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UNEMPLOYMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

The Coronavirus pandemic and the period after Covid are associated with growing uncertainty, major economic crises worldwide, and continual effects on people's daily and social lives. It has national and global outcomes in both the physical health and for the mental health and well-being of many [1; 2; 3]. Furthermore, current economic forecasts suggest that market recovery will take a long time [4]. Unemployment, particularly when long-lasting, is known to have severe consequences for the physical and mental health of the unemployed [5]. Thus, unemployment among young people and its harmful consequences have attracted renewed interest.

The objectives of the study are to analyze global employment trends for youth during the pandemic, to understand how long-term unemployment affects youth's mental health and how government agencies provide support to those affected by unemployment.

Pearlin's sociological study of stress shows that chronic stressors such as long-term unemployment have the most negative consequences for people's psychological distress [6]. Similarly, prolonged unemployment, associated with increased financial strain and a further decline in one's self-esteem, is known to have the most severe consequences for the mental health of individuals and families. This effect is further aggravated in times of economic crisis [7].

According to the report (2021) of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions unemployed or inactive young people experienced difficulties more often than those over 30 who were unemployed or inactive [8]. Young job seekers had a lower chance of returning to their workplaces, as many of them had been employed in economic areas most affected by the restrictions, such as restaurants, bars, event and other entertainment-related services, sales, teaching, and education and non-professional occupations.

In 2019, most young people worked in accommodation and food services (13%), followed by wholesale and retail (11%) and health and social work (11%). As the first two were among the sectors most affected by reduced activity during the pandemic, young people working in these sectors were at higher risk of job loss, as were young people on temporary (36%) and part-time (22%) contracts [8].

In 2020, unemployment among 15 - to 29-year-olds increased by 1.4 percentage points from the 2019 rate to 13.3%, and the NEET (not in employment, education or training) rate increased by 1.2 percentage points to 13.6%. These were larger increases than among older groups [8].

Unemployed or inactive young people were most likely to experience housing insecurity (17% in spring 2021) and difficulty making ends meet (43%), as well as having no savings (39%). Over half of them lived with their parents, which provided security for some vulnerable young people. Living with their parents provided a source of security for young people, particularly students, and was associated with less likelihood of feeling socially excluded among unemployed or inactive young people [8].

Moreover, a direct association between lockdown measures and reduced mental well-being was found as well as lower satisfaction with life (its lowest point falls in the spring of 2021 with the return of restrictions).

By spring 2021, one-third of young people had requested financial support from public authorities, but 1 in 10 had not received the support they needed, and these young people often experienced social exclusion, insecurity and financial difficulties. Gaps in financial support were partly filled by family and other informal sources [9].

National policy responses were focused on preventing unemployment and helping employers pay wages. Short-time working schemes played an important role, although most of these were not specifically aimed at young people. Several measures were launched to offer young people – young professionals, students or new graduates – easier access to and greater coverage by social protection during the pandemic. Increased need for mental health services was reported, but adaptation was difficult. Many interventions in this area concentrated on moving services online and introducing new internet services.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on young people, on their employment participation, working and living conditions and mental well-being. These findings highlight the negative impact that lockdown measures can have on mental health, and the need for effective strategies to support individuals and families during times of crisis. Furthermore, these results underscore the importance of prioritizing mental health services, such as online therapy or counseling, to help individuals cope with the challenges of the pandemic and beyond [4].

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