



Psychological help for an unemployed person - theoretical assumptions

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The article describes the main assumptions psychological assistance to unemployed persons. It focused on the essence of the problems experienced by the unemployed and consequently to reduce these problems. Presented documents formed the basis for the establishment of a program of courses to enhance the psychological status of unemployed. All problems were detected, analyzed and subsequently reduced during the course conducted by a psychologist.

Unemployed persons. Psychological assistance. Psychological status of unemployed.

Introduction

The psychological workshop conception was developed as one of tasks implemented in the Project „*Stand Up, Raise Your Head*“. The Project is in accordance with the European Union strategy and implemented within EQUAL Community Initiative framework. EQUAL Initiative was set up in order to create new and better workplaces, and to facilitate access to them for all people, regardless of their descent, gender, sexual orientation, social background, place of living, education and other factors which can make up the basis for discrimination. „As the Community Initiative of the European Social Fund, EQUAL is a learning platform that finds new ways of achieving the policy objectives of the European Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion Process. EQUAL differs from mainstream European Social Fund programmes since it is a laboratory to develop and test new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the labour market. EQUAL presents evidence of good practice for these innovative approaches, with an emphasis on active co-operation between Member States, thus ensuring that the most positive results are adopted and shared across Europe.“ (www.projekt-sampo.com.pl).

The Project falls into Theme A: Facilitating access and return to the labor market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or reintegrated into a labor market which must be open for all. „*Stand Up, Raise Your Head*“ is an undertaking which – thanks to a multifaceted character of its actions, and an individual attitude towards a person and his or her life problems – brings closer finding employment and keeping it. The Project is directed at the people suffering from prolonged unemployment, with low level of education, living in the rural area or in small towns characterized by a high level of unemployment, and often suffering from inherited unemployment.

The first assumption: limiting unfavorable results of unemployment

It was assumed that long term of unemployment, more than three years, and suffering from poverty in a longer time perspective result in lowering an individual's psychical well-being. During work with an unemployed person, a positive picture of himself or herself should be restored or formed anew, and

self-confidence together with hope should be supported. Another area of difficulties which may concern the people suffering from prolonged unemployment is a feeling of loneliness, a low level of social support, and inappropriately shaped life attitudes, such as an attitude of claims or avoidance, learned helplessness, unreal expectations towards the labor market, a workplace or an employer.

An initial point for developing the workshop programme was defining which human features are particularly desirable on the labor market and which skills and features the adult unemployed lack. An analysis concerned also the workshop participants' sources which should be used for building individual professional aspirations. Therefore the workshop programme includes numerous skills and features which help an individual to create life goals, especially professional goals, and also help to achieve them. Numerous studies in psychology, sociology, and pedagogy are devoted to particular unemployment consequences in various aspects of an individual's functioning. Researchers of unemployment issues the most often make a list of psychological, social, economic costs and those concerning physical and psychical health. Economical effects, that is loss of income, are felt the most intensively.

A worsening economic situation breeds secondary costs in the form of worsening health (Wanberg, 1995), of a change of life style (Underlind, 1996) and recognized values, and of limiting social relations. A prolonged state of being unemployed contributes to impoverishing the whole family of an unemployed person, which is felt more and more intensively. Poverty is often linked with social pathology, an inclination to addictions, criminal behaviors.

Unfavourable psychological consequences of unemployment are revealed as a feeling of a social alienation, experiencing shame, fear of the future and passivity. Negative unemployment effects are also quite often reflected in a low self-esteem and a low assessment of an unemployed person's life, and a feeling of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. An unfavourable assessment of own competences, a low belief in a favourable future debilitates actions and leads to failures. To psychological consequences, lowering life activeness, a poor time structuralization, a loss of professional identity, and changes in a hierarchy of values should be attached.

A hierarchy of values, regardless of a professional situation of polled Polish people, is similar, the highest positions are occupied by health, family and work. However, while the work weight is assessed, differences between those who work and those who are unemployed are noticeable. The people deprived of work attribute to work a greater importance for an individual's well-being than those people who are at work.

The second assumption: recognition of an unemployed person's own professional aspirations and the labor market

In the 20th century, because of a high stability of the environment in which the human prepared himself or herself to the role of an employee, recognition of skills and abilities, and then practicing skills was attributed to the periods of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. Nowadays, progressing great civilization changes prolong the time of questing for professional identity for the period of adulthood, and even late adulthood. At present, the terms of permanent training and „society of knowledge“ are used (Drucker, 1999). As far as employment is concerned, it means creating a broad path of a professional career or a diversified professional career (Bańka, 1995), which will provide an employee with greater opportunities for changing a job or retraining if there is such an environment or individual need. An unemployed person must find his or her adaptation to the work environment a new (Harrison Van, 1987; Kasprzak, 2006) through getting to know himself or herself. Getting to know oneself is a process concerning various areas and features of an individual. Contemporary theories of professional development (Super, 1990; Holland, 1996) underline the importance of a person's own interests as the most significant success factor on the labor market. Apart from interests, an unemployed person should be aware of his or her values, personality characteristics, temperament preferences, needs and expectations towards the workplace, a kind of work and skills. All these individual features make a basis thanks to which an unemployed person builds his or her professional goals. The better self-recognition is the more appropriate and real professional goals are. Appropriate and real goals are more motivating, at first to look for a job, and then to keep it. Work which is in accordance with expectations is a more stable and satisfying work. At such work, an employee more often achieves goals and is promoted.

Real and appropriate professional expectations are developed on the basis of two groups of data, an unemployed person's knowledge of himself or herself and knowledge about the reality in which a person looks for a job. The second area of knowledge concerning principles ruling the labor market, employees' expectations, the structure of job offers should be developed parallel to completing an unemployed

person's knowledge about himself or herself.

The third assumption: controlling emotional experiences

Positive and negative emotions perform an important regulating functions. Emotional processes are an expression of an individual's attitude towards reality. On the one hand, they are effects of perceiving and analyzing an individual's environment, on the other hand, they are a cause of taking up a particular action or not doing it.

The process of behaviour regulated through positive emotions and through negative emotions is different. Negative emotions motivate to a particular behaviour and after avoiding a threat or destroying an obstacle they lose their strength, disappear. Negative emotions work according to the law of negative feedback. Positive emotions, together with providing objects reducing actions impulses, do not weaken specific behaviours, but what is more, they strengthen such behaviours (Fredrikson, 2002). That is they work according to the law of positive feedback. They are a source of increasing drive for actions. Feeling satisfaction and joy creates favourite conditions for further involvement in such actions which will benefit with other gratifications, objects activating positive emotions. Particularly unfavourable effects are brought by such negative emotions which are difficult to be reduced. If a threat is beyond control, or an individual is convinced about it, if failures provoking despair are repeated, then an individual falls into hopelessness and becomes depressed. Despair, sadness and anger which accompany them may lead to suicidal thoughts. It appears that symptoms of hopelessness correlate more intensely in a positive way with suicidal thoughts and acts than suffering from depression (Kozielecki, 2006). It is worth pointing at benefits of experiencing negative emotions. According to the model of co-stimulating (Larsen et al., 2004), negative emotions play a great role in coping with difficult life situations. A strong stress as a result of experiencing a loss or a threat triggers negative emotions. Experiencing them urges an individual to rethinking, internal „digesting“ a reason of a problem in order to accept a loss and to reconcile with oneself.

Last condition of emotional processes effectiveness in a situation of stress and coping with it is experiencing emotions itself. Emotional expression, even exaggerated, is more favourable for an individual than suppressing emotions, regardless of their sign. A simultaneous stimulation of both emotional systems provoking positive and negative emotions prevents health costs in a situation of stress and is a condition of effective coping with it. An unemployed person should have possibility to emotional expression and acceptance of social environment. Expressing emotional experiences accompanying a job loss, and then failures connected with the attempts of its regaining, allows to understand an unemployed person's role himself or herself in these events.

The fourth assumption: a self-efficacy beliefs and defining life goals

Defining life goals should be done also with use of knowledge about reality in order to be able to prevent obstacles in time, or to change a goal, whereas obstacles are beyond control. Planning goals should include not only a content aspect of a goal, but also assessment of a chance and costs of achieving it. Too big costs, or a small chance of achieving a goal work in a similar way as a content attractiveness of a goal, discourage, debilitate perseverance in actions and are in favour for giving up a task.

Motivating through goals implies keeping to clearly defined rules. If these rules are known and kept, they make a goal more realistic and enhance opportunities to reaching the end of a planned activity. An effective goal should be SMART (*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timed*) that is clearly defined, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed. The goal should have a known structure that is defined sub-goals, well-suited means, evaluated potential barriers to achieving a goal, and time framework of particular actions and sub-goals, and also defined ways of consumption of partial results obtained after each of stages in achieving goals. Such understanding of planning and actions should be enriched through forming a sense of efficacy that is a conviction and an expectation towards a self-efficacy. In a situation of an unemployed person it might be a conviction that this person will or will not find a job for himself or herself, or will learn or will not learn English during a professional training. A generalized conviction about a self- efficacy is displayed by a low level of confidence in a person's own competences.

In numerous situations an unemployed person through his or her lost competences of coping with particular difficulties loses also a feeling of his or her own effectiveness, not only while facing a specific task, but also generally, in life. A generalized character of expectations concerns a general conviction of a person's own causativeness or its lack. In a situation of experiencing numerous failures, while expecting a self- efficacy falls to zero, an individual gets into the state of learned helplessness.

The fifth assumption: hope and optimism as success releases

Experiencing hope and an optimistic attitude towards the world and people even in every day thinking is associated with achieving success and experiencing happiness. Those two notions are similar to each other, they are often even regarded as being identical. Optimism is a conviction concerning the whole time spectrum of an individual's life and is expressed by an ability to perceive rather positive than negative features, rather chances than risks. It is slightly tinged with emotions, however it may generate satisfaction, joy. Optimism is an expression of interpretation of events from the past, the present and the future. Conditioning of failures is located widely, mainly in unfavourable circumstances, not in the person himself or herself. The failure itself is a one-time event, not the sequence of negative events which will always take place in the future.

Hope is a conviction that thanks to a person's own activity in the future, achieving his or her goals is highly probable. Key elements of hope are appointing a goal (*goal*), developing a strategy of achieving it (*pathway component*), and eventually taking up and maintaining activity (*agency component*) in an outlined direction (Synder et al., 2002). Hope is associated with experiencing positive emotions in the form of joy, satisfaction and pride.

Hope creates favourable conditions for developing plans, stimulates actions, maintains activity, contributes to achieving goals. It therefore plays a causative role in an individual's behaviour. Consequences of optimism and hope are the same. In the area of work, it will be perseverance in actions, greater and faster achieved successes in work, bigger resistance to failures (Seligmann, 1993), experiencing positive emotions (Synder et al., 2002), a creative attitude towards criticism instead of anxiety, using feedback (Synder et al., 2002), greater confidence in a person's own abilities and respect for himself or herself (Curry & Synder, 2000), motivation maintaining actions targeted at achieving a goal (Synder et al., 2002). A very important consequence of optimism and hope is a good adaptation to a job which is expressed in employment stability and an attachment to the workplace. (Seligmann, 1993).

The sixth assumption: developing a sense of responsibility

Development of responsibility occurs through systematic gathering an individual experience, learning the consequences of a person's own actions, consuming successes, coping with failures, accepting new events. Natural development of responsible behaviours might be disrupted by lack of appropriate models, illnesses or traumatic events in childhood. In adult people, who have already acquired an ability to feel responsibility, lack of responsibility may occur under the influence of unexpected or difficult events (threats, loss). A one-time and short-lasting event causing some difficulties usually does not result in a permanent and significant loss of responsibility but in its weakening. A sense of responsibility may be disrupted or debilitated when a person suffers from a difficult situation, such as unemployment. Depending on earlier development of a sense of responsibility, an unemployed person behaves in a responsible way or acts irresponsibly, in some area or generally. He or she may feel responsibility for all aspects of his or her life, except for unemployment. A person might not feel responsibility for unemployment, but undertakes responsible behaviours in order to get out of unemployment. An unemployed person, who is professionally idle for a long time, according to scientifically substantiated results of unemployment, experiences additionally consequences in social, health, and psychological areas. In such a situation, developing a sense of responsibility not only for a person's own professional situation, but also for other spheres of life, family, health, social relations has a great importance. For the unemployed (especially those suffering from prolonged unemployment) and for the people experiencing deficits in social functioning a sense of responsibility is a beneficial feature of behaviour. A responsible behaviour allows to develop effective actions schemes, which - together with knowledge about the world and of a person himself or herself - bring closer chances of success or allow to endure failure effects. Being responsible is more difficult but it gives a feeling of satisfaction and subjectivity of a person's own life.

The seventh assumption: experiencing social support

Social support is being with others, sharing their emotions, understanding their problems. Several benefits coming from social contacts should be pointed out. Support provided by friendly people reduces tension, raises spirits. The others allow to gain knowledge about themselves and, thanks to social comparison, enable learning favourable life behaviour and behaviour on the labour market.

Other people are a source of information about a person himself or herself. They are a mirror in which

people can look at themselves and see virtues and faults, sources and obstacles to achieve a high quality of life. Self-recognition through contact with the others occurs thanks to two processes, giving feedback about others and social comparisons.

The third function of social support is manifested in contacts with the others which enable to learn from other people. According to the social cognitive theory, the subject behaves in a specific way, if he or she expects the occurrence of particular events and positive results of such behavior. Relations with others may be a source of weakness, but also a source of power. You can learn from others favorable, as well as unfavorable life attitudes and strategies of explaining reality. Literature describes two phenomena of „becoming infected with helplessness“ and „borrowing hope from others“ (Kozielecki, 2006). The latter occurs in a group of the people similar to each other, who are convinced that an individual is a creator of his or her own future. Spending time with such people, their financial or emotional support reinforces a belief in a happy future. Borrowing self-confidence is a good tool of creating goals, arousing energy for actions, building a positive image of oneself.

In a situation of the people suffering from prolonged unemployment, the composition of a group, as well as activities carried out during compensating integration meetings are not indifferent. Creating special support groups can be a source of modeling desirable, effective behaviours. Tasks should be matched as to clear a path for gaining a conviction about a person's own effectiveness, responsibility and hope. Relations in a workshop group should become the stage of infecting with positive emotions, hope, developing activeness full of energy and perseverance.*

The subject of the psychological workshop „Breeding Ground for Optimism“

In order to achieve above-mentioned aims, exercises concerning current, past and future life situation were proposed. These three perspectives are considered in a context of particular life spheres: family, work, interests and social support. Another thematic block was devoted to recognizing the subjects' own interests, aspirations, values, personality features, bad habits, sources and weaknesses, abilities and shortages. All these characteristics were related to the situation of unemployment and work. An important moment of the workshop was an attempt to develop an individual plan of professional development. Apart from individual work of a particular participant, opinions and advice of other group members were used to develop goals and paths to achieve them. Social situation was analyzed during following meetings devoted to family, this immediate and that further one. Social contacts were analyzed taking into consideration benefits and losses for particular people and relations which the workshop participants live in. The best rules of relations were searched for, and obstacles which interfere with developing mature relations were identified. Then, participants tried to define and to deepen relations in a workshop group, to define a social background for themselves.

During the whole workshop, participants learned how to use the rules of efficient communication which accompanies an individual continuously, regardless of a temporal and content aspect of life.

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Psychologická pomoc pre nezamestnané osoby - teoretické predpoklady

Článok popisuje hlavné predpoklady psychologickej pomoci nezamestnaným osobám. Bol zameraný na podstatu problémov, ktoré zažívajú nezamestnaní a následne aj na redukovanie týchto problémov. Predstavené podklady sa stali základom na vytvorenie programu kurzov na posilnenie psychologického stavu nezamestnaných osôb. Všetky problémy boli odhalené, analyzované a následne redukované počas kurzu vedeného psychológom. Prvá oblasť zvládania problémov bola zameraná na poznanie seba samého, vlastné profesionálne preferencie a osobnosť, talent a slabosti. Druhá časť sa zaoberala niektorými vlastnými emocionálnymi skúsenosťami a dosiahnutím presvedčenia o vlastnej efektívnosti. Ďalšou časťou tréningu bolo analyzovať oblasti života s nadšením a optimizmom a vyvinúť zmysel pre zodpovednosť. Poslednou časťou bolo utváranie si schopnosti budovania sociálnej podpory.