

MENTAL HEALTH PREVENTION AND UNEMPLOYMENT: WHAT DEMANDS EMERGE FROM THE MAIN STAKEHOLDERS?

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Abstract

Introduction: Unemployment impacts mental health through various factors. At the same time, deteriorating mental health negatively affects reemployment chances. Mental health prevention is highly recommended for this fragilized populations by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Organisation mondiale de la santé, 2012). Recommendations on such actions are formulated by the literature (e.g.: Bartholomew et al., 1998; D'Amours et al., 2008). Implementation's quality, which includes adapting the intervention with the needs and desires of the target population is advised. Yet, no study has been done on the interests of unemployed people regarding preventive action targeting mental health. **Methodology:** 13 jobseekers were interviewed with a semi-structured interview about their experiences with unemployment and their wishes regarding mental health prevention. A thematic analysis was carried out using Nvivo 14 software and Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology. **Results:** Half of the participants expressed interest in participating in such a prevention initiative. Five main themes were identified, each comprising 2 to 5 sub-themes. The participants were particularly interested in discussions about their experiences addressing psychological difficulties, social and economic counseling, professional reinsertion and socialization. Additionally, they provided recommendations on the structure, logistics, animation and group composition for mental health prevention initiatives. **Conclusion:** Unemployed individuals are impacted by their situation and seek mental health prevention actions tailored to their needs. They are invested in proposing topics and organizational advice for such initiatives. This work provides the foundation for developing more effective prevention actions for unemployed individuals and better their implementation.

Keywords: *Unemployment, prevention, mental health, reintegration.*

1. Introduction

Unemployment impacts mental health (Paul & Moser, 2009). At the same time, deteriorated mental health negatively affects reemployment (Wanberg et al., 2005). Factors of this deterioration had been studied through privative models (Jahoda, 1982) or more isolated factors, for example stigmatization (Bourguignon & Herman, 2006). Mental health prevention is highly recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Organisation mondiale de la santé, 2012), especially for these fragilized populations. Recommendations has been formulated by the literature about the construction of such action (e.g.: Bartholomew et al., 1998; D'Amours et al., 2008), such as adapting the intervention with the needs and desires of the target population. Some interventions do exist (see: Hult et al., 2020) but no study analyzed the expectations of unemployed people regarding preventive action targeting mental health. By this qualitative enquiry, we aim to create a base of knowledge concerning this subject.

2. Methodology

This article is part of a larger qualitative study which explored unemployed people's perception of changes that had taken place since the loss of their job before questioning them about what they would expect in a mental health group prevention action destined to unemployed people.

2.1. Participants and procedure

Adverts about the study were relayed by rehabilitation structures and on social media. The study and its objectives were presented to the volunteers. They signed an informed consent form before the interview, which could take place face-to-face or visio-conference. The study was conducted from March to May 2023. Candidates had to be major, unemployed for less than two years and willing to work again in

the future. Volunteers with disabilities that did not depend on the main service for jobseekers in France or that were planning on stopping their career in any way were not recruited.

Thirteen interviews were conducted. The sample included 8 females and 5 males, that were on average 31.46 years old (S.d. = 8.01). They were living in different density cities. Sociodemographic information is available on Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic information on participants.

Sexe	Age	Months unemployed	Former Job	End of contract
F	36	3	Recruitment manager	End of short-term contract
H	30	18	Day manager	Contractual termination
F	31	2	Communication manager	End of short-term contract
F	30	10	Sales assistant	End of short-term contract
H	33	9	Lighting engineer	Contractual termination
F	53	5	In Training	End of formation
F	31	4	Administrative assistant	Contractual termination
F	22	3	Laundry assistant	End of short-term contract
H	31	1	Socio-cultural animator	End of short-term contract
H	24	17	Sales assistant	Contractual termination
F	23	9	Sales assistant	Unfitness for work
H	38	1	Truck driver	Contractual termination
F	27	17	Home help	Contractual termination

2.2. Data collection

The study was approved by our local ethic committee (Comité d'éthique pour la recherche sur la personne des universités de Tours et de Poitiers, CER-TP) at the reference ER-TP 2023-01-10. Following the preliminary consent of the participants regarding the interview, its recording and the treatment of their personal data, the interviews were conducted following a semi-structured interview grid. The interview part that we present here was introduced by the simple reminder that the final objective of the thesis was to elaborate a prevention action about mental health in destination to unemployed people. The following questions were asked: "if such action were presented to you, would you participate?" which was followed, if necessary, by two probing questions: "why?" and "on which conditions?". We then interrogated "what would you expect from such a program?" which, only if the themes were not mentioned, were followed by additional questions: "would you like to talk about: professional reintegration?", "Psychological difficulties?", "Job search difficulties?". Then we asked about the structure of the intervention: "What should be avoided". Interviews continued until the discourses dried up. The average duration of the interviews was 1 hour 32 minutes (S.D.: 27,9 minutes).

2.3. Analysis

The interviews were transcript using the dictation witting mode of Word with the recordings before being corrected by hand. We conducted a thematic analysis using Nvivo 14 and followed the steps recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). We used an inductive approach for codification and looked for themes with a semantic/explicit level. We differed with the conventions by including in our tabs the number of occurrences and participants that mentioned the element (e.g.: occurrences/participants), as we wished to be transparent about our data and their density. The verbatims presented in the tabs are translated from the original verbatim of the interview.

3. Results

Regarding the mental health prevention part of the interview, this subject attracts the attention of all the participants (203/13). They mainly express on the expected content of the intervention (121/12) (see tab. 2), advice regarding the intervention (43/9) (see tab. 3) and their own participation (49/13) (see tab. 4). The remaining codes, that we will not discuss, are further explanation demands (16/7) and enthusiasm (3/2). Regarding participation (29/13), participants tend to say they would participate (13/7) more than not (13/5) and/or find that the idea is good for other unemployed people (10/6).

Regarding conditioned participation (20/8), some mentioned that if the action were not linked to the France's main service for jobseekers, they would go (5/2). Some wished to participate to only some

modules (5/2), or to hierarchize themes for each group (1/1). Some others would participate if their state of mind were different, more isolated (2/1), or less motivated (1/1).

The most evoked and expected content of the intervention is the interest in sharing their experience of unemployment (39/12). Some specified with different people (4/3) or with former unemployed people (2/1). Another linked interest is learning to communicate around unemployment (3/2), their place in society (4/4) and their unemployment to work transition (1/1).

Psychological difficulties are also often cited as a subject of interest (28/10). Candidates wished to get contact with a mental health professional in group (9/5) to be oriented (6/4). Other than this, demands are centered around managing emotions (7/4) and relationship to oneself (7/5), itself containing self-esteem (4/4), self-confidence (2/1) and a citation of stereotypes around unemployment (1/1). We also outlined vague demands of mental health help (3/2) and help to maintain mental health in time (1/1).

Professional insertion is also cited (33/9), regarding job search (11/8) and in the other hand help around failure and rejection management (13/5). Lastly, help to skill enhancement assistance (1/1), information on professions (4/1) and help structuring efforts (1/1) were also cited.

Social and economic counseling (16/6) is a theme that regroup help with budgeting (7/5) and knowledge of rights and possible contacts (for further material help) (9/5).

Lastly, socialization (5/5) is viewed as interesting to alleviate loneliness (4/4) and promote social integration (1/1). Main subthemes and codes of the category “Themes to cover in a mental health intervention for unemployed people” are available in table 2.

Regarding the prevention advice from the participants, few advice was given (43/9). Amongst this advice, structure and logistics (17/5) were cited. The intervention should not be mandatory (5/4), linked to our main service for jobseekers (4/3), and should be at hours that fit the population (1/1). Interest (3/1) and disinterest (1/1) for remote groups are expressed. Warnings were made about the lack of pertinence to assist at only one seance (1/1), the risk of losing participants (1/1) and the difficulty of integrating depressed persons (1/1). About the content of the prevention (15/4) job search (3/2) and private matters 92/3) such as conjugal relationships (1/1), personal or psychological information (1/1) and alcohol use disorder (1/1) should be eluded according to some participants. Participants warned us about idealization about present and futures situations (1/1) or instigating discouragement (1/1).. Intervention form (4/4) should not mainly be composed of presentations (4/4), such as videos (1/1) or non-ludic content (1/1). Groups management (7/4) was evoked, regarding the necessity for some to make socio-cultural uniform groups (1/1), to be vigilant to the uniformity of speech (6/1) and of eventual anxiety amongst the participants (2/1). One person disproves the group format (1/1).

4. Discussion

More than half of the participants expressed interest in participating in such a prevention initiative. One major general interest (sharing their experience of unemployment) and five main themes were identified: psychological difficulties (emotional regulation and self-esteem), professional themes (job search, management of failed candidatures), social and budget counseling and lastly a help to ease solitude. Additionally, they provided recommendations on the structure, logistics, facilitation, topics to avoid, and group composition. To cite some, we found a disapproval around our main service for jobseekers in France and the mandatory approach. The form should stay interactive and ludic. Some disagreements amongst participants were found regarding remote intervention (wished for its accessibility), and could be dependent on the territory (country vs cities). Group composition is ambivalent too, with an interest for different people, but also the advice to uniformize the socio-cultural factors. We should add that this last piece of advice was mainly based on previous classic job club experiences. The theme for job search is also debated. Candidates were generally enthusiastic and invested in the reflection process, which reflects the pertinence of our work.

This research can help to complete academics models to create a mental health intervention that could engage unemployed people by directly answering their needs. These results could also be used, in some extent, as a base for any questionnaire attending to evaluate the expectations and needs by intervention or by intervention group, according to the modular dynamic that has been advised by our participants.

5. Conclusion

Unemployed individuals are impacted by their situation and seek mental health prevention actions tailored to their needs. They are invested in proposing topics and organizational advice for such initiatives. This work provides the foundation for developing more effective prevention actions for unemployed individuals and better their implementation.

Table 2. Main subthemes and codes of the category
 “Themes to cover in a mental health intervention for unemployed people”.

Sub theme	Code details	Nb cit/n	Citation example
Sharing unemployment's experiences	Sharing experience	30/12	« What I would have liked would have been, for example, to get together in a group and do a sort of discussion group, for example on the problems that we may come up against here, (...), or simply a sharing of experience... »
	Communicating about unemployment	3/2	« Managing the family.// - Managing communication around unemployment? // Yeah, maybe that, yeah, that could be pretty good. Well, even people other than family, yeah, so... “(imitating) You've got to work, eh” Yes... Yes. Yes, yes. »
	Discussing their place in society	4/4	« So there you go, don't get carried away by society, it'll be good to talk about that too. » « (...) The relationship to one's place in society, »
	Transition to employment	1/1	« It's a return to the world of work and it's this world that's actually quite brutal... And the, the, the transition from your home to the world of work, (...) you feel like you're hitting a wall in the face... (...) In fact, it's a whole lifestyle that changes overnight. »
Psychological difficulties	Contact with a mental health professional	9/5	« So it's clear that if you can offer support, even for a few hours, but with someone with whom you can express... your questions, your self-esteem, I find that really, really interesting. Yeah. »
	Managing emotions	7/4	« Yeah, if it's modular, yeah, (...) emotional management... it speaks to me... »
	Relationship to self	7/5	« Little tips and tricks, (...) to not put yourself down, to try to help yourself get out, to show yourself that you're still capable of doing things and that the fact that people say no to you isn't representative of what you are very often»
	Help with mental health	3/2	« More the aspect of... Well, I'd like to say mental health (yes, yes), that's more like it,... » « ah I would have liked... The emotional... psychological aspect? (...) ... »
	Helping to go the distance	1/1	« Well, try to to to to to In prevention, it's all about trying to succeed, to give you the keys to succeeding over the distance... over the long haul. (...) »
Professional reinsertion	Job search evocation	11/8	« To advise them on job search sites and create... resumes and stuff because there are some good sites out there right now for working resumes and stuff so to find like... »
	Failure and rejection management	13/5	« It could be a nice little workshop on how to deal with failure... To be able to bounce back without waiting! that's the name of the program. »
	Skills enhancement assistance	1/1	« To show you that you're still capable of doing things (...) It's that because people don't want you, Bah, you've got the impression that you're no good in fact... when it's not true. »
	Information on professions	4/1	« The need to take stock of what it really is... er... this or that job in the biggest jobs in the primary, secondary, tertiary sectors... in fact. Roughly speaking, with the start and end of a career with real pay scales, real figures and examples... »
	Structuring requests	1/1	« A follow-up, a schedule edition... (...) These are people who don't know how to manage themselves, if they do, it's people who are wholehearted and dedicated, they're the best profiles in the world. »
Economic counseling	Help with budgeting	7/5	« And Ben Go ahead guys, how to save a little more? How can you have a social life? But without breaking the bank have... finally have some little things to put in place? Yeah, really, really. »
	Knowledge of rights and possible contacts	9/5	« Well, to inform us about um, schemes that can be complementary, what kind of aid exists? Because there are, I'm sure we have a lot, but we don't even know about half of them...»
Socialization	Alleviate loneliness	4/4	« It means, for example, getting together in a group and doing a sort of discussion group, (...) whether it's the financial aspect of solitude or interaction... »
	Promote social integration	1/1	« For me, it would have been. Mental health first, then ... social integration, then work. »

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