APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTERNATIONAL REVIEW, 1995, *44* (1) 77–93

Reemployment after Migration from East to West Germany: A Longitudinal Study on Psychosocial Factors

Ralf Schwarzer & André Hahn

Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

235 migrants est-allemands ont été interviewés trois fois dans les deux ans qui ont suivi leur arrivée à Berlin-Ouest en 1989. Leur crainte du chômage, enregistrée dès le départ, a été rapportée plus tard à leur statut professionnel et au nombre de mois de travail. Ceux qui avaient des attentes élevées trouvaient plus facilement un emploi. Les femmes étaient plus pessimistes que les hommes quant à leurs chances de retrouver du travail. Les attentes étaient indépendantes de l'optimisme fondamental et autres traits de personnalité. Dans la seconde partie de l'étude, les plaintes relatives à la santé, l'évaluation du stress et les ressources sociales ont été reliées à la durée du travail. Selon un modèle structurel, les principaux prédicteurs de la durée du travail étaient les attentes initiales et l'état de santé. Celui-ci agissait à travers les attentes dans un premier temps et à travers l'estimation du stress et les ressources sociales dans un second temps. Un autre modèle transformant l'état de santé en variable dépendante convint également aux données, mais comme il ne reposait pas sur exactement le même échantillon, il ne pouvait pas invalider le premier modèle. On peut conclure de cette recherche que les attentes relevaient de facteurs non psychologiques et qu'une mauvaise santé abaissait la probabilité de retrouver un emploi, en partie parce qu'elle augmentait le stress et réduisait les ressources sociales.

Two hundred and thirty-five East German migrants were interviewed three times during a two-year period after their transition to West Berlin in 1989. Their unemployment expectations, which were recorded at the onset, were related to employment status and number of months on the job later on. Those with higher expectations were more successful in gaining a job. Women were less likely to expect reemployment than men. Expectancies were independent of dispositional optimism and other personality traits. In the second part of the study, health complaints, stress appraisals, and social support were related to employment duration. Within a structural model, initial expectancies and illness were the major predictors of employment duration. Illness operated through expectancies at Time 1, and through stress appraisals and social support at Time 2. A second model with illness as a

Requests for reprints should be sent to Ralf Schwarzer, Institute of Psychology (WE 7), Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin, Germany.

dependent variable did also fit the data but this was not based on exactly the same sample and therefore could not invalidate the first one. From this study, it is concluded a) that expectancies were based on factors other than psychological ones, and b) that illness reduced the likelihood of reemployment, partly through increased stress and decreased social support.

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, more than 300,000 East German citizens left their country and moved to West Germany. As part of this exodus, more than 50,000 migrants resettled in West Berlin. Some came via the West German embassies in Warsaw, Prague, or Budapest, or fled the country under other dubious and dangerous conditions, whereas a larger number crossed the border after the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. In the present study, East German refugees and migrants have been studied during the two years after their transition to the West.

Migration can be considered a non-normative critical life event that may result in a stressful readaptation process at the individual level as well as at the collective level, as demonstrated in studies on acculturation of ethnic minorities in pluralistic societies (Berry et al., 1989; Williams & Westermeyer, 1988). As with other critical events (such as accidents, losses, divorce, illness, etc.), the corresponding psychological crisis may have a tremendous impact on an individual's personality development, psychosocial functioning, and health. It is not only necessary to cope with daily hassles that arise after migration, especially crowded living conditions in camps or gyms on arrival, but also with the threat of long-term unemployment and the need to establish a new social network. Thus, the migrants are disadvantaged not only by higher demands than previously, but also by their heightened individual vulnerability towards stress, because they have to deal with the loss of their vocational and social ties as well. After migration, people are in need of a substantial reestablishment of networks, including friendships and intimate relationships (Kim, 1987; Lin, 1988). The migrants lose their home environment—sometimes under dangerous circumstances—and are no longer sheltered by protective factors such as family, jobs, and housing. One aspect of their stressful life conditions, i.e. their employment situation was selected for this analysis.

Employment is not only the basis for earning one's living, but it is also crucial for being respected in a Western society characterised by high material and economic values. The impact of unemployment therefore goes beyond direct economic costs. Lacking a job creates insecurity with respect to one's future life perspective. Although research on unemployment problems is heterogeneous and the results are inconsistent, it can be summarised that the studies generally report an impairment of psychological and

physical well-being for the majority of the unemployed, especially in the case of long-term unemployment (Dooley & Catalano, 1988; Feather, 1990; Frese & Mohr, 1987; Jahoda, 1982; Leona & Feldman, 1992; Mortimer, 1991; Schaufeli & Van Yperen, 1992; Schwefel, Svensson, & Zöllner, 1987; Warr, 1987). The stressful quality of unemployment is mostly attributed to weakened control possibilities due to financial hardships or social network disruption, fewer goals and task demands, a larger time budget without time markers to break up and organise each day, or reduced opportunities for social contacts.

Obviously, many studies have examined the possible effects of unemployment on mental and physical health, but it has also been argued that health deficits themselves may constitute a major cause of unemployment. Illness and depression can impair job search motivation and job search behaviours, and also create negative expectancies on the part of potential employers. This can be understood as a vicious circle. Unemployment may cause stress and health complaints, but the latter could themselves be antecedents of continued joblessness. A person who obviously suffers from stress might be less attractive for employers, although obtaining the job would alleviate the stress (cf. Leona & Feldman, 1992).

Whereas *stress* and *illness* represent vulnerability factors, and have a negative effect on job search motivation and job search behaviours, *social support* represents a resource factor for employment (Hobfoll, 1988). Perceived available support denotes the anticipation of supportive action if needed. Received support describes actual social encounters where someone has provided tangible help, affection, or other kinds of support. Received support, thus, refers to the actual receipt of helpful transactions, whether emotional, instrumental, or material (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1991).

Although variables such as stress, support, and health could have an influence on job search and hiring, these would hardly constitute the major predictors of employment. Instead, the job market situation and individual qualifications should be of more importance. This could be reflected in the *expectancies* the jobless persons hold towards future employment. When asked how likely it is that they would be employed sooner or later, the interviewees should take into account the skills they have acquired and the degree to which their qualifications fit the available positions. Expectancies can be realistic or unrealistic, and also pessimistic or optimistic. An expectancy can reflect a situation-specific state such as "I will get a job in a few weeks from now", or a generalised disposition such as "Good things will happen" (see Scheier & Carver, 1987). Self-beliefs and expectancies that focus on an individual's capability to control the environment have been found predictive in various domains of human functioning (for an overview see Schwarzer, 1992). If one feels resourceful and competent, then it seems to be realistic to cope successfully with adverse life circumstances. Positive

expectancies of having a job in the near future can thus be based more or less on believing in favourable outcomes or in one's coping competence. These cognitions are somewhat difficult to disentangle, and therefore a single statement about the subjective likelihood of future employment might suffice to reflect a number of determinants taken concomitantly into account to form an individual's judgement.

In the present study, most of the East Germans were jobless at the first interview shortly after their migration. Changes in employment are to be examined for both women and men. One question was how long they expected to remain unemployed. In the follow-up interviews, they were asked whether they had obtained a job. The first research question was to examine the role of these expectancies. It was hypothesised that *initial expectancies* would tend to be realistic, but that personality variables would bias these expectancies and would also predict success and failure in obtaining and keeping a job. The second research question dealt with the prediction of employment over time. The *duration of employment at Time 3* served as the dependent variable. In particular, the research question was to investigate to what extent the total duration of employment two years after the migration was determined (a) by prior expectancies and health (Time 1), and (b) by intermediate stress appraisals and social support (Time 2).

METHOD

In October 1989, just before the opening of the Berlin Wall, a study was launched to gain more detailed knowledge about the adaptation and coping processes of refugees and migrants from East Germany who were arriving daily in West Berlin. The project was designed as a longitudinal investigation with three measurement points during the first two years after resettlement.

Procedure and Participants

The East German migrants were contacted individually in their temporary living quarters and were asked to take part in a psychosocial investigation on the adaptation process in the West. The participation was voluntary and guaranteed anonymous. Instead of indicating names or addresses, a numerical code was agreed on in order to correctly assign each person to the longitudinal data set. The first wave of assessment took place in the autumn and winter of 1989/1990, the second-wave data were obtained in summer 1990, and the third wave was collected in summer 1991. A total of 1,036 migrants agreed to participate and, thus, constituted the first-wave sample. A subsample of 235 completed the questionnaires at all three points in time; 126 men (mean age = 31 years) and 109 women (mean age = 32 years). Many participants of the initial sample either refused to participate in the follow-up surveys or could not be tracked down again. Reasons for high attrition rate were (a) lack of incentives for responding, (b) anonymous data collection resulting in loss of contacts, (c) continued mobility of the migrants after their initial arrival in Berlin, and (d) the large number of questionnaire items, which took about an hour to answer. The possibility of selective attrition was tested by t tests for those five variables that were available in both the Wave 1 sample and the longitudinal sample. The two samples did not differ in terms of sex ($t = 1.37$, $P = 0.17$), unemployment expectancies ($t = 1.53$, $P = 0.13$), heart complaints ($t = 0.34$, $P = 0.73$), and pain in the limbs ($t = 1.2$, $P = 0.23$) but they did differ in terms of age ($t = 3.63$, $P < 0.001$). Migrants in the panel sample were on average three years older than those who made up the first-wave sample.

Participants filled out a questionnaire measuring, among other variables, employment status, employment duration, unemployment expectancies, stress appraisals, received social support, anticipated social support, health complaints, and various personality variables including dispositional optimism, anger, anxiety, and self-efficacy.

Measures

The actual *employment status* was recorded at three points in time (*employed* versus *not employed*). *Employment duration* was assessed by the following item: "Since my migration to the West, I was employed for a total of ____ months". This item took into account that many migrants had several temporary jobs (for which they were not trained) and multiple reemployments. *Unemployment expectations* were assessed by the question "If you are unemployed, how long might it possibly take until you find a job? ____ months."

Several personality scales were administered such as anger, anxiety, generalised self-efficacy, social conflict, etc. These were short versions of commonly used instruments. *Dispositional optimism* was measured by an 8-item scale developed by Scheier and Carver (1987) and adapted to German by Wieland-Eckelmann and Carver (1990). An example item is "In uncertain times I usually expect the best". The internal consistency was alpha = 0.67. Trait anger (alpha = 0.68) and trait anxiety (alpha = 0.72) were measured by 4-item scales, and generalised self-efficacy was assessed by a 10-item scale (alpha = 0.78; cf. Schwarzer, 1993). All items were endorsed on a 4-point Likert-type scale.

For the social support construct, a distinction was made between *received social support*, which denotes a retrospective assessment of actual behaviours, and *perceived available social support*. The first scale consisted of 11 items, such as "Friends and relatives have helped me to look for a job" (alpha = 0.81), and the second scale consisted of eight items, such

as "There are people whom I can rely upon when I need help" (alpha = 0.87). All items were endorsed on a 4-point Likert-type scale. The intercorrelation between these two scales was 0.77.

As indicators of *ill health*, self-reported physical symptoms were recorded on the basis of a standardised German instrument (Brähler & Scheer, 1983). Two subscales of six items each were chosen from this inventory: *heart complaints* (alpha = 0.77) and *pains in the limbs* (alpha = 0.82). All items were endorsed on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The intercorrelation between these two scales was 0.61.

Cognitive stress appraisals were measured by two scales that were developed in line with the stress theory of Lazarus (1991). The *threat* subscale consisted of four items such as "I worry about the difficulties that I face" (alpha = 0.86). The *loss* subscale also consisted of four items, such as "I feel discouraged because everything has turned worse since migration to the West" (alpha = 0.86). All items were endorsed on a 4-point Likert-type scale. The intercorrelation between these two scales was 0.73.

RESULTS

Resettlement was successful for the majority of the sample. At the onset of the study, 28% were reemployed, one year later 63%, and two years later 74% (see Fig. 1). The fact that not all the participants were jobless at the onset of the study is partly due to the extended time period that some of them had already lived in the West. The interviews were conducted not only with migrants who had just arrived, but also with refugees who had fled across the border weeks or months before 9 November 1989. A repeated measures ANOVA yielded a strong time effect, $F(2, 426) = 87.48$, $P < 0.001$. In addition, sex differences were observed, $F(1, 213) = 16.91$, $P < 0.01$. Women were obviously less successful than men in obtaining reemployment.

The following section focuses on one specific aspect of reemployment, namely the expectancies of the job searchers. Because 28% were already employed and because others did not make an effort to find work, e.g. students, trainees, or housewives, only a subsample of 123 participants responded to the unemployment expectations measure. On the average they expected to secure a job within four months ($SD = 5.22$); the range was from 0 to 23 months.

Optimistic Expectancies

Many of the respondents (75%) expected to gain a job within the next three months following the interview. Only 12% believed that it would take longer than half a year to become employed. There is no way to determine exactly how realistic these expectancies were for each individual,

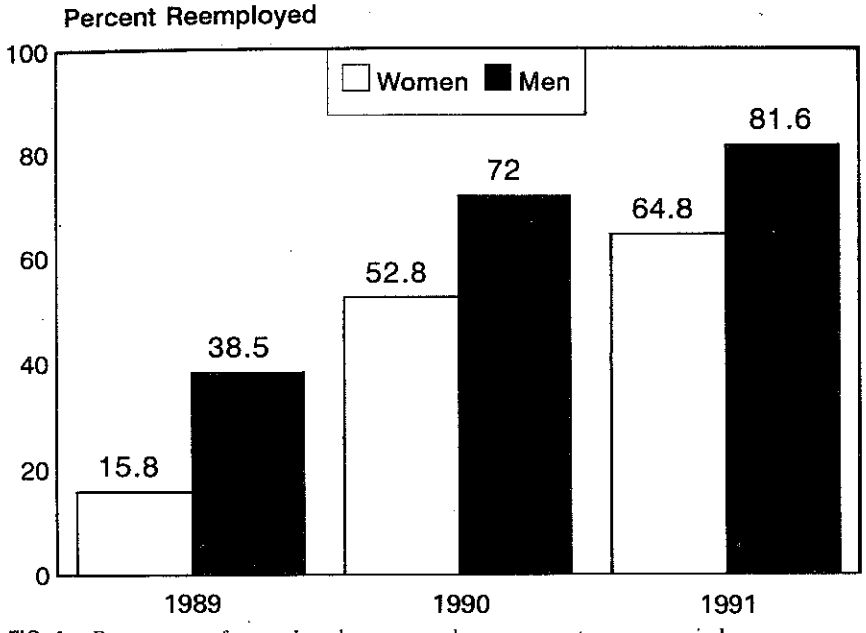

FIG. 1. Percentages of reemployed women and men over a two-year period.

but an overall evaluation was possible by relating the employment status at Wave 2 and Wave 3 to the initial expectations. If the optimistic anticipation had been realistic, then almost all migrants should have been employed at Wave 2. However only 59% of those who had made such a prediction actually found a job. By separating 'optimists' who expected employment within three months from 'pessimists' who expected it in four months or later, a remarkable difference emerged: only 26% of the female pessimists, but 56% of the female optimists, were successful (see Fig. 2a); also, only 56% of the male pessimists, but 74% of the male optimists, gained a job (Fig. 2b).

Looking at Wave 3, one finds that 75% were employed. Again there was a difference between pessimists and optimists: only 59% of the female pessimists, but 71% of the female optimists, were successful (Fig. 2a); among the males, 67% of pessimists, but 88% of the optimists, gained a job (Fig. 2b).

Overall, there is less employment than had been expected by the job hunters. Even the pessimists were too optimistic. According to their own predictions, all of the respondents should have found a job within the two-year period, but only 75% did. Although they had been too optimistic, there was also a realistic component in the expectations: of those who expected employment within three months after Wave 1, two thirds were

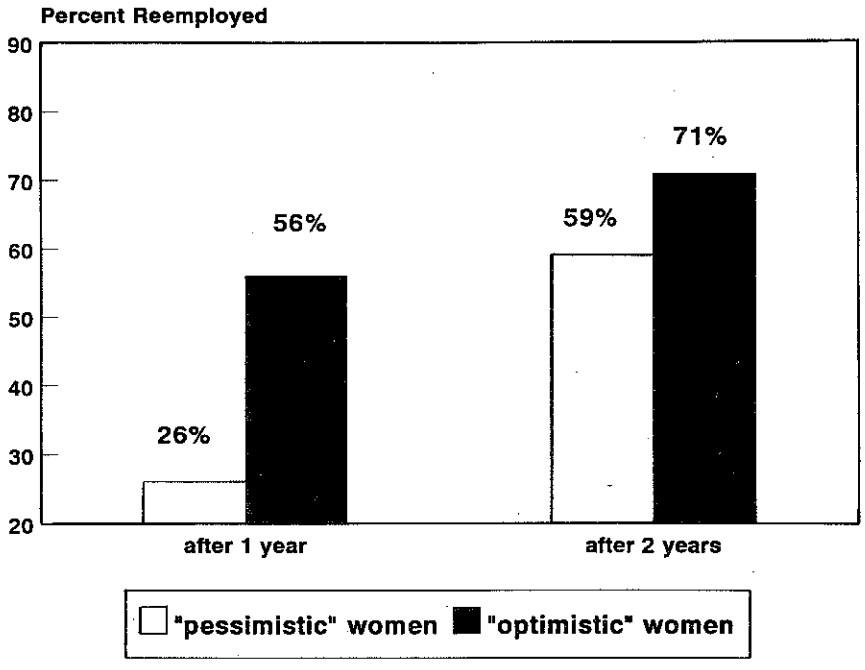

FIG. 2a. Percentages of reemployed women one year and two years after their transition as a function of unemployment expectations (low *vs* high).

successful at least after a year, whereas only one third of the pessimists succeeded. The latter had made a more realistic appraisal of their situation (see also Frese, 1992).

This raised the question of why some were optimistic while others were pessimistic about their future employment. Were there stable individual differences that could account for dispositional expectancies or hopelessness? To examine this question, a number of personality variables and some demographic information were related to the unemployment expectancies. In particular, it was assumed that dispositional optimism would be highly related to unemployment expectancies. It was also of interest whether these variables would predict employment status at Times 2 and 3 (see Table 1).

Surprisingly, no personality antecedents of the specific unemployment expectancies could be identified; also, employment status could not be predicted, It is of note that dispositional optimism did not correlate with unemployment expectancies. Only sex appeared to make a difference. This points to the possibility that the expectancies tap the dimension of perceived employability, and that this is not personality-dependent or 'trait-

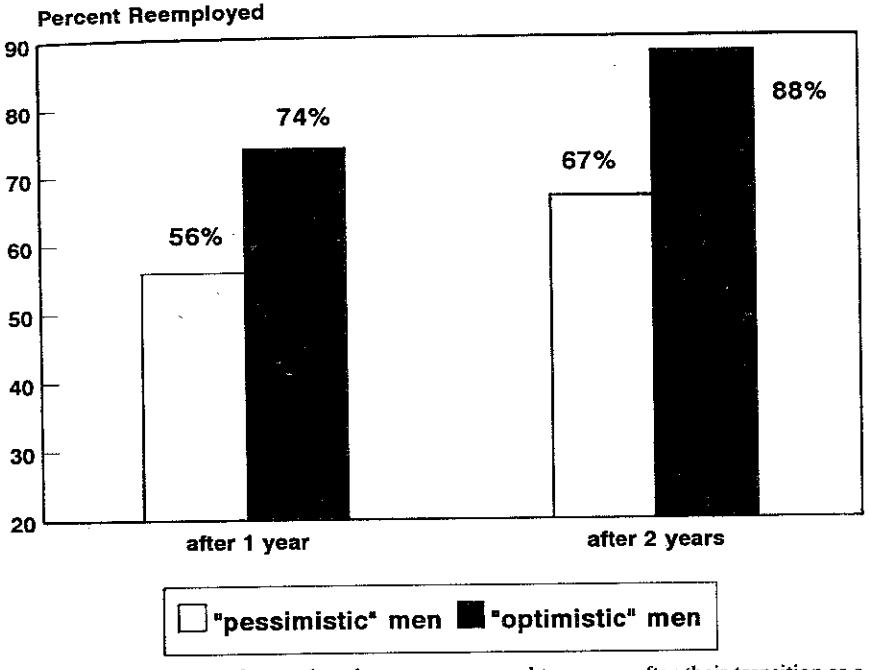

FIG. 2b. Percentages of reemployed men one year and two years after their transition as a function of unemployment expectations (low *vs* high).

based' but rather grounded on more or less realistic perceptions of one's objective employability. To further examine the demographic information and to inspect possible interactions, a two-way ANOVA was computed with sex and age as factors and unemployment expectancies as dependent

TABLE 1
Correlations Among Personality Characteristics (Time 1), Unemployment Expectancies (Time 1), and Employment Status (Times 2 and 3)

	Expectancies Time 1	*Employment Status Time 2*	*Employment Status Time 3*
Sex	0.26*	0.23*	0.20
Age	−0.08	−0.11	−0.11
Dispositional Optimism	0.09	−0.05	0.07
Trait Anger	0.04	0.12	0.11
Trait Anxiety	0.02	0.09	0.15
Self-efficacy	−0.06	−0.13	−0.11

*$P < 0.01$.

variable (see Fig. 3). A main effect for sex emerged, $F(1, 117) = 8.3$, $P = 0.005$, and a tendency for age, $F(2, 117) = 2.48$, $P = 0.088$. There was no interaction. As can be seen in Fig. 3, expectancies are lowest for middle-aged women and highest for young men, which fairly reflects the actual job market situation.

Antecedents of Employment Duration

The second part of this paper deals with a different aspect of employment, namely its duration. This variable provides information that is distinct from employment status because it includes a stability dimension; also, it better reflects one's success in adaptation to life in the West. It was hypothesised that, among other factors, illness might represent a major determinant of employment instability or long-term unemployment. It was also hypothesised that during the course of this stressful life transition, stress appraisals and social support might play a mediating role in the job search and hiring process.

In order to examine the direct and indirect determinants of employment duration at Time 3, a structural model was specified with illness and unemployment expectations as distal predictors at Time 1, and stress

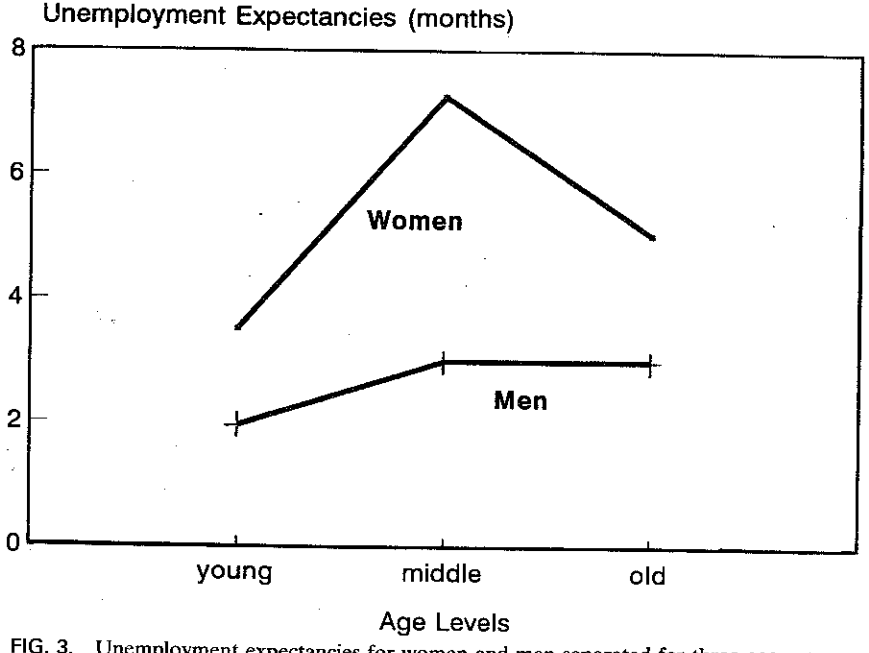

FIG. 3. Unemployment expectancies for women and men separated for three age groups.

appraisal and social support as proximal predictors at Time 2. The latter were considered to represent the major mediators between illness and employment duration. Illness, stress appraisal, and social support were specified as multiple-indicator latent variables, the remaining two (employment duration and expectations) were single-indicator variables. Table 2 contains the correlation matrix of all variables involved in the structural equation model.

The analysis was conducted with the LISREL VII program (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1988). The free parameters were estimated by the unweighted least squares method. Several indices of goodness of fit were obtained: (a) $\chi^2[df = 14] = 23.3$ $(P = 0.056)$, (b) $\chi^2/df = 1.66$, (c) $GFI = 0.99$, (d) $AGFI = 0.98$, and (e) $RMSR = 0.037$. They confirm a very good fit of the model.

Figure 4 displays the resulting parameter estimates. The factor loadings of the measurement model turned out to be high. For the *illness* construct, heart complaints obtained lambda = 0.85 and pain in the limbs lambda = 0.73; for the *stress appraisal* construct, threat received lambda = 0.82 and loss yielded lambda = 0.89; and for the *social support* construct, received support obtained lambda = 0.81 compared to lambda = 0.95 for perceived support. Stress appraisals and social support were inversely related to each other (−0.31).

Of the *employment duration* variance, 29% were explained by the four determinants. The strongest path stemmed from *unemployment expectations* (−0.33). The earlier the migrants expected to secure a job, the more time on the job resulted after two years. Those who believed it would take a long time to become employed obviously ended up with a shorter work duration. This reflects the realistic component of the expectations.

Illness at Time 1 influenced stress appraisal (0.54) and social support (−0.28) at Time 2. Physical symptoms apparently led to more stress and may have deterred network members, or may have inhibited the establishment of close personal relationships. Stress and support exert only a very small influence on employment duration, but as mediators they help to transmit the predictive power of health complaints. The direct effect of the latter was −0.17, but its total effect was −0.31. This is an important finding because it underscores the assumption that initial health complaints reduce subsequent employment duration over a two-year period. There was also a small link between illness and initial unemployment expectations (0.10), indicating the possibility that the participants based their expectations somewhat on their subjective health status, which might affect their job search motivation and behaviours. Although this path is almost negligible, its removal would be unwise, as it would exclude one of the three pathways for indirect effect of illness on employment duration.

Confirming one causal model does not imply that this is necessarily the

TABLE 2
Correlation Matrix of Variables in the Structural Model

	M	*SD*	*Rec. S.*	*Perc. S.*	*Threat*	*Loss*	*Dur*	*Exp*	*Heart*	*Pain*
Received support	26.17	6.51	1.000							
Perceived support	23.93	6.02	0.766	1.000						
Threat	6.82	2.54	−0.240	−0.296	1.000					
Loss	5.90	2.46	−0.401	−0.448	0.727	1.000				
Duration of unemployment	15.00	5.86	0.175	0.224	−0.226	−0.252	1.000			
Unemployment expectancy	3.99	5.22	−0.000	0.009	−0.032	0.006	−0.357	1.000		
Heart complaints	2.32	3.25	−0.153	−0.232	0.437	0.364	−0.246	0.147	1.000	
Pain in limbs	4.68	5.22	−0.213	−0.202	0.388	0.281	−0.224	0.083	0.613	1.000

Rec. S. = Received Support; Perc. S. = Perceived Support; Dur = Duration of unemployment; Exp = Unemployment expectancy.

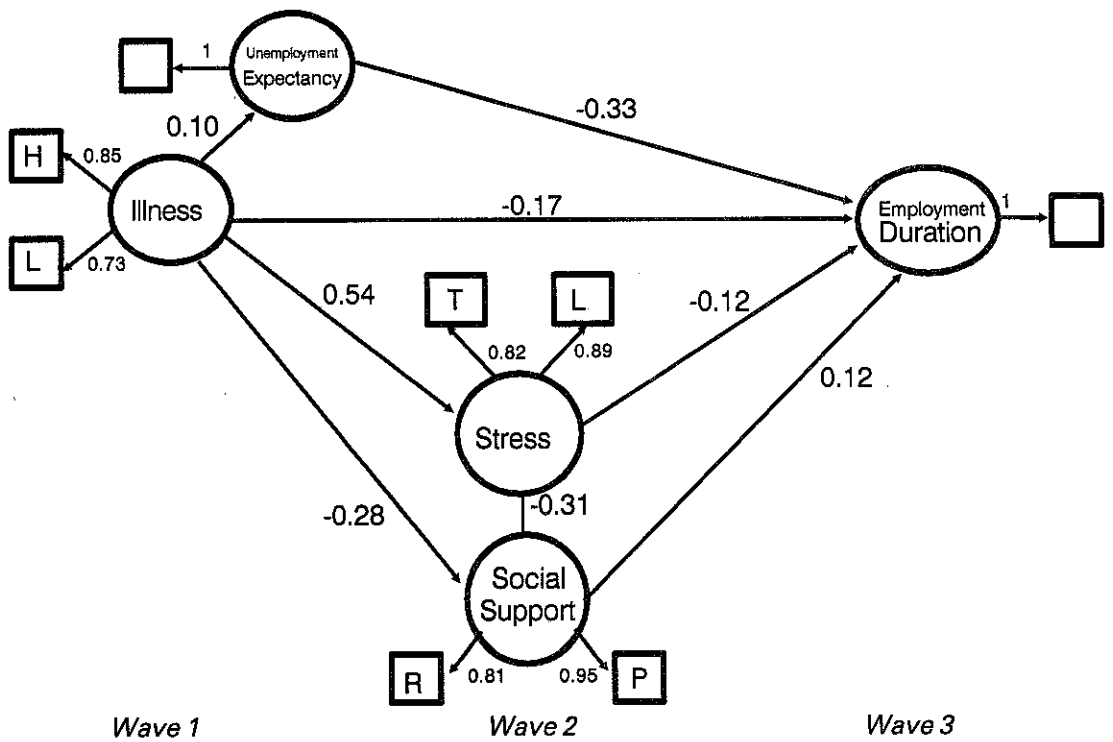

FIG. 4. Causal mediator model of employment duration (abbreviations: Illness, H = heart complaints, L = pain in the limbs; Stress, T = threat, L = loss; Social Support, R = received support, P = perceived available support).

only valid one. Others can fit as well. Strictly speaking, the present data are not suitable to study causal relationships because (a) they are non-experimental and (b) not all variables were measured at all points in time. Several alternative models based on the correlation matrix in Table 2 were considered but did not fit the data well. To further explore possible directions of influence an attempt was made to test a model that specified ill health as a dependent variable at Time 3. Because duration of unemployment was not measured at Time 1, it was substituted by the employment status that also might have determined later ill health. This model required a different correlation matrix where not only unemployed but also employed persons were included (n = 207). This implied that unemployment expectancies had to be dropped from the model. Employment status at Time 1 was specified as the predictor, ill health at Time 3 as the dependent latent variable, and stress and social support served again as the mediators. This model did obtain a very good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 6.17$, $df = 9$, $P = 0.72$, $RMSR = 0.03$, $AGFI = 0.98$). The path from employment status to ill health was 0.19, similar to the opposite direction tested previously. This result confirms the common belief that joblessness and illness represent 'transactional variables' that are likely to influence each other over time. Due to design problems it was impossible to perform an 'acid test' of this issue. Instead, the message here is that the duration of employment can be somewhat predicted by ill health, but more so by unemployment expectancies.

DISCUSSION

This study has shed some light on the psychosocial adaptation process of East Germans who had experienced a stressful life transition by migrating to the West under sometimes dramatic circumstances. The focus of the present analysis was on two aspects of reemployment. One dealt with the expectations that migrants held in terms of the likelihood of not being hired; the other dealt with factors that would contribute either to successful reemployment or to long-term joblessness.

The latter research question was studied by predicting *employment duration at Time 3* from information collected at earlier points in time. Within a stress and coping framework, this offered an uncommon perspective in psychosocial research on unemployment. Instead of emphasising mental or physical health consequences (e.g. Häfner, 1990; Leona & Feldman, 1992), psychosocial antecedents of later employment were identified. Employment as measured in terms of months on the job includes the possibility of temporary jobs and multiple reemployment. No personality traits have been found to predict employment status and employment duration, but initial unemployment expectancies and health complaints

emerged as considerable determinants. By structural modelling, it was found that stress appraisal and social support mediated the effect of illness on later employment. The more stress is evoked by illness and the less social support is mobilised, the less likely it becomes that the person will be hired or that employment will last over an extended period of time.

The main problem with this analysis was that, although longitudinal in nature, it did not account for stability information and reverse causal relationships, i.e. it could not be ruled out that unemployment, for example, was a source of illness. This was indeed found on the basis of a different correlation matrix of variables from a sample of unemployed as well as employed migrants. Because the variable unemployment expectancies had to be dropped because the employed did not respond to it, no direct comparison of the second model to the first could be made. It is likely that the relationship between illness, health, and employment is reciprocal but for a comprehensive study of the nature of this reciprocal determinism a different investigation would be required.

An important result was that *initial unemployment expectancies* were the best predictor of later employment status and employment duration. This leads to the question of what constitutes these expectancies psychologically. What is the basis for one's optimistic or pessimistic appraisal of the situation? Unfortunately, because the study was originally not designed to examine this question, there was not sufficient information in the present data set to explore this line of thought in more detail. In particular, a standardised measure of unemployment expectancies was not available here (see Feather, 1983; Feather & Davenport, 1981). Unfortunately, there were also no data available on job-search motivation and job-search behaviours to validate this assumption (see Kanfer & Hulin, 1985).

Interestingly, there seems to be no personality-dependent bias in estimating one's chance of reemployment, as there were no personality variables associated with the job-specific expectancy variable. Unemployment expectations were uncorrelated with all other variables except sex and illness. Therefore, the initial unemployment expectations were obviously not based on personality traits as measured in this study, but most likely on situation parameters. Not personality, but one's interpretation of the job market and personal qualifications, and the fit between the two may result in efforts to obtain work. The migrants might have made their judgements on the basis of job market information, social comparison with others, or even misinformation. The expectation might have also reflected their objective employability in terms of skills, experience, health, and fitness.

It is of note that dispositional optimism as a personality trait had no influence on unemployment expectancies at all. Also, it was not correlated with employment status. In addition, generalised self-efficacy, i.e. one's

perceived coping ability, was unrelated. Research on self-beliefs suggests that, in particular situations, specific measures of perceived self-efficacy succeed to predict actual behaviours, whereas generalised measures fail to do so (see Schwarzer, 1992; 1993). Unemployment expectancies can be considered a situation-specific measure of optimism or pessimism that has turned out to be independent of generalised perceptions and traits. Further research should aim at identifying the sources of these cognitions, make use of a sound psychometric measure, and relate these to actual job-search motivation and job-search behaviours.

The present study was not designed to accomplish this. Instead, it was conceived as a study on a critical life event, and it uses reemployment as a paradigm of coping with a crisis. This study is unique in its analysis of a sample of refugees shortly after their transition when the majority were jobless, even highly skilled workers who, under normal circumstances, would not be out of work. The unique nature of the study had its pros and cons. It casts doubts on the generalisability of the results because the German reunification is not a universal event that is frequently replicated. It may be that the relationships under investigation are singular and do not show up in other samples of jobless people. On the other hand, it is a rare opportunity to study a large number of migrants longitudinally in the course of a stress-and-coping situation, and to gain some insight into the psychological mechanisms that operate in the resettlement and reemployment process.

Manuscript received September 1992
Revised manuscript received July 1993

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