Young workers with low employment skills:
Their perceptions of work, decent work and the future - preliminary results

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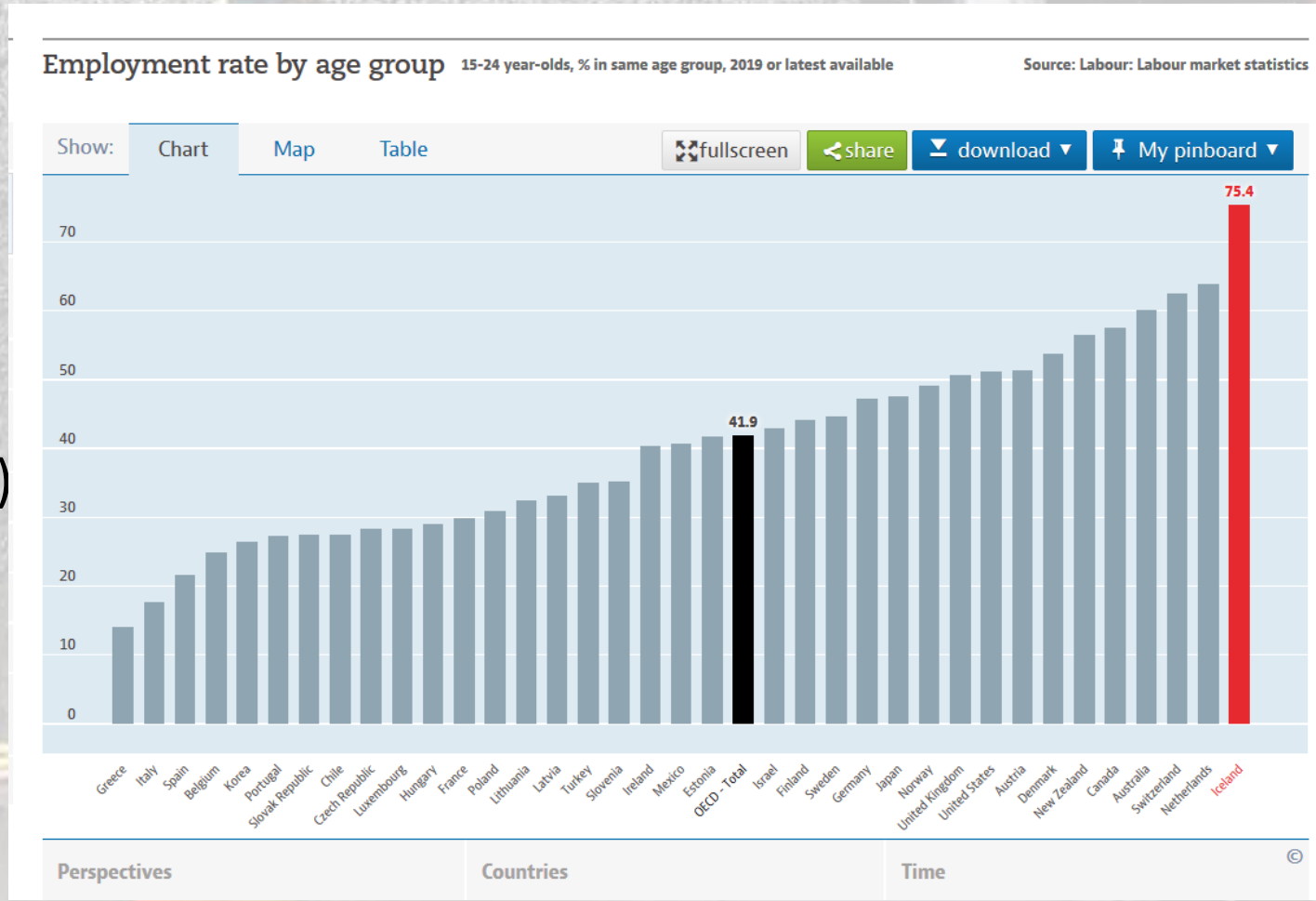
What are low-skilled workers?

- No formal education after compulsory education
- Minimal economical gains for the work performed
- Limited occupational choices
- Limited work experience
- Sometimes skills in low-skilled jobs can be learned quickly (within 30 days)
    - Investopedia.com

Context: High employment and drop out rate

- High employment rate - 75% of people aged 15 to 24
  - Part time jobs
  - Formal work (90% in unions)
- Low unemployment rate, 6.7%, in youngest age groups (16-24 ys)
  - (Eurostat, 2019)
- High dropout rate from upper secondary school – 26% of a cohort
  - (Statistics Iceland, 2018)



OECD (2020), Employment rate by age group (indicator). doi: 10.1787/084f32c7-en (Accessed on 18 February 2020)

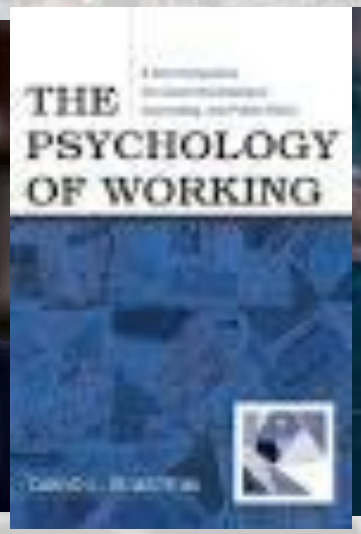
Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework of research: Right to dignified work / Career adaptability

Dr. David Blustein´s Psychology of Working Theory (PWT)

- A theory that focuses on how hard work is for many in our society (Blustein, 2019)
- „Dignified work is not just important for survival but is also essential for individual and community well being (Blustein, 2019)“.



Dr. Mark Savickas‘ Career Construction Theory (CCT)

- „From career construction, what we keep focusing on to help people design life are two meta-competencies, identity and adaptability. Identity means helping people know their intentions and their story to shape their choice. And adaptability knowing how to revise the story when the time comes“.

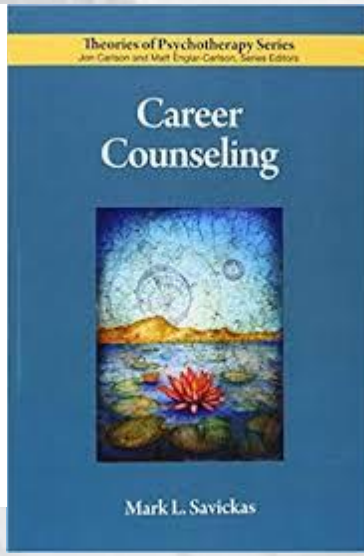
(Interview Jenn Long with dr. Mark Savickas, in Integrating theory, research & practice in c.d.(n.d. www.ncda.org)

Career Adapt-Abilities Scale: Items, Standardized Loadings, Descriptive Statistics, and Internal Consistency Reliabilities.

Construct		Item (First-Order Indicators)	Mean	SD	Loading
Concern	1.	Thinking about what my future will be like	3.88	.92	.61
	2.	Realizing that today's choices shape my future	3.86	.97	.62
	3.	Preparing for the future	3.61	.95	.79
	4.	Becoming aware of the educational and career choices that I must make	3.95	.96	.75
	5.	Planning how to achieve my goals	3.63	1.02	.73
	6.	Concerned about my career	3.83	1.11	.43
Control	1.	Keeping upbeat	3.48	.95	.51
	2.	Making decisions by myself	3.87	.93	.59
	3.	Taking responsibility for my actions	4.00	.88	.65
	4.	Sticking up for my beliefs	4.19	.86	.61
	5.	Counting on myself	4.01	.91	.73
	6.	Doing what's right for me	4.00	.94	.73
Curiosity	1.	Exploring my surroundings	3.58	.93	.66
	2.	Looking for opportunities to grow as a person	3.89	.86	.80
	3.	Investigating options before making a choice	3.74	.95	.70
	4.	Observing different ways of doing things	3.77	.92	.71
	5.	Probing deeply into questions I have	3.36	1.09	.63
	6.	Becoming curious about new opportunities	3.81	.90	.64
Confidence	1.	Performing tasks efficiently	3.91	.87	.74
	2.	Taking care to do things well	3.91	.88	.83
	3.	Learning new skills	4.02	.87	.79
	4.	Working up to my ability	3.87	.95	.76
	5.	Overcoming obstacles	3.96	.89	.76
	6.	Solving problems	3.92	.94	.72

Construct		Construct (Second-Order Indicators)	Mean	SD	Loading
Adaptability	1.	Concern	3.79	.71	.85
	2.	Control	3.93	.65	.89
	3.	Curiosity	3.69	.71	.85
	4.	Confidence	3.93	.73	.91

*Note: All of the loadings are statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$



Savickas´Career Construction Theory

Career identity

- Young people construe work identities ➔ migrate into work that gives them satisfaction / P-E
- Individuals need to repeatedly reconstruct their identities, which are viewed as performances rather than as ascribed traits.
  - Savickas, 2015, p. 137
- If you can dream it, you can do it
  - Savickas, 2011

Career adaptability

- „Career adaptability is a psycho-social construct that denotes an individual‘s readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development. The adaptive fitness of attitudes, beliefs, and compentencies – the ABC‘s of career construction – increases along the developmental lines of concern, control, [curiosity] and confidence“
  - Savickas, 2005, p. 46

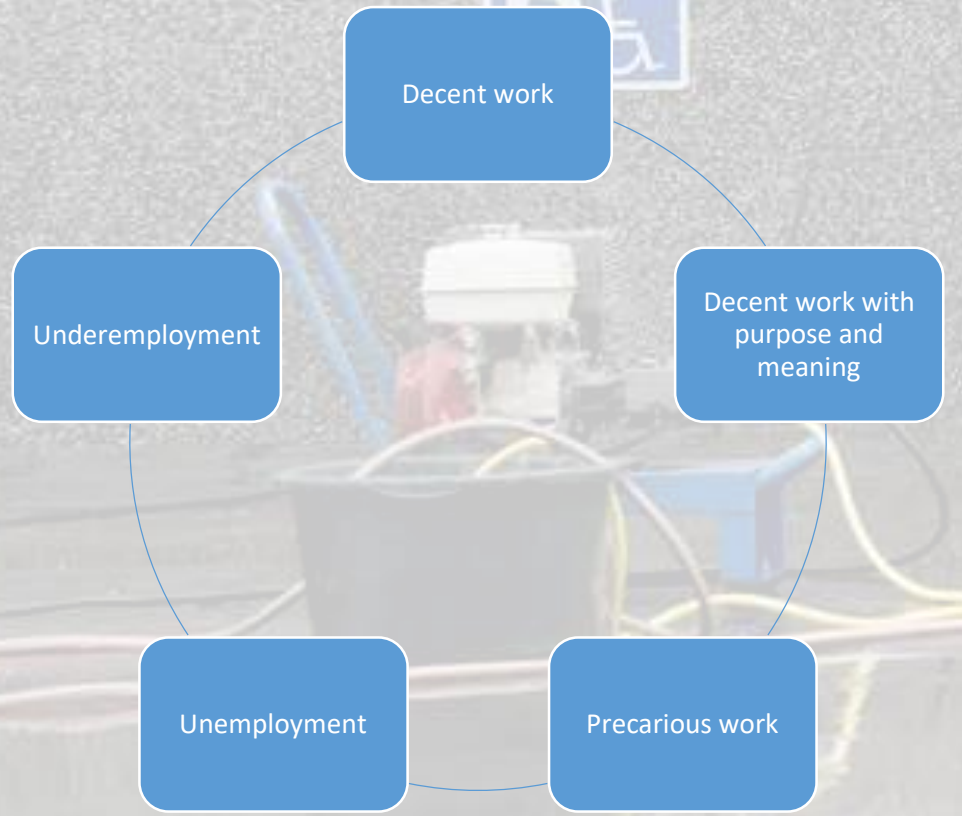
Career adaptability dimensions

Adaptability dimension	Attitudes and beliefs	Competence	Coping behaviours	Career problem
Concern	Planful	Planning	Aware Involved Preparing	Indifference
Control	Decisive	Decision making	Assertive Disciplined Wilful	Indecision
Curiosity	Inquisitive	Exploring	Experimenting Risk taking Inquiring	Unrealism
Confidence	Efficacious	Problem solving	Persistent Striving Industrious	Inhibition

Source: Savickas, 2005

Blustein's Psychology of working theory

Broad landscape of contemporary work



Adapted from Blustein, 2019

Haves and have-nots

- Job polarization is increasing
- Majority of at-risk workers are low skilled and have low income ➔ precariat
  - (Blustein, 2019)
- Blustein's theory adresses work experiences of at-risk workers
  - No focus on lower skilled workers in career psychology literature, but they deserve more attention
    - (Blustein, 2011; Muse & Pichler, 2011)

Psychology of Working Theory

Work volition

- is the “perceived capacity to make occupational choices despite constraints”
  - (Duffy et al, 2012, p. 401)
- Work experiences range from „people with volition in their work lifes to those that work in any task simply to survive for another day“
  - (Blustein, 2006, p. 21)

Working fulfils three core functions

1. Working as a means for survival and power
2. Working as a means of social connection
3. Working as a means of self-determination

➔ Work can be a source of injustice or it can fill life with purpose

Theoretical framework

Liquid modernity (Bauman, 2018)

- In modern times every thing is fluid or changing as constrasted to more stable times (new job, new spouse, new gender, new commodity, new ideas..) ➔ continous change
- Precarity and uncertainty in the labour market
  - Precariat – exploited group that is stuck in a life-style of short-term employment (going from one job to the next) (Toshchenko, 2018)

Emerging adulthood

- The age group 18-29 is in-between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2004)
- Identity exploration, focusing on oneself and feeling of being in-between are main characteristics of this period (Arnett, 2010)
    - In-between different kind of work in search for identity
- Transition from school to work

Theoretical framework

Decent work ≠ unemployment

Definition of decent work

Opportunities for work that is *productive* and delivers a *fair income*, *security* in the workplace and *social protection* for families, better prospects for *personal development* and *social integration*, *freedom* for people to *express* their concerns, organize and *participate* in the decisions that affect their lives and *equality* of opportunity and treatment for all women and men

International Labour Organization, n.d

Research on decent work

- Extensive research has demonstrated that decent work is associated with greater resilience in other domains of life and with an enhanced level of health and well-being.
  - Blustein, Masdonati, Rossier, 2017
- Access to decent work is more difficult for marginalized people
  - Duffy et al, 2016

Research questions

For young people without formal training, but in a job:

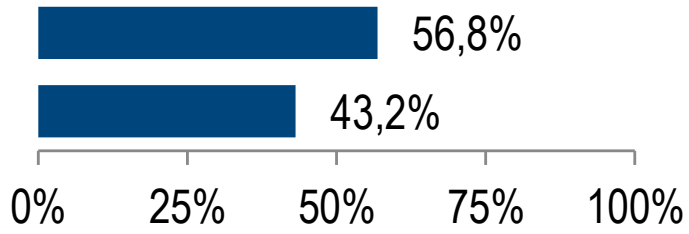
- What are their views on the job they are currently in (and have been for the last 6 months)?
- What are their views on their future careers?
- Do they consider their job as decent work?
- What are their educational intentions?
- How does their work experience contribute to career construction?
    - How do they differ according to social variables (SES, gender, parenthood), psychological variables (work volitions) or psychosocial variables (career adaptability)

Method

- Quantitative: Questionnaire (60 questions) administered in January and February 2020 to 7000 participants (random sampling) in the age group of 20 to 29. Number of participants 141, 65% men and 35% women. SES of both parents upper class or middle class (45%), low class, upper or middle class (55%).
- Questions on background, work situation, salary, attitudes towards their jobs, future intentions, work volition, decent work, prefered occupation, education in past, present and future, leisures and finally Career Adapt-Ability Scale.

Have you ever experienced being unemployed?

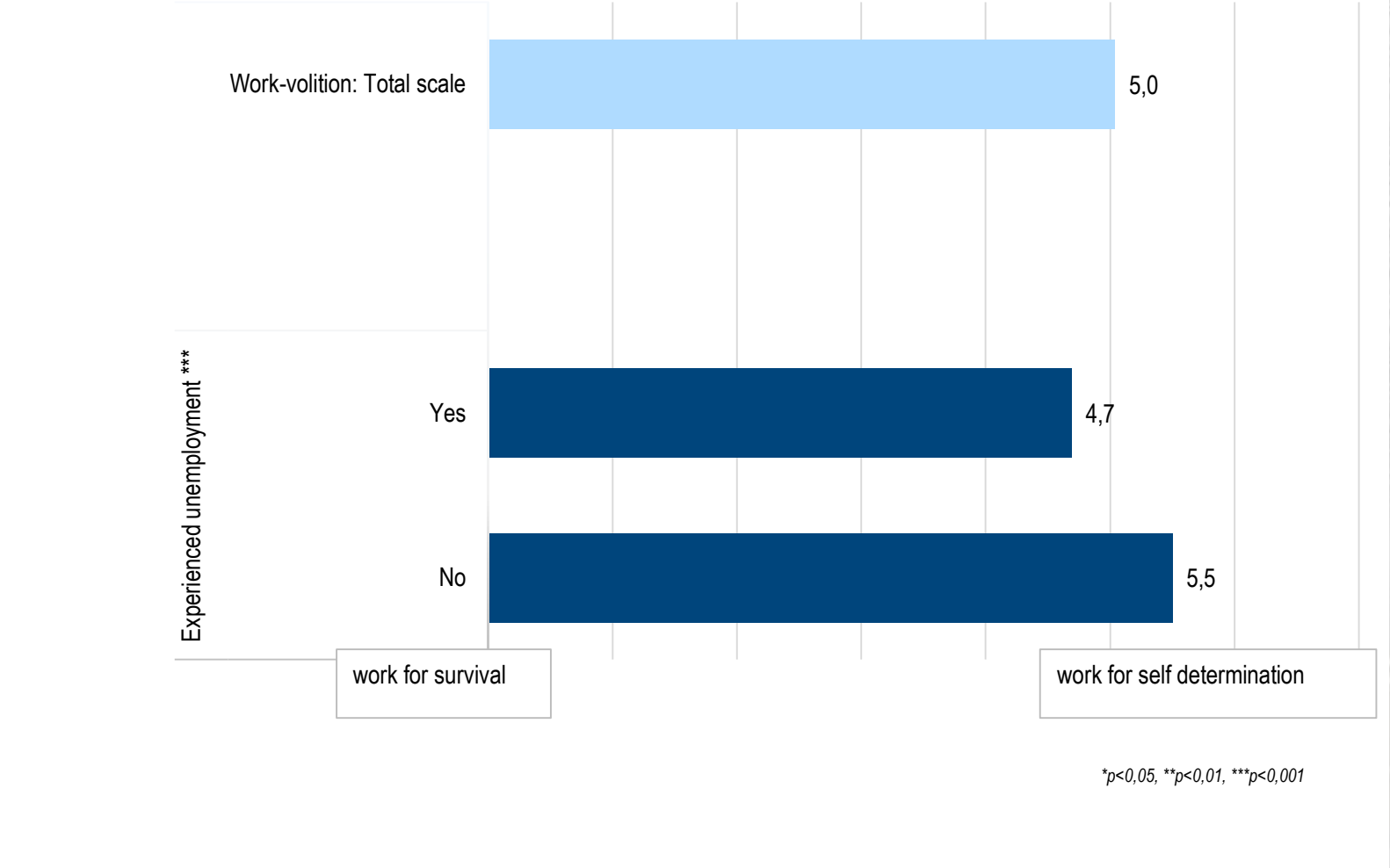
	N	Percentage
Yes	79	56,8%
No	60	43,2%
Total	139	**100%**
Choose not to answer	2	
Total	**141**	



Average in age group 16 to 24: 6,7% unemployment in 2019

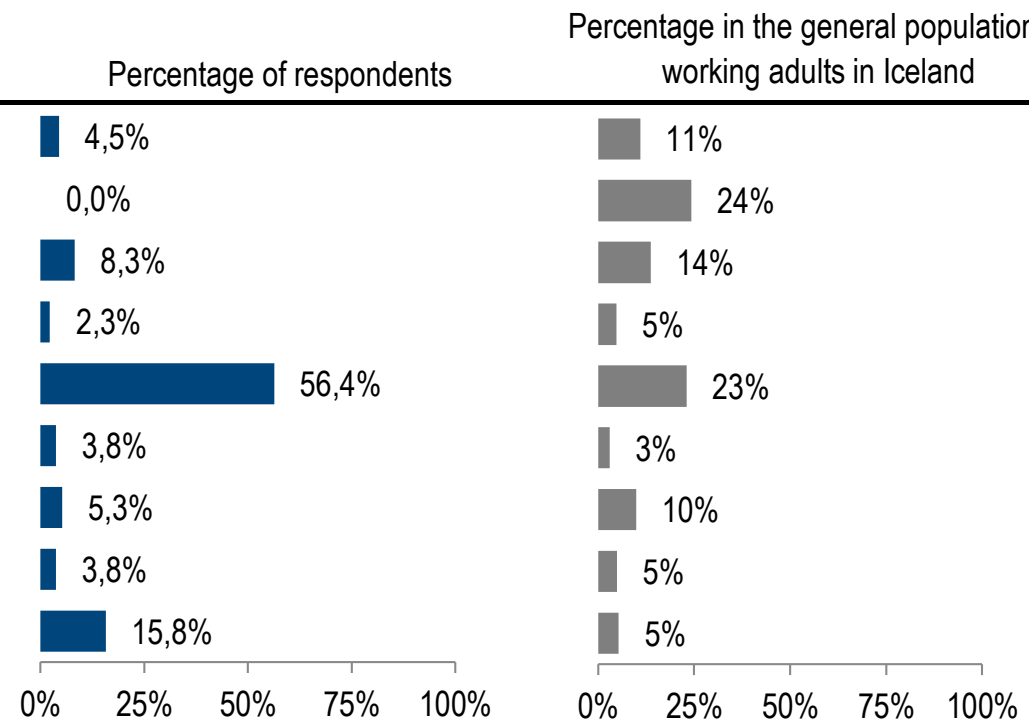
Iceland: 3.4% unemployment in 2019

Work-volition and unemployment



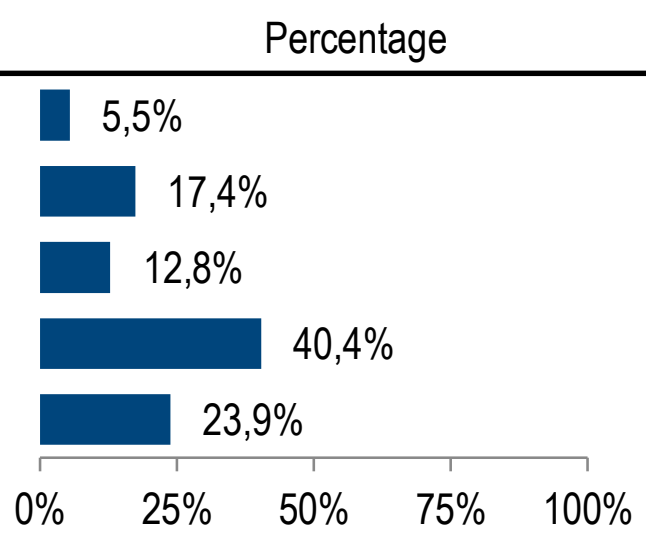
Current work

	N	Percentage
Legislators, senior officials and managers	6	4,5%
Specialists	0	0,0%
Technicians and associate professionals	11	8,3%
Clerks	3	2,3%
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	75	56,4%
Skill agricultural and fishery workers	5	3,8%
Craft and related workers	7	5,3%
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	5	3,8%
Elementary occupations	21	15,8%
Total	133	**100%**
Choose not to answer	8	
Total	**141**	



Average number of work hours a week

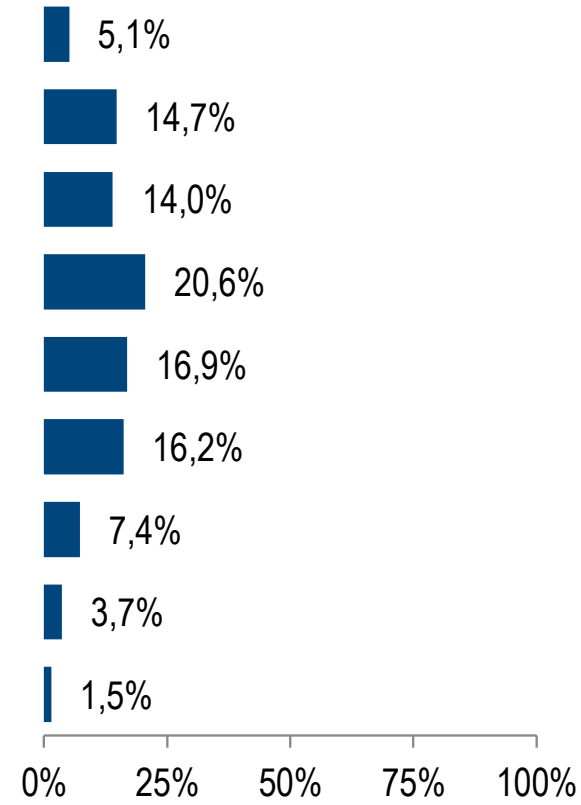
	N	Percentage
Less than 10 hours	6	5,5%
10 - 29 hours	19	17,4%
30 thru 39 hours	14	12,8%
40 - 49 hours	44	40,4%
50 hours or more	26	23,9%
Total	**109**	**100%**
Choose not to answer	32	
Total	**141**	



Approximately how many hours do you work on average in a typical work-week, overtime included?

Income

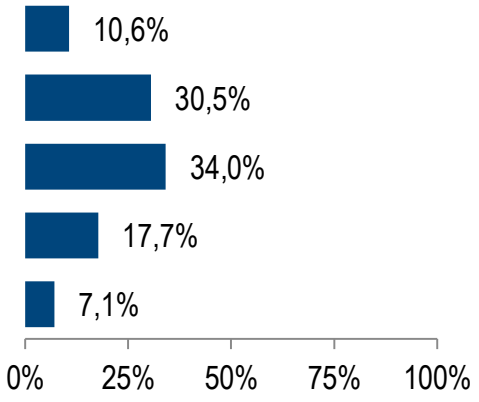
		N	Percentage
Low	Less than 700 EUR	7	5,1%
	700 - 1400 EUR	20	14,7%
	1401 - 2000 EUR	19	14,0%
Middle	2001 - 2800 EUR	28	20,6%
	2801 - 3500 EUR	23	16,9%
High	3501 - 4200 EUR	22	16,2%
	4201 - 4900 EUR	10	7,4%
	4901 - 5600 thousand ISK	5	3,7%
	5601 EUR or more	2	1,5%
	Total	136	**100%**
	Choose not to answer	5	
	Total	**141**	



Income satisfaction

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your income?

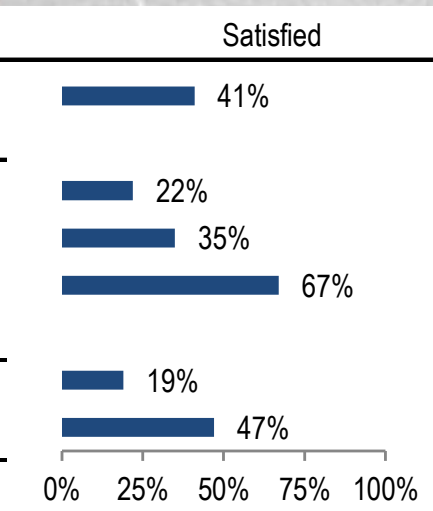
	N	Percentage
Very satisfied	15	10,6%
Rather satisfied	43	30,5%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	48	34,0%
Rather dissatisfied	25	17,7%
Very dissatisfied	10	7,1%
Total	**141**	**100%**



Income satisfaction is associated with income and having children

	Satisfied	Neither nor	Dissatisfied	N
Total	41%	34%	24%	141
Income **				
Low income	22%	50%	28%	46
Middle income	35%	33%	31%	51
High income	67%	18%	15%	39
Have children *				
Yes	19%	58%	23%	674
No	47%	29%	25%	91

*p < 0,05, **p < 0,01, ***p < 0,001



Views on current work

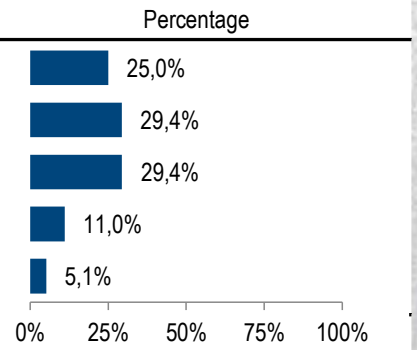
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements	N	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I enjoy myself at work	141	89%	3%	9%
At my workplace there is good morale	140	84%	4%	12%
I feel good in the company of my coworkers	140	92%	2%	6%
I have good employment security at my workplace	141	80%	7%	13%
At my workplace people are rewarded if they do well	141	64%	16%	21%
Managers are concerned with the health and well-being of the employees	140	75%	9%	17%
Employees are treated equally and do not face discrimination	141	79%	10%	11%
At my workplace, people use their right to sick leave without fear or repercussions	140	79%	10%	11%
At my workplace, people in my position are encouraged to use their right to parental leave	141	66%	32%	2%
One the whole, I am satisfied with my work	141	89%	4%	7%

Does the work qualify as decent work?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements	N	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I feel emotionally safe interacting with people at work	141	85%	6%	9%
At work, I feel safe from emotional or verbal abuse of any kind	136	89%	1%	10%
I feel physically safe interacting with people at work	136	96%	1%	2%
I am not properly paid for my work	137	57%	14%	29%
I do not feel I am paid enough based on my qualifications and experience	136	43%	27%	31%
I am rewarded adequately for my work	137	62%	19%	20%
I do not have enough time for non-work activities	136	47%	8%	45%
I have no time to rest during the work week	136	33%	9%	58%
I have free time during the work week	136	67%	13%	21%
The values of my organization match my family values	134	36%	43%	21%
The values of my organization match the values within my community	136	39%	41%	20%

In your opinion, are you likely or unlikely to hold your dream job in the future?

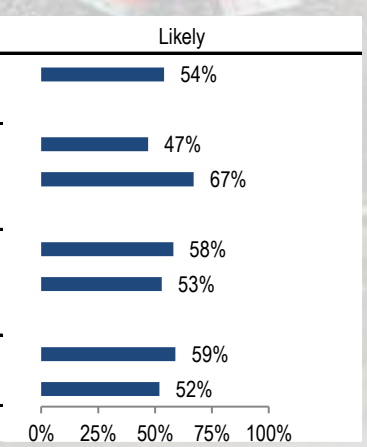
	N	Percentage
Very likely	34	25,0%
Rather likely	40	29,4%
Neither likely nor unlikely	40	29,4%
Rather unlikely	15	11,0%
Very unlikely	7	5,1%
Total	136	**100%**
Choose not to answer	5	
Total	**141**	



The likelihood of holding the job in the future is associated with type of preferred job but not participants' studies

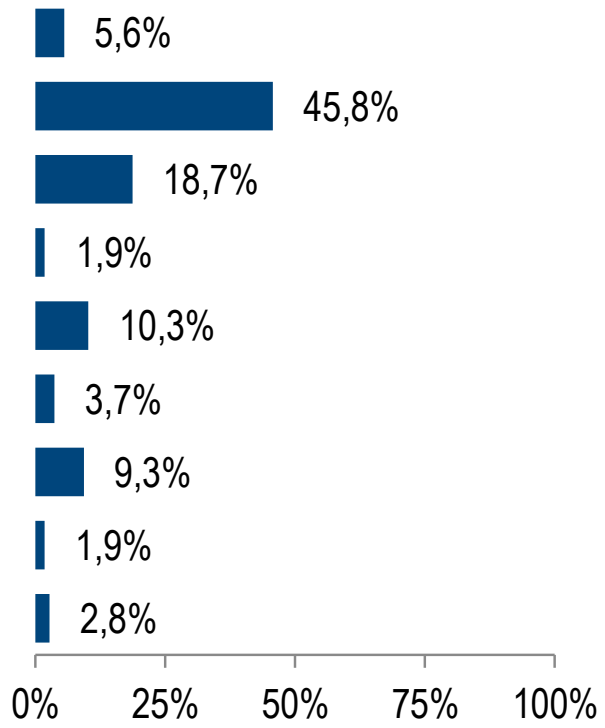
	Likely	Neither nor	Unlikely	N
Total	54%	29%	16%	136
Type of dream job *				
A job that requires a university degree	47%	27%	27%	49
A job that does not require a university degree	67%	22%	10%	58
Currently studying in secondary school				
Yes	58%	16%	26%	31
No	53%	32%	15%	81
How many credits completed in secondary school				
90 credits or less	59%	26%	15%	46
More than 90 credits	52%	32%	16%	62

*p < 0,05, **p < 0,01, ***p < 0,001

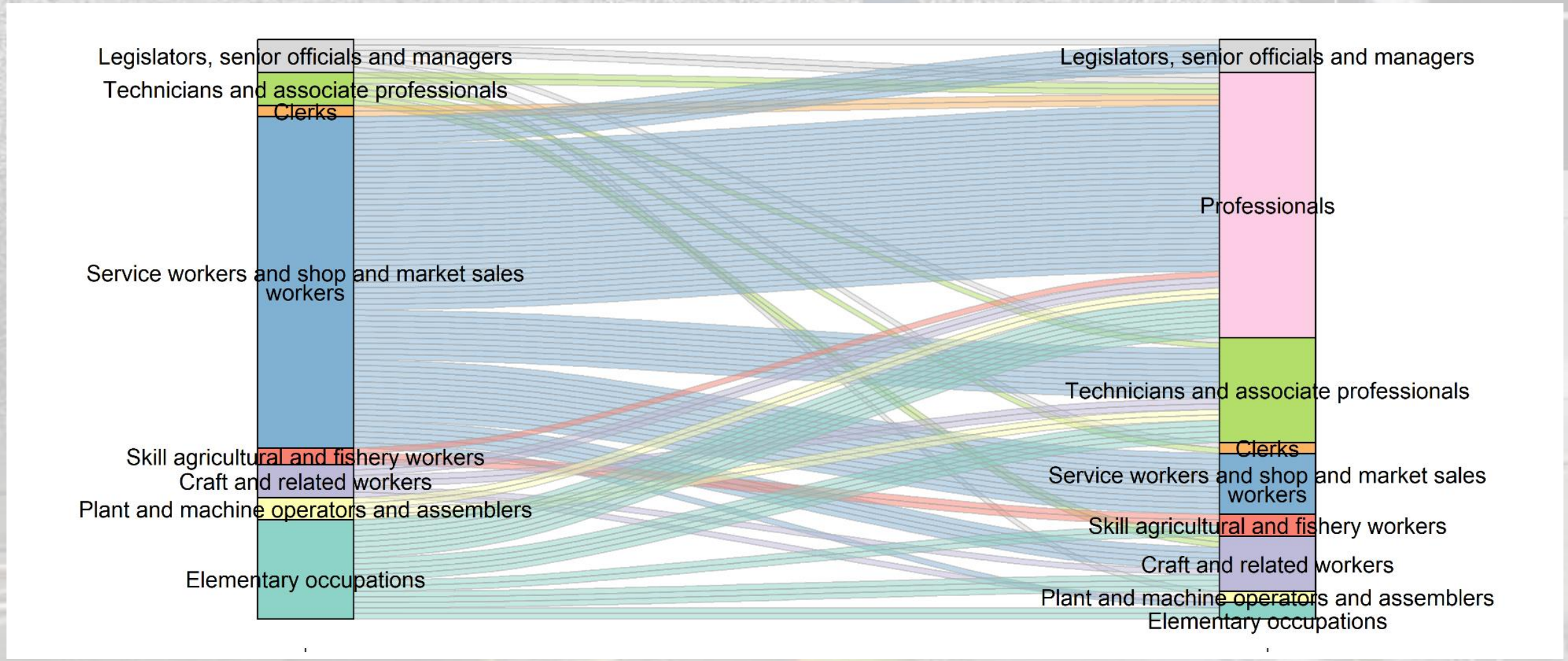


Preferred future occupation

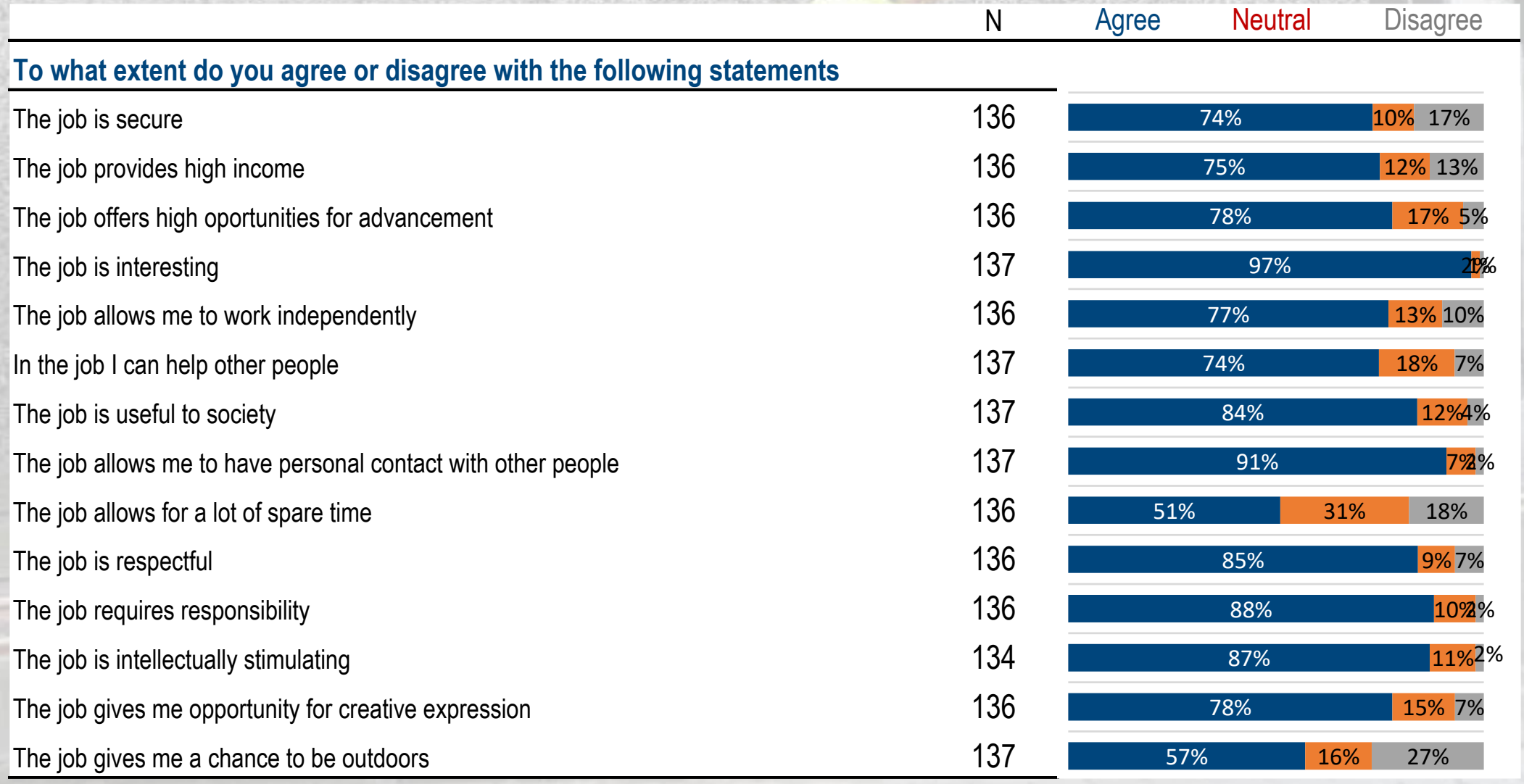
	N	Percentage
Legislators, senior officials and managers	6	5,6%
Professionals	49	45,8%
Technicians and associate professionals	20	18,7%
Clerks	2	1,9%
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	11	10,3%
Skill agricultural and fishery workers	4	3,7%
Craft and related workers	10	9,3%
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	2	1,9%
Elementary occupations	3	2,8%
Total	107	**100%**
Choose not to answer	34	
Total	**141**	



Preferred future job in relation to participant's current occupation



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the job you wish to hold in the future?

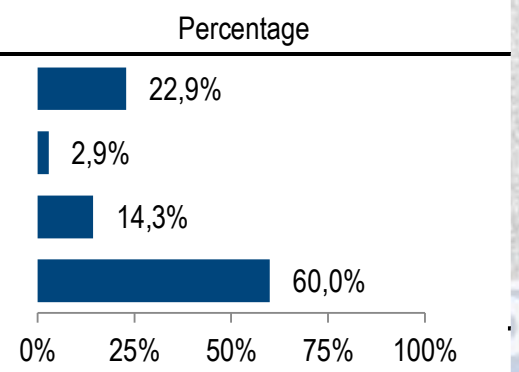


Qualitative St

Context!

Are you currently studying in secondary school?

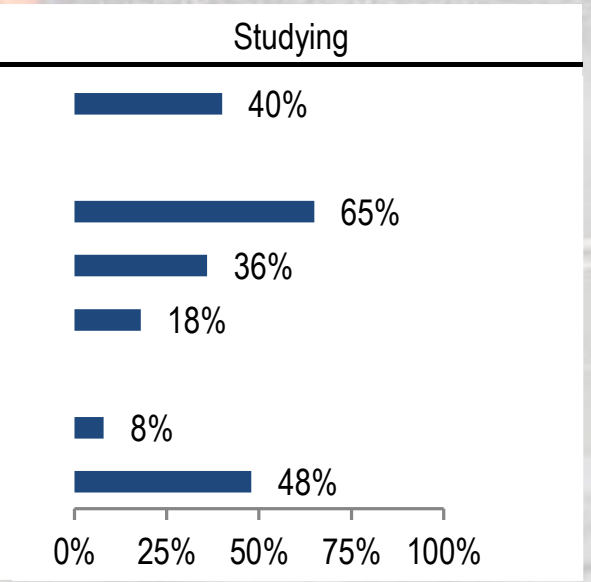
	N	Percentage
Yes, academic studies	32	22,9%
Yes, vocational studies/training	4	2,9%
Yes, vocational studies/training	20	14,3%
No	84	60,0%
Total	140	**100%**
Not applicable	1	
Total	**141**	



Studying in secondary school was associated with income and having children

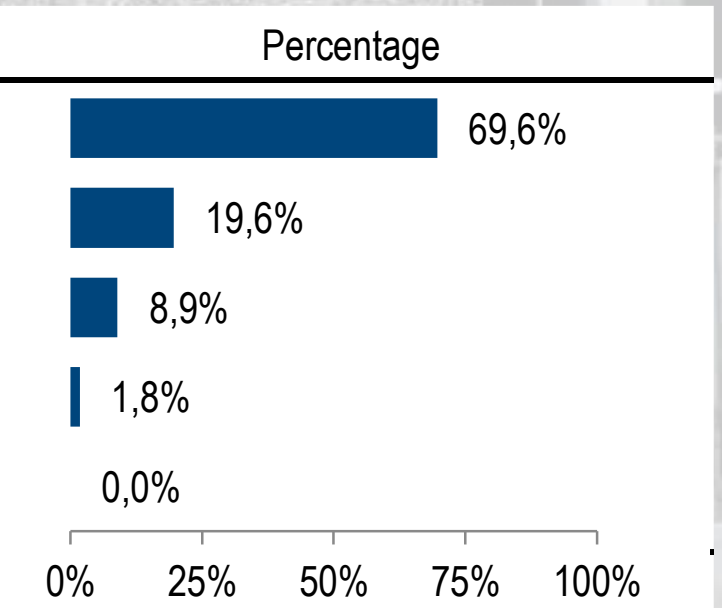
	Studying	Not studying	N
Total	40%	60%	140
Income *			
Low income	65%	35%	46
Middle income	36%	64%	50
High income	18%	82%	39
Have children *			
Yes	8%	93%	674
No	48%	52%	91

*p < 0,05, **p < 0,01, ***p < 0,001



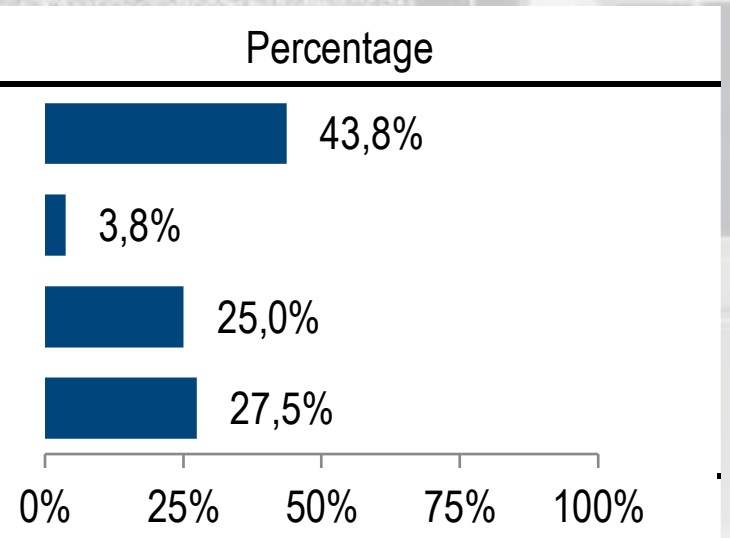
Those who are in secondary school:
In your opinion, are you likely or unlikely to complete the studies

	N	Percentage
Very likely	39	69,6%
Rather likely	11	19,6%
Neither likely nor unlikely	5	8,9%
Rather unlikely	1	1,8%
Very unlikely	0	0,0%
Total	56	**100%**
Not applicable	85	
Total	**141**	

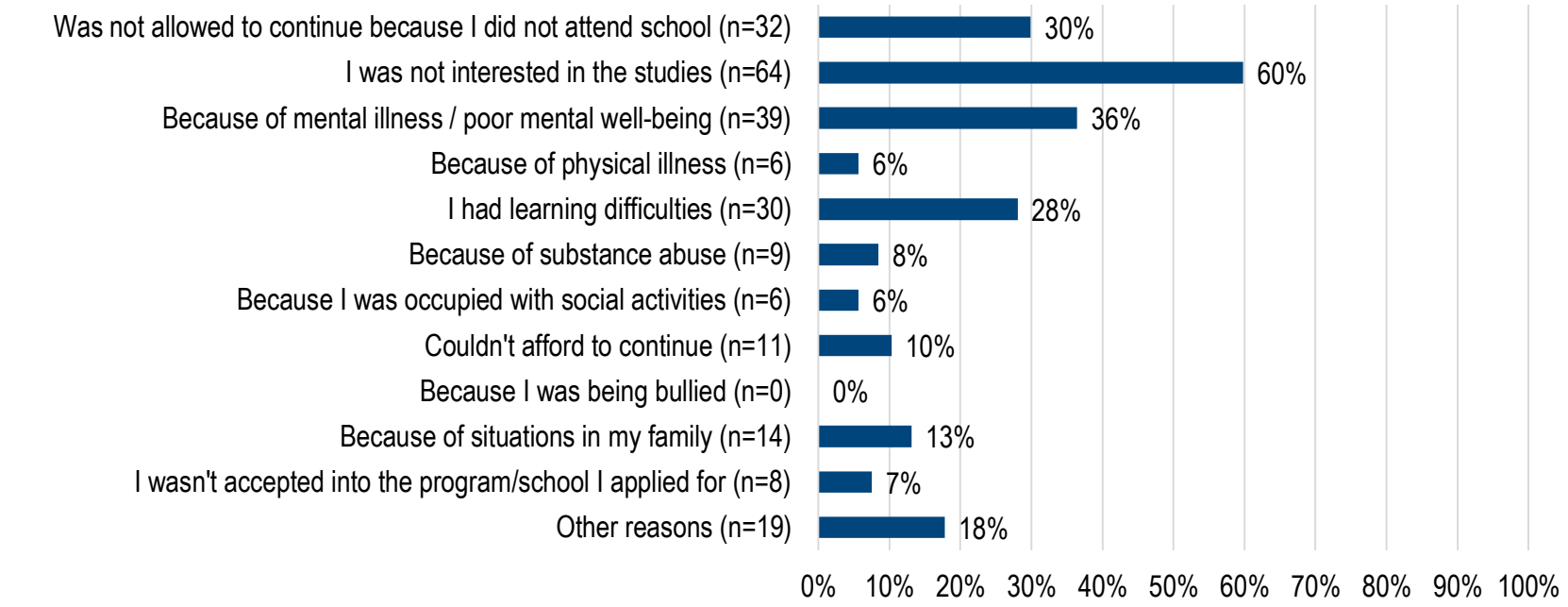


Those who are not in secondary school:
Are you planning on starting secondary school?

	N	Percentage
Yes, academic studies	35	43,8%
Yes, performing or visual arts	3	3,8%
Yes, occupational studies/training	20	25,0%
No	22	27,5%
Total	80	**100%**
Do not want to answer	4	
Not applicable	57	
Total	**141**	

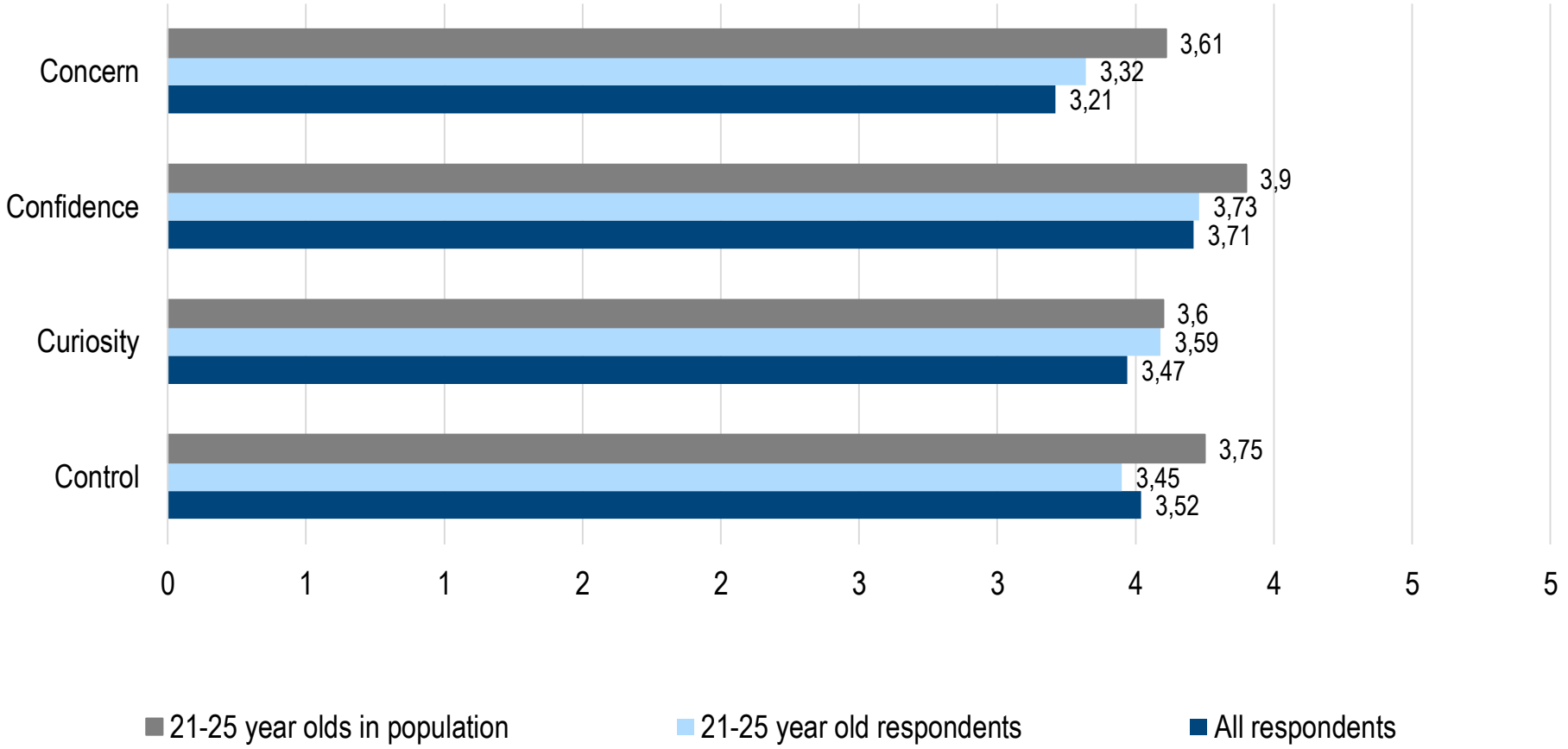


What are the main reasons for not completing studies at upper secondary school?



N=107
Participants could mark more than one answer, therefore the total percent of cases is larger than 100%.

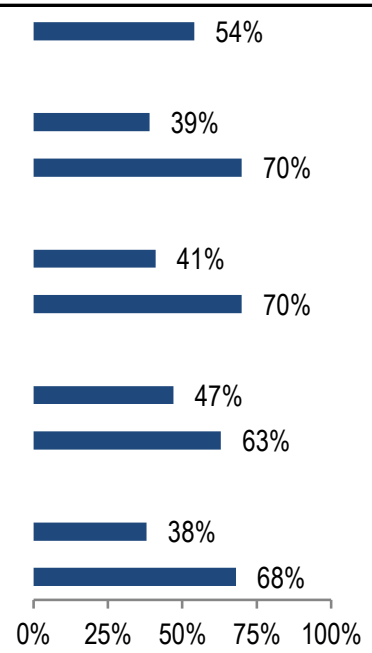
Career Adapt-Ability Scale



Career adaptability and likelihood of holding preferred job in the future

	Likely	Neither nor	Unlikely	N
Total	54%	29%	16%	136
Concern **				
Below average	39%	36%	25%	64
Above average	70%	21%	9%	70
Confidence **				
Below average	41%	39%	20%	64
Above average	70%	19%	12%	69
Curiosity				
Below average	47%	31%	22%	58
Above average	63%	27%	11%	75
Control **				
Below average	38%	38%	23%	60
Above average	68%	21%	11%	75

*p < 0,05, **p < 0,01, ***p < 0,001



Summary and discussion 1 of 3

- Positive occupational outlook: 55% of participants think it likely or rather likely that they will enter their prefered occupation (16% unlikely)
- Positive educational outlook: Of the 40% who are in school 2/3rd find it likely they will finish their studies. Will they with all the work they are doing (64% work over 40 hs a week)?
- Causes of dropout show that this group has had more difficulties than dropouts as a whole (more learning difficulties, mental illness, lack of interest...)
  - 60% are not in school (2/3rd would like to return) – What support do they have?
- What about support like student loans or educational organisations (for adults)?
- Most valued aspect of their prefered occupation: interesting and allows personal contacts
- Most participants feel good at work and find other aspects of it more or less decent

Summary and discussion 2 of 3

- 20% are parents (45% in population). They are much less happy with their salary and less likely to be in school ➔ poor family policy
- Participants who have been unemployed score lower on work volition
  - Survival vs self-determination is clearly a dimension (Blustein)
- Career construction
  - Participants score lower on all scales of career adaptability compared to peers
  - They are especially not as concerned (plan and prepare) or in control (decisive) ➔ need more support ➔ difficulty in career identity construction?
  - Participants who find it likely they will reach their career goals score higher on CAAS
- Are we looking at one or more groups (hopeful vs not hopeful)? Or a fluid work situation (non linear career)?
- Analysis of data with social variables of gender, SES ➔ intersectionality

Summary and discussion 3 of 3

- Guidance for all, not only for people in school → 10 year plan in Switzerland

Takk fyrir – Thank you - Merci

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