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PEOPLE**

Andreea Teodora TUDOR

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Psycho-Clinical Aspects of Unemployed People

Andreea Teodora TUDOR¹

Abstract

The present research had the purpose to determine the existence of any psycho-clinical aspects regarding unemployed people.

The sample of subjects consisted of 32 long-term unemployed, women and men, aged between 19 and 60 years.

The research method consisted of two questionnaires and statistical analysis. The instruments used were the Zuckerman – Kuhlman 5 Factors Personality Questionnaire and The Strategic Coping Approach Scale.

The results from the research showed that unemployed people have low levels compared to the average population in impulsive search of sensations, which indicates a preference to organizing, planning and the lack of contingency, and low levels of activity compared to the average population, which shows a tendency of stagnation, inactivity and reluctance to change.

Also, the female unemployed population show similar levels with the mean of the population in terms of sensation seeking and impulsive activity. Instead, they use the behavioral coping strategy for social networking, more than the average population, showing a tendency to group affiliation when stressful events, such as and the loss of employment, happen.

In conclusion, the research showed that there are differences between the mean of people and people without jobs, leaving room for future research, which can be more comprehensive.

Keywords: unemployment, unemployed, work, psycho-clinical, research.

¹ Mrd., “Ovidius” University, Constanța, tudorteodora@yahoo.com.

1. Introduction

The current state of the economy has become in the last few years a stress factor on a global level. In other words, money are an important stress source to the individuals. For this reason, losing a job which provides a certain financial stability may become a traumatizing event in one's life.

Either this happens voluntarily or involuntarily, it can produce important effects in the interior structure of the individual. But these effects can be stronger in case the unemployment situations is involuntarily, and the unemployed person losing both the safety of satisfying some basic needs (food, housing etc.) and those of group belonging, security and others. The sudden appearance of this deprivation puts the individual in a state of emotional stress, which can take multiple forms.

Some researchers (Murroughau, 2014) have launched the idea that losing your job (or becoming unemployed) sometimes has symptoms which are similar to PTSD (post-traumatic syndrome disorder). Among other, lower self-esteem, increased anxiety, the presence of depression symptoms, psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, low activity levels, reaching even the extreme cases of suicide attempts and suicide. (Paul & Moser, 2009).

This research aims to highlight common personality traits of unemployed people, in order to shape a psychological profile and psycho-clinical issues that could result from the loss of employee status.

The increasing unemployment rate in recent years raises strong questions about the attitude of individuals in terms of their action or inaction on labour market. Therefore, to clarify these gaps and to create a functioning social reintegration system for such persons, but also to facilitate regaining personal balance, it is necessary to create programs to prevent adverse effects of the loss of workplace and to fight these where they already manifested, and for this, it is necessary to know specific clinical aspects of the unemployed, from which these programs can be developed and implemented.

In addition, the effects of inactivity and unemployment especially among young people can have a strong impact on society and therefore, the psychological foundations that foster this kind of behaviour must be found, in order to develop a prevention strategy.

2. Theoretical approach. Literature research

Unemployment is a contemporary, complex, extensive phenomenon, which includes economic, social, political, psychological and moral aspects.

It is an economic phenomenon, characteristic to the capitalistic society, which consists in the fact that part of the employees are left with no workplace, following a gap between the labour force supply and demand. The “unemployment” term can also be explained as “inactivity”.

Unemployment is characterised by loss of income, loss of self-esteem, the erosion of community relations and the emergence of feelings such as alienation and exclusion from the “normal life”, which causes tensions (Aghinea, 2007) and threatens the social stability (Andre & Lelord, 2014).

It manifests itself unevenly in countries, areas, periods of time, sex, age, professional qualification etc. It mostly affects young people and women, and if it becomes extended over a long period of time, it increases the risk of professional competency loss and the reintegration difficulty. The long term unemployed, with over 1 year of inactivity, is sometimes irreparably disqualified. The loss of professional skills and the loss of “work rhythm” make the individual less competitive and drives increased distrust. (Borie-Holtz, Van Horn & Zukin, 2010)

Table 1. Unemployment rate in Romania, sex differentiated.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	6.9	6.4	8.4	7.0	8.0	7.2	7.3	6.4	5.8	6.9	7.3
Men	7.5	6.9	8.9	7.5	9.0	7.7	8.2	7.2	6.7	7.7	7.9
Women	6.1	5.8	7.7	6.4	6.9	6.4	6.1	5.4	4.7	5.8	6.5

Source: National Statistics Institute

Table 2. Unemployment rate in Romania, level of studies differentiated.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Superior	3.5	3.9	4.7	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.8	2.9	2.7	4.3	5.4
Medium	9.1	8.2	9.6	8.1	8.8	8.0	7.8	6.9	6.0	7.2	8.3
Low	4.1	4.0	7.1	5.7	8.2	6.6	7.6	7.1	7.1	7.5	6.1

Source: National Statistics Institute

Table 3. Unemployment rate in Romania, age differentiated.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
15-24 y.o.	18.4	17.2	21.7	18.5	21.0	19.7	21.0	20.1	18.6	20.8	22.1
> 25 y.o.	5.1	4.8	6.4	5.4	6.2	5.6	5.7	4.9	4.4	5.4	5.8

Source: National Statistics Institute

Unemployment doesn't affect all groups of people in the same way. On a global level, there has been noted that there is a higher unemployment rate in Latino and Afro-American people, compared to Europeans. Immigrants (Kochhar, 2009), disabled people (Shapiro, 2009) or those who don't have superior studies (Leonhardt, 2009) are also more exposed to it. Women without jobs are more mentally instable than men in the same situation (McKee-Ryan, 2005). Also, women have a tendency towards irritability, anger, lack of motivation or energy and activity (A.P.A, 2009). In combination with other physical and psychological weaknesses, the impact of losing their workplace on some groups can have serious effects on individuals and communities which are already vulnerable.

Other studies show that losing their job, for some people, is more than a financial crisis, but also creates a series of other dysfunctions such as stress, anxiety, substance abuse, the deterioration of family relations, shame and depression (Van Horn, 2011).

Psychologists (Eisenberg, 1938), have drawn a conceptual link between involuntary unemployment and mental health, meaning that losing its workplace mentally affects the individual. Moreover, Erikson (1959) noted the presence of incomplete psychosocial development and the feelings of helplessness due to a lack of control (Seligman, 1975). He mentions that a healthy personality and emotional development at maturity needs the individual to believe that he lays his efforts to "enrich" himself through his contribution to the family and community. On the other hand, self-esteem is compromised through unemployment, leading to anxiety and self-doubt. (Bolognini, 2002). The vision of Erikson is completed by Seligman, who says that the helplessness feeling appears when the individuals who become unemployed think they cannot influence the important events in their life such as providing a right workplace. This helplessness feeling, if it manifests for a long while, can lead to depression. Also, as the unemployment period advances, the individual becomes pessimistic, shows high levels of frustration and disappointment.

Other researchers have hypothesised regarding the duration of inactivity, affirming that short unemployment periods are much less traumatizing than the lack of a workplace for a long period of time (Struble, 1993)

3. Researching the psycho-clinical aspects of unemployed people

The current state of the economy has become in the last few years a stress factor on a global level. In other words, money are an important stress source to the individuals. For this reason, losing a job which provides a certain financial stability may become a traumatizing event in one's life.

3.1. Objectives and hypothesis

The main objective of the research was to create a psychological profile of unemployed people, which sums up a series of similar traits of those, by sketching the psycho-clinical aspects which they manifest and which can be caused by losing the workplace.

The specific objectives were to establish the common aspects of those involved in the research.

The hypothesis on which the research was based are the following:

HS1: It is assumed that unemployed people have lower activity levels, compared to the mean of the population.

HS2: It is considered that people without jobs show a tendency towards comfort and activities that are not too demanding.

HS3: Male unemployees are more active than the female ones.

HS4: It is assumed that people who lost their workplace have higher than the average scores on the anxiety scale.

These assumptions were verified using the instruments described in the following.

3.2. Research methodology

The research consisted in a sample of 32 individuals, aged between 18 and 61 years old, with at least medium levels of studies (high school), men and women, who were unemployed for at least 6 months.

In order to obtain the information needed for the research, two standardized instruments were used: the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire (ZKPQ) and the Strategic Coping Approach Scale (SACS).

The ZKPQ is destined to the evaluation of five factors which represent the dimensions of the Alternative Five-Factor Model – AFFM: impulsive search for sensations, sociability, neuroticism-anxiety, aggression-hostility and activity.

The AFFM (Zuckerman, 2002) resulted from a series of factorial analysis, carried out on some scales which evaluate the fundamental

dimensions of personality or temper, used in psycho-biological research. Unlike other models, this one accentuates the temper characteristics of the personality, giving importance to the psycho-biological aspects.

The ZKPQ is usually used for the psycho-diagnosis, in the educational, clinical and medical psychology field.

The questionnaire has 99 items, which are linked to the following scales:

- The *Sociability* scale measures the affiliation, social participation and extraversion, the preference towards interacting with others and also a rejection of loneliness from sociable people, versus a preference to that from non-sociable people.
- The *Impulsive search for sensations* scale measures low socializing, impulsiveness and psychoticism. It shows lack of planning and acting without thinking, or high attraction towards agitation and strong emotions, novelty and variety and unpredictable situations.
- The *Activity* scale measures the persistence and the energetic behaviour. This factor is associated with the need to maintain one's self active and feeling nervous when there is nothing to do.
- The *Neuroticism-anxiety* scale measures anxiety, fear, emotivity in general, psychastenia and inhibition towards aggression. It is also associated with indecision, lack of self-esteem and sensibility to criticism.
- The *Aggressiveness-hostility* scale measures aggression, hostility, anger, lack of control and is associated with impoliteness, recklessness and antisocial, revengeful behaviour, irascibility and impatience.

Apart from these scales, the ZKPQ also has a *social desirability* scale, which shows how much the subject wants to be more likable in the eyes of the researcher, to create himself a better image, to be considered "social desirable".

The Strategic Coping Approach Scale (SCAS) is a self-assessment questionnaire which measures the active/passive, prosocial/antisocial, direct/indirect behavioural coping strategies of adults above 18 y.o. More precisely, with the help of this instrument, one can evaluate how people react behaviourally, in general, when they encounter a problem or a stressful situation. The assessed strategies refer to the general tendency to approach problems, using a specific set of behaviours. This tendency is rather stable in time and it is relevant in the context of losing a workplace, which can be a stress factor.

The questionnaire has 52 items, crystalized in 9 scales: Assertive action, Social networking, looking for social support, prudent action, instinctive action, avoidance, indirect action, antisocial action and aggressive action.

The research was done through applying the 2 instruments to the subjects from the selected sample and through statistical analysis and comparing the data obtained from the assessment.

3.3. Results and data interpretation

After applying the two questionnaires, after analysing and interpreting the data (see *Appendix 1 – ZKPQ scores graphic chart* and *Appendix 2 – SCAS scores graphic chart*), the following information was obtained:

Table 4. Descriptive statistics.

Scales	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Sociability	32	30	72	53.75
Impulsive search of sensations	32	16	68	35.63
Activity	32	20	60	37.19
Neuroticism_Anxiety	32	40	70	55.41
Aggressiveness -Hostility	32	33	72	52.69
Assertive action	32	16	64	44.25
Social Networking	32	41	76	59.47
Looking for social support	32	30	69	52.19
Prudent action	32	25	73	50.69
Instinctive action	32	29	75	56.22
Avoidance	32	33	79	55.00
Indirect action	32	30	70	51.50
Antisocial action	32	33	66	51.41
Aggressive action	32	30	71	50.25

Fig. 1 – Scores obtained by subjects, compared to the mean of population (T=40-60)

It can be noticed that the subjects obtained a medium T score of 35.63 on the Impulsive search for sensations scale, a score situated above the mean of the population (T score 40-60). This means that unemployed people prefer a certain pre-established order and have the tendency to avoid unpredictable situations. Despite the context in which they are, of not having a job, unemployed people do not manifest proactivity and interest in, why not, changing their career, but rather chose a comfort zone, which confirms assumption that people without jobs show a tendency towards comfort and activities that are not too demanding.

Also, it can be observed that 68.75% of the subjects have scored lower than the average population regarding the Activity scale, with an average T score of 37.19, which confirms the assumption that unemployed people have lower activity levels, compared to the mean of the population. This can be explained by the fact that the lack of a workplace for over 6 months can induce a passive state, apathy and lack of energy towards getting involved in activities, as well as low motivation.

Regarding the assumption that male unemployees are more active than the female ones, it has been not confirmed, as it can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics – comparison by sex variable.

Sex		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	Sociability	18	37	72	53.61	9.930
	Impulsive search of sensations	18	16	54	29.94	10.155
	Activity	18	20	55	33.78	11.059
	Neuroticism_Anxiety	18	40	70	57.17	8.227
	Aggressiveness -Hostility	18	33	72	54.56	10.595
	Assertive action	18	16	58	40.56	10.303
	Social Networking	18	41	76	58.06	9.378
	Looking for social support	18	38	65	52.00	7.436
	Prudent action	18	25	73	49.17	11.480
	Instinctive action	18	41	71	56.50	8.111
	Avoidance	18	33	66	53.61	7.935
	Indirect action	18	30	67	48.17	12.316
	Antisocial action	18	33	66	50.72	9.398
	Aggressive action	18	30	71	49.17	11.668
Female						
	Sociability	14	30	67	53.93	9.539

Impulsive search of sensations	14	32	68	42.93	10.469
Activity	14	25	60	41.57	9.804
Neuroticism_Anxiety	14	44	63	53.14	6.037
Aggressiveness -Hostility	14	34	65	50.29	7.097
Assertive action	14	30	64	49.00	9.257
Social Networking	14	55	74	61.29	6.120
Looking for social support	14	30	69	52.43	10.173
Prudent action	14	34	70	52.64	7.732
Instinctive action	14	29	75	55.86	13.208
Avoidance	14	38	79	56.79	12.534
Indirect action	14	38	70	55.79	10.334
Antisocial action	14	34	66	52.29	10.276
Aggressive action	14	33	71	51.64	13.568

As seen from above, women without jobs not only have higher levels of activity and impulsive search of sensations than men, but they also have a higher score on social networking, (T score 61.29), slightly above the average population. This means that unemployed women prefer to join others in order to overcome stressful situations or to help others do it.

From the data analysis we also can deny the assumption that people who lost their workplace have high scores on the anxiety scale. Despite the fact that some of the individuals tested scored higher than the average, this is not a general trait of the tested sample.

3. Conclusions and implications

On the basis of the data obtained, a psycho-clinical profile of the unemployed people can be made, contouring a series of common features of those who do not have a workplace. This profile sums up, for the moment, the lack of activity, along with a preference towards routine and the absence of dynamics and change. Moreover, it can be noticed that unemployed women develop a behavioural coping strategy of group affiliation, in order to obtain or offer support, with the purpose of overcoming a stressful, tensioned situation, such as losing their job.

Also, starting from this research, the cause-effect link between losing one's workplace as a trauma and other clinical aspects can be investigated. For instance, research can be done on the impact that the high depressive tendency has on the subject and if that makes him/her perceive losing

his/her job as a trauma, or, on the contrary, if becoming unemployed generates increased scores on the depression scale.

However, I believe that it is necessary to research other aspects of the personality of the unemployed too. This can lead to further solutions regarding methods of preventing the emotional imbalance which appears in the situation of unemployment, so individuals are not so “traumatised” and in such a manner that they become able to reintegrate themselves easier on labour market, contributing to the decrease of unemployment rate and to the community development.

The data collected in this research contribute to a better, more profound knowledge of the unemployment phenomenon, from a psychological point of view, and to the development of support programmes.

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Biodata

MA Andreea Teodora TUDOR

Andreea Teodora Tudor has a bachelor degree in Psychology, since 2014. She is currently studying a Master's Degree for Personality Complex Psychodiagnosis, in "Ovidius" University, Constanta. She has been a guest student at University of Nantes, Faculty of Psychology, France, in 2013. Professionally, she is a Clinician Psychologist since January 2015, licenced for psychological evaluation. She is also working on European-funded projects, developed by an NGO (Sigma Development Center), which include social inclusion measures for unemployed people and violence and discrimination prevention measures for teenagers.

Appendix 1

Appendix 2