to older workers with health limitations with a small network. Studies conducted by Boot et al. [19] and by Proper et al. [21] have shown that older workers with health limitations continue to work in order to maintain their social contacts; our study shows that this might especially be the case for those with a small network.

Firth et al. [25] showed that higher levels of self-esteem have a small negative effect on the intention to quit work. Our study, however, showed a strong effect of self-esteem. In the bivariate analysis, moderate self-esteem was associated with lower odds of EEPW when compared to low self-esteem. In the final prediction model, moderate self-esteem and high self-esteem were both found to be important predictors of EEPW. In the past, very few studies reported on the relationship between self-esteem and work exit. Maybe this was overlooked in earlier studies, but possibly it is a factor that is relevant only for workers with health limitations. Our study shows that, for older worker with health limitations, higher levels of self-esteem were negatively associated with EEPW. Thus, low self-esteem can be seen as a risk factor for early work exit in older workers with health limitations. Possibly, workers with health limitations and low self-esteem are not convinced that they can continue in their job in combination with their health limitations and thus exit early from employment.

In our study the three components of self-efficacy were analyzed separately. Only persistence when facing adversity was statistically significantly associated with EEPW. For older workers with health limitations, higher scores on the scale of persistence when facing adversity were associated with lower odds of EEPW when compared to lower scores. This is in line with the findings reported by Paggi & Jopp [26], who stated that higher self-efficacy in older workers is related to higher job satisfaction and job motivation and might therefore lead to more work continuation among this group [26].

4.2 Work domain

Among physical work demands, medium and high levels of repetitive movements at work were associated with higher odds of EEPW when compared to a low level of repetitive movements at work. The evidence for the relation between physical work demands, such as repetitive movements, and early work exit is mixed. The systematic review by Van den Berg et al. [27] showed that high physical work demands are among the most important factors associated with EEPW, while several other studies did not find a relation between physical demands and early work exit [13, 23, 64]. Our study corresponds with the systematic review by Van den Berg et al. [27] as it shows that there is a positive relation between physical work demands and EEPW. Specifically, for older workers with health limitations, medium and high levels of repetitive movements at work are a risk factor for EEPW. Possibly, the work environment of older workers with health limitations has already been adapted as to physical demands that are quite obvious, such as the use of force at work and working in an uncomfortable position. At the same time, it may be that working conditions policies have overlooked the negative influence of repetitive movements at work and that they still need to improve on this factor to prevent early work exit in older workers with health limitations.

Among psychosocial work resources, a high variation of activities at work proved to be significantly associated with lower odds of EEPW among older workers with health limitations, compared to those with little variation of activities at work. This supports the finding by Fleischmann et al. [28] that higher psychosocial work resources may directly reduce the risk of early work exit. They also reported that, contrary to intuition, high psychosocial work demands are related to lower risks of work exit, which is something that was found in our study as well: for older workers with health limitations, high cognitive demands are associated with lower odds of EEPW when compared to low cognitive demands. High cognitive demands are more likely to reflect a characteristic of workers who continue to work until retirement than that

they are a factor that would make them exit early from work. Workers with low cognitive demands probably have a low educational level and are faced with less favorable working conditions, for instance highly repetitive movements at work. Therefore, it might be better to focus on improving the working conditions than on enhancing the cognitive demands at work.

Working 0–15 hours per week was positively associated with EEPW. This association is hard to interpret, because only information on the job held last was available. We did not inquire whether respondents had recently, before the start of our study, started working fewer hours per week.

4.3 Methodological considerations

Four of the 36 variables in this study showed significant differences between participants with follow-up data and those without follow-up data. On average, those without follow-up data were lower educated, provided less informal care, had a smaller social network, and smoked more often. This may have led to an underestimation of the effects found for educational level, informal caregiving, and network size.

The final prediction model included five events per variable, while it is generally advised to have at least ten events per variable in a logistic regression [55]. Therefore, the coefficients of the model should be interpreted with caution as the small number of events per variable might lead to biased results [55]. Even though this rule of ten events per variable is usually advised, some studies suggest that bias mainly arises in models with 2–4 events per variable and that models with 5–9 events per variable should not be systematically discounted [65, 66]. The performance of the final prediction model was assessed by using apparent validation methods. The performance of the model was good with an AUC of 0.74, and the p-value of the Hosmer–Lemeshow test was 0.11 (criteria: AUC > 0.70 and p > 0.05, respectively).

Despite the satisfactory characteristics of our prediction model, we acknowledge that it is an associational model and that no causal relations can be derived. It is possible that the associations found may be driven by other factors that we did not study. For example, a large social network may be a proxy for unmeasured conditions such as commitment to social activities.

Strengths and limitations

The first strength of our study is that it focuses on older workers with health limitations. By selecting people based on the presence of functional limitations instead of disability, people with health limitations are included in an early stage of the

disease process. The second strength is the use of a physical performance test instead of a self-reported questionnaire; a performance test enables detection of functional limitations before respondents might have noticed these themselves [32]. The third strength of our study is that it includes a broad spectrum of variables associated with EEPW. Most previous studies focused on specific domains, such as work or health, related to work exit or continuation. By including a broad spectrum of factors based on the literature, our study gives an overview of many factors associated with EEPW within the group of older workers with health limitations. The fourth and final strength of our study is the fact that it makes use of data from a representative sample of the Dutch population [30].

The first limitation of our study is the small sample size. This caused some of the analyses to have a low number of events per variable. Moreover, the number of healthy workers in our sample was even substantially smaller ($n=68$). This impeded a comparison of the strength of predictors between workers with health limitations and healthy workers. The second limitation is the self-reporting nature, where participants were asked to report whether they did or did not work for one hour per week or more, the dependent variable. We were unable to compare this information with, for example, registry data. However, we prefer our definition of work exit over reports of being retired or not, because there are many pathways to retirement, including partial retirement and bridge jobs. The third limitation is that we used only apparent validation methods, by which the performance of the model is tested in the same sample. In this study the area below the ROC curve and the Hosmer-Lemeshow test were used [55]. Such apparent validation methods lead to optimistic estimates of performance, as predictive models perform better in the original dataset than in other datasets [67]. Other commonly used internal validation methods such as cross-validation, split-sample validation, and bootstrap validation were not applied in our study due to the small sample size, while bootstrap validation was not used as it is not possible to bootstrap in a multiple imputed dataset [68]. To overcome this limitation, we recommend that the performance of the prediction model be examined in another dataset in the future.

The fourth limitation is that a univariate selection of predictors and a stepwise selection procedure may lead to biased coefficients and an overly optimistic model fit [55, 69]. Therefore, the coefficients and odds ratios in the prediction model of this study should be interpreted with caution. In future research this might be overcome by using advanced selection techniques such as Bayesian Model Averaging or the 'Lasso' technique [55].

4.4 Recommendations for research and practice

Earlier studies have stressed that it is important to address older workers with and without health limitations separately [16, 17]. Our study reveals important personal and work-related factors associated with and predictive of early exit from paid work in older workers with health limitations. Policymakers and researchers can use these findings when designing new policies that aim to overcome EEPW in older workers with health limitations. We describe some promising pathways. Our study shows that women are more likely to exit work early than men, and that this might be caused by other factors than strictly gender, such as informal caregiving. In our study, informal caregiving itself was also found to be predictive of EEPW for both men and women. Therefore, it seems important to change the work environment of workers who provide informal care such that they can combine paid work with informal care tasks. Earlier research has shown that support from colleagues and supervisors has a positive influence on informal caregivers at work [70]. It has also been shown that it is important to give individual attention to workers who provide informal care, and to increase their job control and/or create flexible working arrangements [60]. Alternatively, their caregiving burden may be alleviated outside the workplace, by extending their eligibility for formal care to the household. All of this might help to prevent EEPW among older workers with health limitations who provide informal care.

Older workers with health limitations and a large network were more likely to exit early from paid work than workers with a small network. As stated before, it might be that workers with a small network continue to work so as to maintain their social contacts. Therefore, it seems important that employers increase the social contact and social coherence among all employees. It may be that, if social contacts between workers become more frequent and more important, this would help prevent EEPW among workers with larger networks as well. This may be achieved in several ways, for instance by organizing workshops, team building activities, and other social events for all employees.

Low self-esteem and low persistence when facing adversity, a component of self-efficacy, have been found to be risk factors for EEPW among older workers with health limitations. Therefore, employers are advised to initiate interventions that aim at enhancing the self-esteem and self-efficacy of older workers with health limitations. This might be achieved by organizing workshops and by implementing training programs that enhance the self-efficacy and/or self-esteem of older workers.

Two work-related factors were found to be risk factors for EEPW in older workers with health limitations, i.e., repetitive movements at work and a low variation in activities at work. Therefore, work policies are advised to improve these work-related

factors for older workers with health limitations by introducing higher variation in activities and reducing repetitive movements at work.

For future research, it is necessary to externally validate the final prediction model in a different, preferably larger study sample. Moreover, the predictors found in this sample of workers with health limitations should be examined in a sample of healthy workers. For predictors that do not differ between these two groups, more general policies may apply. Instead, for predictors that are relevant for workers with health limitations only, more targeted policies need to be designed. A third recommendation for further research is to assess the influence of the job held longest instead of the job held last. It now remains unknown whether respondents recently, before work exit, started working less or experienced changes in working conditions.

A final recommendation for further research is to assess whether the recommended changes in policy and work environment will help to overcome early work exit in older workers with health limitations. Especially for personality traits such as self-efficacy and self-esteem, it is important to investigate to what extent interventions will lead to improvements, as these are known to be relatively stable traits. However, in our earlier research, we did find change over time. In the case of neuroticism [71], we found an autocorrelation of 0.75 and observed some longitudinal change, in particular in the age group of this study, those 55–65 years old. In the same age group, sense of mastery had an autocorrelation of 0.60 and showed relevant longitudinal change [72]. Furthermore, an intervention study among frail older people showed that even at ages around 80 years, sense of mastery improved [73]. Thus, we consider intervention studies among older workers as a promising line of action.

Regarding earlier intervention studies, a recent review by the Netherlands Health Council [74] concluded that very few such studies have been performed among older workers, and even fewer among older workers with health problems. Only two of the latter studies showed some effect on work ability, and none showed effects on sickness absence. It should be noted that no intervention studies addressed the factors that proved promising in our study.

4.5 Conclusion

This study provides new insights into factors that predict and are associated with EEPW in older workers with health limitations. To overcome EEPW among older workers with health limitations, it seems important to adapt work policies and the work environment in several regards. Enhancing the self-esteem and self-efficacy of workers may lead to fewer older workers with health limitations exiting the

workforce early. For those who provide informal care it is important that they receive support at work and gain more job control; this may help to overcome EEPW. Also, employers are advised to strengthen the social coherence of their employees and to acknowledge the importance of the social contacts between employees at work. A higher variation in work activities and fewer repetitive movements at work might also lead to fewer older workers with health limitations exiting early from the workforce. Further research should examine whether these proposed changes in policy and work environment help overcome EEPW among older workers with health limitations in practice.

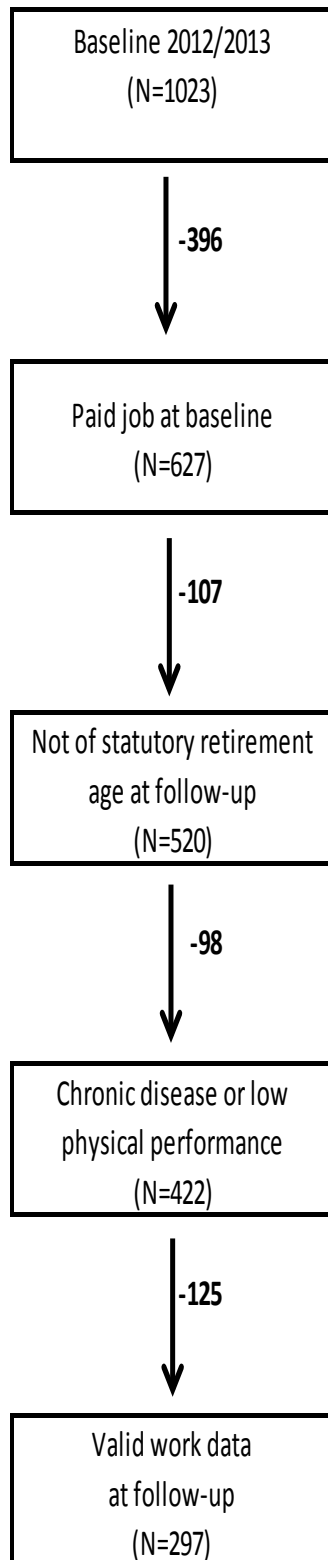
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Appendix A**Figure 1. Flowchart of inclusion procedure**

Appendix B

Figure 2 Additional analyses

Gender adjusted for age				
Gender	Male	R	R	0.020
	Female	0.691	1.996	
Gender adjusted for age + partner has a job				
Gender	Male	R	R	0.016
	Female	0.719	2.053	
Gender corrected for age + self-esteem				
Gender	Male	R	R	0.038
	Female	0.636	1.888	
Gender adjusted for age + Informal care				
Gender	Male	R	R	0.058
	Female	0.581	1.788	
Gender adjusted for age + education				
Gender	Male	R	R	0.043
	Female	0.614	1.848	
Gender adjusted for age + network size				
Gender	Male	R	R	0.047
	Female	0.614	1.849	
Gender adjusted for age+education+Informal care + network size				
Gender	Male	R	R	0.161
	Female	0.452	1.571	

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