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Unemployment as a Factor Influencing Mental Well-Being

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Abstract

To develop an adequate employment policy is hardly possible without consideration of the psychosocial state of the unemployed. Therefore, not only is the statement of individual peculiarities significant, but also the definition of typical regularities, which allows to choose the most effective forms of psychological assistance and support.

This paper addresses the results of the cluster analysis of the MMPI test profiles of the unemployed and employed women in order to construct the most typical profiles of the unemployed women and to define the most optimal directions of psychological assistance. Those personality profiles which were identified in the MMPI polling were classified using the methods of the cluster analysis. The participants of the study were 50 employed women and 298 unemployed women, most of whom were students of re-qualification courses at two educational institutions in Riga. The constructed personality profiles were grouped into 5 clusters. This paper provides characteristics for each cluster and offers recommendations for psychologists, pedagogues and other professionals who engage in re-qualification training of the unemployed or provide other services to the unemployed.

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1. Introduction

The concept of unemployment (“Arbeitslosigkeit”) has been used since the end of the 19th century; however, the issue of unemployment could be traced to earlier times. Even the politicians of the Ancient Rome were engaged in

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the delivery of social aid for the unemployed free citizens. The transition from the socially planned economy to the market economy has created unemployment in Latvia, too. As a result a new social group of the unemployed has emerged. According to the data of the State Employment Agency of Latvia, as of 30 Jun 2016 there were 78 164 registered unemployed, which constituted 8.3% of the economically active citizens. The rate of unemployment was 5.0% in Riga, 18.0% in the districts of Latgale, 15.8% in the district of Rezekne, 11.9% in the district of Liepaja and 6.9% in the district of Ventspils (Report of unemployment situation in the country, 2016). This data points to the topicality of the issue in modern society.

A significant number of scientific endeavours have focused on the study of personality under the conditions of crisis at the time of social transformations. However, much of such research has been conducted in relatively stable and well-established market economies. Theoretical aspects of social psychology that pertain to social contexts prescribe clarification of the system of universal factors, which influence an individual under specific historical and cultural circumstances. Consequently, research that is particularly useful is the one that provides data on individual peculiarities under specific historical and cultural circumstances. In the context of Latvia it would translate into individual peculiarities under Latvian-specific historical and cultural circumstances that emerge as a reaction to a specific situation in the state. To develop an effective employment policy is hardly possible without consideration of the psychosocial state of the unemployed. Therefore, not only is the statement of individual peculiarities significant, but also the definition of typical regularities, which allows to choose the most effective forms of psychological assistance and support. The questions that continue to be highly topical today pertain to the definition of mental disorders, which have frequently been noticed among the unemployed, and the relationship that exists between these mental disorders and unemployment, more specifically, whether these disorders are the cause or consequence of unemployment (Belle, Bullock, 2010; Karsten, Moser, 2009; Goldman-Mellor, 2016; McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2005; Prause, Dooley, 2001; Holland, 2012).

The results of the cluster analysis of the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) test profiles of the employed and unemployed women were summarized in order to construct the most typical profiles of the unemployed women and to identify the most optimal directions of psychological assistance. The comparative analysis of the MMPI test profiles of the unemployed men and women were offered in (Palma, 2002).

2. Unemployment and Mental Disorders

There is dependence between unemployment and mental health. Unemployment leads to negative perception which, according to Warr (1983), manifests itself in anxiety, depression, melancholy, feeling of dependency, inability to solve routine problems and self-dissatisfaction. In that study, 954 men who had been unemployed for a year were surveyed. Warr found that 20% of the participants experienced deterioration in their mental health, while 8% felt better compared to their employment periods, which was attributed by Warr to disappearance of work-related negative factors. Furthermore, in 1982 many thousands of school alumni were surveyed in England (Banks and Jackson, 1982) in order to determine if unemployment impacted mental health or if mental health was the cause of unemployment. School period indices were compared to records of employment of the one-to-two year period after school graduation. The results demonstrated that those who had not found any job had their emotional disorders aggravated, while emotional disorders of those who had found employment were not as severe (besides, their initial figures were lower). The authors concluded that poor mental health represented rather an insignificant cause of unemployment.

However, Pelzer *et al.* (2014) claimed that unemployment was an important stressor affecting mental health. Social skills do not interfere with depressive reactions during unemployment. At the same time, Furnham (1986) believed that there was a bilateral connection between mental health and unemployment since many people who had been unable to find a job for a long time became victims of alcoholism and many of them had mental disorders in their anamnesis from before. Prause and Dooley (2001) suggested that the unemployed who had a high index of depression were further expected to be unemployed. The impact of unemployment on mental health became apparent after a certain time. One Australian research (Feather and Davenport, 1983) studied 400 young unemployed and showed that 56% of the unemployed had clinical mental disorders; in most cases more than 5 months set apart the moment when the persons lost their job and the moment when the first symptoms appeared. In the longitudinal study by Kirchler (1984), 20 men and 13 women who had recently lost their job were asked to

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