

A Study of Coping Strategies Among Unemployment Youth

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ABSTRACT

As we know that in today's scenario, unemployment is a basic and attentive problem of youth. Unemployment affects not only the economical and mental health but also the social health. Here we frame the coping strategies and their possible outcomes. As in the unemployment research, coping is frequently confounded with outcome, implying that certain strategies are better than others, and that coping is more or less a problem-solving strategy. Emphasizing coping as merely problem solving devalues, however, its other functions that concern well-being. In unemployment research, the activities of the young can be understood through a broader conceptualisation of the ways in which they attempt to master societal conditions through individual action. This article focuses on the study of different coping patterns among unemployed youth and the relationship between different individual coping strategies, resources and constraints and mental well-being.

I. Introduction

Some studies showed that work seemed to be the basis of social integration and the main reference for men and women in their everyday organization of life. This deprivation hypothesis, which illuminates the problems of not having a job, has been the basis of an abundance of unemployment research. However, research from the 1990s suggests that there are few signs of withdrawal into passivity and social isolation among the unemployed. The increased participation in leisure activities and the consequent patterns of sociability may well provide the same psychological functions as work. Indeed, a recent study concluded that unemployed people who manage to fulfil their psychosocial needs in other ways than paid employment are quite well mentally. These controversial results reveal that the relationship between sociability and unemployment works both ways. Unemployed people who participate regularly in social life are less likely to be excluded due to their lack of work. On the other hand, unemployment—interlaced with poverty—may restrict people's social activities.

Coping is frequently confounded with outcome, implying that certain strategies are better than others, and that coping is more or less a problem-solving strategy. Some thinkers emphasizing coping as merely problem solving devalues its other functions that concern managing emotions and maintaining self-esteem and a positive outlook. The context is evidently important. Coping is not only about the circumstances of the individuals, but about what resources are available to them. Furthermore, the societal context moulds individual experiences. The activities of the young can only be understood through a broader conceptualization of the ways in which they attempt to master societal conditions through individual action. Presumably, coping strategies were relate to the unemployment situation in the country.

What is Coping?

Coping serves two overriding functions: managing or altering the problem, and regulating the emotional response to it. Coping has a number of definitions. Psychologists distinguishes between four different meanings of coping. The first involves the use of different strategies, and the other three concern more or less different reactions to the problem [2]. This division might also represent the common distinction between problem-focused coping, where efforts are directed at doing something constructive about the conditions of the threat/harm, and emotion-focused coping, which is concerned with regulating the emotions arising from the situation.

In contrast, emotion-focused behaviour employs strategies such as acceptance, denial, disengagement and searching for emotional support. Coping must include various efforts to manage stressful events regardless of outcome. This means that no strategy is considered inherently better than any other. The strategy is determined only by its effects in a given encounter and its effects in the long run. Within the social sciences, the discourse of coping has been most prominent within the discipline of psychology, later being incorporated into sociological and social policy studies. Although the terminology is largely shared, there are differences in the operationalizations and interpretations of this concept. Broadly, psychological studies focus on individual behaviour, whereas sociological studies pay greater attention to the social context of people's lives.

Coping with Unemployment

People cope with unemployment in many different ways. Coping is, to a large extent, related to gender, age, qualifications, one's financial situation level of activity and social network. Although research in this area is drawn from different disciplines, it largely explains coping in terms of individual attributes. However, the aim is not to present a complete overview of the research in this field, but to highlight research findings that focus on social activity and unemployment, and thereby identify factors that are important in analyzing coping and mental well-being.

Overall, research has shown that those who use active coping strategies are young people, individuals with high education, married people with children and people with short experience of unemployment. Indeed, some studies suggest that the adaptation and social pressures associated with unemployment are less serious among younger than among older people and that young people seem to cope with unemployment better than the middle-aged.

However, the other research suggested that the seriousness of an economic crisis had most effect on the young. All of the young people in experienced serious financial problems: some sank into isolation while others quarrelled with their parents and left home. On the other hand, the unemployment period could also be used constructively, for example, for seeking a new job or for developing personal resources. Some other researchers have shown that young people may use their unemployment period to solve problems and to look for a job.

The psychological impact of unemployment thus appears to be related to how unemployed people use their time. Specifically, those who cope best are engaged in purposeful activity and maintain regular contact with people outside the nuclear family. Previous research has shown that sports or membership of clubs and associations may well reduce the chance of having poorer mental health during unemployment.

Adopting an alternative role may also serve as a buffer against negative experience. Study of unemployed women showed that the availability of an alternative role, such as being at home with the children, made the experience less distressing, especially among women with low education. On the whole, research on the effects of unemployment on mental health has shown that women generally tend to adjust better than men. One explanation for this is that women have more extensive social networks offering support and that they maintain their level of activity better when unemployed. Another explanation is that women have lower salaries and fewer career opportunities, and thus view employment as less important than men do. Some evidence of the importance of social relationships is also to be found in which the activity level among people was compared according to labour market status. The most striking difference was between the employed and the unemployed, and lay in the nature rather than in the extensiveness of their networks. The unemployed tended to have friends who were also unemployed, and they had weaker social support systems to help with the psychological and material problems. Family relationships can also be controversial. Some families seem more able than others to translate the social changes around them into useful advice and practice in ways more likely to promote young people's transitions. The social welfare system may also provide assistance in various ways.

In sum, unemployment seems to be a dynamic situation, which is coped with in different ways, depending on the resources, social capital, and orientation of the individual. It is also determined by constraints that mitigate the use of resources. In addition, individual agency may be historically specific and relate with social, economic and cultural dynamics. Thus, we may expect to find both individual differences, depending on the resources and constraints people have, as well as differences between the countries. Unemployment can be more stigmatizing in countries with low unemployment levels than where it is high. It can also be different in countries where unemployment is long-standing. On the other hand, we might find homogeneous patterns indicating that certain coping strategies are essential for all the young people.

This study follows a coping-process-oriented approach in analyzing the encounter of unemployment among young unemployed people. Coping is analyzed by taking into account young unemployed individuals' responses to unemployment, activities during unemployment, and resources and constraints which mediate their (re)actions. Different coping patterns in countries with different unemployment levels and different coping strategies related to mental health among unemployed youth.

Various types of coping

- Active,
- Neutral
- Passive coping,
- Direct and indirect means,
- Alternative strategies and
- Problem solving and
- Emotional coping

The concept of coping strategies is here used to refer to activities during unemployment as well as reactions to unemployment. The approach used differentiates between direct strategies, which consist of

activities aimed at getting employed or developing the qualities to get re-employed, and indirect strategies, which consist of activities that are not directly aimed at getting re-employed but belong to everyday life (e.g. housework and social contacts). Furthermore, it distinguishes between alternative strategies, involving replacing activities such as child care and voluntary work. In addition, problem-solving and emotional-focused reactions are included.

There was a high level of agreement that being unemployed increased the time available for family, friends and hobbies, and that there was freedom in using the time. The majority of the subjects did not feel extremely isolated, nor did they feel that their self-confidence had diminished. This pattern applied to most of the young people who experienced unemployment as less positive. As far as negative experiences were concerned, a specific feature emerged. Up to two-thirds of the respondents found that they had become financially dependent on others while they were unemployed. These differences could well be explained by the financial circumstances. In general, the women in all the countries experienced more financial dependence, a bigger loss of self-confidence and more isolation, whereas the men found they had more time for hobbies when they were unemployed. Young people living alone felt more distressed by unemployment than those living with their parents. Other factors, such as education, work experience and unemployment duration did not have a significant impact. Financial difficulties were highly related to negative unemployment experiences.

Factor analysis differentiated between problem-focused ('I have more time for family and friends', 'I can use my time as I please', 'I have more time for hobbies'), and emotion-focused factors ('I do not accomplish anything', 'I have problems planning for the future', 'I am losing my self-confidence', 'I feel isolated', 'I am financially dependent on others'), of which the latter were the strongest, and explained 38 per cent of the variance. Together, these factors explained 56 per cent of the variance. The same pattern emerged for all of the countries. Previous studies have shown that problem-focused and emotion-focused behaviour do not exclude each other and people use both types of approaches. Still, this is seldom acknowledged when measuring and defining coping behaviour.

II. Conclusion

Coping is frequently predicated on the assumption that, given the right tools or resources, one can cope effectively with most sources of stress. What, then, is the relationship between sociability and unemployment and what were the sources of individual well-being during unemployment? Overall, the analysis suggested that the tools and resources for successful coping are centred around educational attainment, household composition, unemployment duration and material conditions. The findings show some general patterns, in that participating in sports reduces mental health problems among unemployed youth. However, being socially active does not necessarily lead to a higher probability of individual well-being. The context seems to matter. In some problems, young drifters formed a majority, having an active social life did not increase mental well-being. This shows the contradictory situations young people experience.

Some young people withdraw from activities and their lives centre on peer groups who are in the same situation. They may also perceive adult life as characterized by a lack of prospects and rely on their peer group to provide an acceptable route. Most probably, material factors provide an important mediating factor in explaining the different experiences, since previous research has shown that economic exclusion was highest among them. Even though material resources formed a strong explanatory determinant of mental health for all the young unemployed people in the study, the analysis showed that there appeared to be more opportunities.

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