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Does unemployment contribute to a poor self-esteem,
and does social support, coping and perceived control
have any effect during unemployment?

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to examine whether self-esteem can be affected by unemployment and whether social support, self efficacy and perceived control have any effects on self-esteem during unemployment.

Method: The study was of a quantitative and descriptive character and a convenience sample was used. Questionnaires were distributed to 64 unemployed males and females at a job-centre in East Midland, England. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions about the participant's age, gender, education, length of unemployment, social support (meaning emotional support and help from friends and family), coping (meaning a person's ability to handle a stressful and emotionally demanding situation). Rosenberg's self-esteem scale was also added into the questionnaire and the results were then analyzed by using a Likert scale.

Results: The results showed, that the majority of the unemployed scored 30 or higher on the self-esteem scale which indicates a low self-esteem according to Rosenberg's self-esteem scale. Regarding social support from friends during job loss or unemployment, the majority of the unemployed with a low self-esteem, felt they didn't have social support from friends during unemployment. A small part of the unemployed who had high self-esteem, felt they had social support from friends during unemployment.

Discussion: Self-esteem is complex, and it was difficult to generalize the results in this study. However, it seems that social support, self efficacy and coping were important aspects regarding self-esteem.

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1. Introduction

1.1 A Public Health perspective on unemployment and its negative effects

Ill health has increased dramatically in today's society and unemployment is one of many factors that contribute to ill health. For many individuals, work is one of the fundamental objects of human existence and an important factor that gives them the opportunity to participate in society. The work allows them to produce goods and services that are essential in modern life. It also allows people to be a part of the social structure which will make them feel content in terms of personal, familial and social aspects of life (Dolan, 2007). A prerequisite in obtaining an improved population health is to ensure that individuals feel they are involved and have influence in society (the Ministry of Health, 2008).

There are several aspects that are essential when working, such as; time structure, social contact, collective goals, social status and identity, and regular activity (Ibid.). During unemployment these disappear and have a negative effect on the mental health (Jahoda, 1982). It is difficult to find a meaning in life without a job and the well-being of individuals will be jeopardized without these important functions (Ibid.).

Unemployment is very costly, not only in economic terms but also in terms of human suffering. Several studies have examined unemployment and its effects on individual health. Unemployment has been shown to influence young people's development, the quality of life and self esteem in a negative way (Axelsson, Andersen, Edén & Ejlertsson (2007). This might have implications for the society, in terms of increased risk of crime and other antisocial behaviour, and the support and care that individuals might be in need of due to unemployment (Ibid.).

1.2 Self esteem

Self-esteem is a complex concept that has been used to understand the journey we take in life in search of happiness (Dolan, 2007). According to Joubert (1991), self-esteem can be defined as a “person’s judgment of general self-worth that is a product of an implicit evaluation of self-approval or self-disapproval made by the individual”.

Dolan (2007) describes self-esteem as an internal perception on how competent we are to work, live and share and fully developing as balanced individuals. In other words, it is the result of the perception of material, emotional and ethical achievements based on one's own efforts and on the confidence we place in ourselves and in others (Dolan, 2007). Self-esteem is based on the self confidence in our ability to dream, care, think and manage to be efficient and to be able to cope with challenges posed by life, both positive and negative (Ibid.).

Rosenberg (1965) argues that self-esteem is correlated to one's self-worth and can be described as specific or global. A specific self-esteem concerns only one specific situation, whereas a global self-esteem concerns self-esteem in various situations. The global self-esteem is a better measurement as it gives values of both negative and positive values of the self (Ibid.). Furthermore, he discusses two approaches to what creates self-esteem. The first approach is that self-esteem is something we receive by other people's encouragement and unconditional love in the early stages of our life. The other approach is that, we in our own personal development perceive ourselves as competent and therefore obtain self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965).

Johnson (1997) defines self-esteem as the level of love, respect and value individuals feel about one's self and that it is something we always strive to find in life. The ability to achieve good self-esteem varies from person to person and is dependent on the individual's own values, experiences and goals in life and on the different paths in life one chooses to take (Ibid.).

A positive self-esteem works as an immune system of the conscience, and offers resistance, strength and capacity to cope with various stressful situations in a better

way. Lack of self-esteem means that the individual gets trapped in a maze of stress and a failure to adapt to the situation and therefore finds himself with no way of getting out of the maze (Dolan, 2007).

1.3 Shame and self-esteem

There are different situations in which the individual may feel shame in life and several reasons why these feelings are triggered off. According to Jönsson (2003), one of these situations is being unemployed. The feeling of shame is induced by feeling less worthy or being inferior to others because of lack of work. Being unemployed is important to one's identity, and societal attitudes sometimes imply that the unemployed are lazy and do not want to work, which affects people's attitudes of themselves. This attitude can lead to feelings of shame and guilt. Shame, in turn, leads to one's self-image becoming worse and these attitudes may affect individual's health in a negative way. Jönsson (2003) argues that shame is associated with trust. If a person has difficulties trusting a person in his surrounding, it will lead to the person thinking he is less worthy, which in turn will contribute to a lower self-esteem. People often experience shame when they fail different tasks, according to the author, and many of the unemployed may experience this in their daily life as they fail to be shortlisted for job interviews as well as not having the economy to pay their bills. Feelings of shame occur when the person does not live up to the expectations society demands from one another (Ibid.).

1.4 Different ways of coping with unemployment

Being unemployed and experiencing low self-esteem can be a stressful and an emotionally demanding situation, and how people cope with unemployment varies from person to person. Coping is the belief that one can control a situation. There are two different coping strategies, passive coping and active coping. In the passive coping strategy, the individuals are not fully engaged mentally or behaviorally. They act in a passive way. In the active coping strategy, the individuals try in the best way to prevent problems by actively act, for example by talking about problems and seek social support from their family and/or friends (Dolan, 2007). In discussing the role of social support in relation to unemployment, it has been argued, social support is an

essential aspect in the coping process during periods of unemployment and people who receive social support perform better in unemployment situations (Water & Moore 2002). Other studies have shown that social support is beneficial to health while facing stressful events such as unemployment (Thoits 1995).

Hammer (2000) argues that one's ability to cope with a situation is linked with having close contact with family and/or friends. This, he argues, may decrease mental health problems and act in order to prevent social exclusion.

1.5 Perception of control

Locus of control is a concept that was developed by Julian B. Rotter in 1954. The idea refers to one's conception and ideas about one's beliefs, that is that an individual can control actions that affect him in the daily life. It is said a person has internal locus of control if one believes that consequences of one's actions are controlled by the person himself. An external locus of control, on the other hand, is when one thinks, that the consequences of one's actions are not controlled by oneself, but rather controlled by luck, fate, chance or other people more influential than oneself (Rotter, 1990). Individual's emotional and physical well being is dependent on one's perception of control. An event can be considered as threatening if the person lacks control over events in his life and therefore perceives the stressor as uncontrollable. Whereas people who perceive they have control of events, regard the stressor as challenging and controllable. Individuals, who perceive having a high internal locus of control or high perceived control, therefore tend to better control their behaviours and their ability to cope with stressful events in life (Owusu-Ansah, 2008).

Thoits (1995) argues that the most common indicator of a persons coping mechanism is reliance on one's sense of control or mastery over his life. Having a high internal locus of control is associated with one's ability to adapt to difficult situations, such as unemployment. Waters & Moore (2002) also discussed the role of perceived control in relation to unemployment. They argued that high internal locus of control influenced re-employment and lack of internal locus of control contributed to continuing unemployment. Wiener, Oei & Creed (1999) describe the importance of

perceived control in relation to unemployment. Low perceived control was found to have a strong correlation with unemployment. The results also showed that individuals with jobs had higher levels of perceived control compared to those who were unemployed. They also came to the conclusion that the longer an individual is unemployed, the greater the risk of low perceived control, which also increased the difficulty of getting a job.

1.6 Self efficacy

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as one's ability to be able to perform and organize actions/activities that are required to reach a desired goal or result. The level of one's self/efficacy is affected by the way one copes with obstacles and failures and it also affects one's actions/activities when it comes to endurance and effort. He argues that if the individual believes in herself and that she can cope with a situation, chances are that she will be able to cope with it. If the individual does not believe in herself and that she can handle a situation, she will probably not be able to do so either. He also believes that a high belief in one's own ability is related to a better health (ibid.)

Bandura argues that, before one can have power and control over one's life, a good self-esteem is required as well as; good self awareness and a developed competence. Once these are developed it may help the individual influence different situations. He also argues that it is not an insurance of a desirable future, rather a better way of making impacts on planned and unplanned opportunities (Bandura, 1982).

England is one of many countries that suffer from economic crisis and today the unemployment rate stands at eight per cent, and during the last quarter the numbers of employed people have fallen by 178 000. The quarterly rise in unemployment is reminiscent of an economy in recession and takes a great toll on people's psychological health. There are many psychological consequences of unemployment and one of them is, suffering from low self-esteem.

Self-esteem is complex, and researchers do not agree on whether unemployment contributes to lower self-esteem or if it is a personality trait. This problem raises issues about whether unemployment contributes to lower self-esteem or not, or if it is in fact a personality trait?

2. Purpose

Self-esteem is something that is believed to have a negative impact on individual's health during unemployment. The purpose of the study is to examine whether self-esteem can be affected by unemployment and whether social support, self efficacy and perceived control have any effects on self-esteem during unemployment.

2.1 Problem

- What is it that makes some individuals maintain a high self-esteem during unemployment and others don't?
- Does social support and high perceived control have any effect on self-esteem during unemployment?
- Does coping have any impact on how individuals maintain their self-esteem during unemployment?

3. Method

The method is firstly presented with information on how the approach for the study was carried out. Secondly, a presentation of the design for the study is described. Furthermore, details about the selection and study group are explained. Additionally, descriptions of the material and data collection method are presented followed by a clarification of the method in consideration. Data analysis and research ethical considerations are described in detail, and finally: a description of the validity and reliability is pointed out.

3.1 Approach

A job centre manager at a Jobcentre in a city in East Midlands, England was contacted, for help in getting volunteers to be able to accomplish the study. The city is a large city with a population of 300 000 inhabitants and 7, 6 % are unemployed (Leicester city Council). The reason for choosing this city was the possibility of getting a large sample of unemployed respondents. The manager was informed about the purpose of the study, and he was also shown the questions which were approved. Future dates were arranged with the manager at two different dates when the jobcentre was to hold two separate meetings for the unemployed and at these meetings distribute the questionnaires. These dates were set to 2011.11.29 and 2011.11.30. The questionnaires were distributed at the planned dates. In connection with the distribution, the manager explained the purpose of the study to the respondents and the aim was to distribute approximately 40-50 questionnaires. At the first meeting 30 questionnaires were distributed and at the second 40 were handed out.

3.2 Design

The study was of a quantitative and descriptive character

3.3 Selection and study group

A convenience sample was used in the study, which means choosing the respondents, who are easiest to reach, without worrying about how representative these are for the population (Trost, 2007). The natural choice was to use the job-centre to get participants for the study. The aim was to distribute questionnaires to an equal number unemployed males and females at the job-centre. A total of 70 questionnaires were distributed and 64 were returned. The number of females was 31 and males 33.

3.4 Material/Data collection method

A questionnaire was used in the study which included 12 questions about the participant's age, gender, education, length of unemployment, social support (meaning emotional support and help from friends and family), coping (meaning a

person's ability to handle a stressful and emotionally demanding situation). The questions in the questionnaire were closed questions. In addition Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used (Rosenberg, 1965). This scale is used when measuring attitudes by asking the extent to which the respondent agrees or disagrees with a particular question or statement. The scale was chosen because it is the most commonly used scale in scientific studies about self-esteem (Blaschovich & Tomaka, 1991). The scale has also been proved to have a high reliability and validity in various studies when it comes to measuring self-esteem (Cheng & Furnham, 2003).

3.5 Method considerations

The advantage of using a questionnaire is that it is easier to collect answers from a large sample (Trost, 2007). The disadvantage is that the questions are already fixed and therefore makes it difficult for the respondent to add what she/he thinks is important in connection with the study. Although the questionnaire was already made up, a section of lines at the end was added so the respondents had the possibility to add anything she/he thought was important for the study. Even though these were added, no respondent added anything.

3.6 Data analysis

The results were analyzed by using a Likert scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale is a ten item scale with items answered on a four point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The results were analyzed by using bar charts that displayed the frequencies of the respondents who expressed agreement, disagreement and so on, with each position covered in Rosenberg's self-esteem scale. Each statement in the scale consists of one number for each answer, that is, strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The points from each respondent in the self-esteem scale was added up by using the following codes: Strongly agree: 1 agree: 2 disagree: 3 strongly disagree: 4. Items with an asterisk were scored reverse, that is, Strongly agree; 4 agree:3 disagree:2 strongly disagree:1(see annex 1). The questions with an asterisk are negative statements about the self-esteem and the questions without asterisk are of positive character. A low score indicates a high self-esteem and a high score indicates a low self-esteem. The results from the self-esteem scale were then analyzed in

relation to the respondent's answer regarding social support and coping. The scores from the self-esteem scale were divided into two groups of respondents. One group consisted of unemployed who scored 30 points or more from the self-esteem scale, and the other group consisted of unemployed who scored 29 or less on the same scale. The two groups were compared and analysed in relation to the answers regarding social support and coping. Furthermore, the alternatives to the four last figures in the results were combined so agree and strongly agree equals agree, and disagree and strongly disagree equals disagree. SPSS and Microsoft office excel were used to achieve these analyses.

3.7 Research ethical considerations

An information letter (see annex 2) was written in connection with the survey and in accordance with the Science Council's ethical principles and recommendations (Codex, 2004). It is based on information requirement, the consent requirement, confidentiality requirement and utilization requirement. According to the information requirement, the researcher shall inform the participants about the purpose of the research, and that participation in the survey is voluntary and may be terminated if the participant wishes. The consent requirement implies that the participant is free to determine their participation in the survey and to withdraw their participation without negative consequences. The confidentiality requirement implies that the personal information from the survey must be kept confidential. The utilization requirement implies that personal information about individuals may only be used for research purposes and not for commercial use.

3.8 Validity and reliability

Validity means, that what is being measured is the same thing as the researcher sets out to measure (Troost, 2007). The purpose of this study was to see how unemployment affects self-esteem and whether social support and coping have any impact on self-esteem. The reliability of a study refers to the consistency of the measure one sets out to measure (Troost, 2007). Rosenberg's self-esteem scale was used as a measurement, as it has proven to have a high reliability and validity in various studies when measuring self-esteem (Cheng & Furnham, 2003). Negations

and difficult words were excluded from the questionnaire to avoid misunderstandings, that could have caused confusion for the respondents and therefore this helped maintain the highest reliability possible.

4. Results

The results were collected via a questionnaire among a sample of respondents who consisted of unemployed males and females. The results from the self-esteem scale are presented with bar charts for each item in the scale and show the percentage and to what extent a respondent agrees or disagrees with each question. The results were analyzed by using a Likert scale. The results from the self-esteem scale are also presented with a bar chart showing frequencies of each respondents score from the 10 items. Furthermore, the results from the questions regarding social support and coping are presented with bar charts and show the frequencies and percentages and to what extent respondents agree or disagree with the questions, and the relationship of these scores to the self-esteem scale. In total, 64 respondents returned the questionnaires.

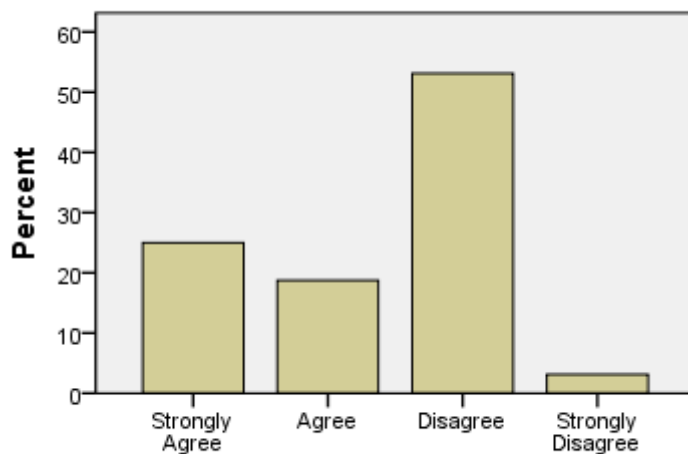


Figure 1. Percentage of the unemployed, who felt they are a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others

As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority among the unemployed disagreed to the question while almost a fifth of the unemployed agreed.

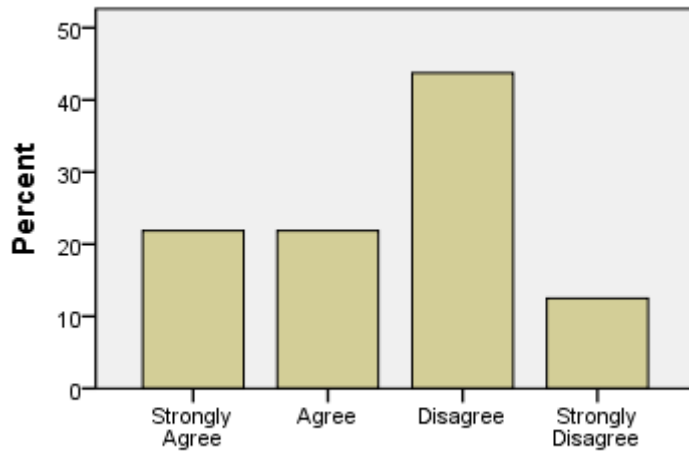


Figure 2. Percentage of the unemployed who thought they had a number of good qualities.

As can be seen in figure 2, the majority of the respondents disagreed to the question. Equal amounts of respondents chose agree and strongly agree as an answer.

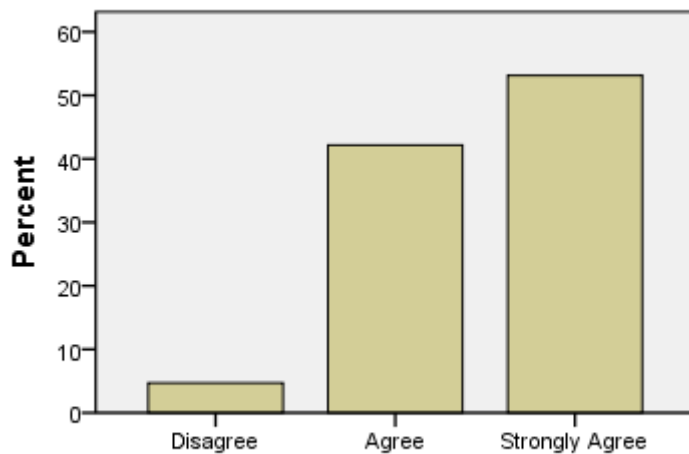


Figure 3. Percentage of the unemployed who believed they were a failure

In figure 3 one can see, that the results show that the majority strongly agreed or agreed with the question while none of the respondents gave strongly disagree as an answer.

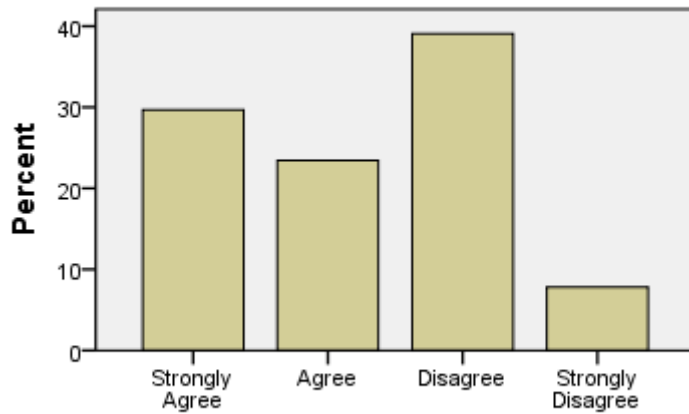


Figure 4. Percentage of the unemployed who believed they could do most things as well as most other people

As can be seen in figure 4, the majority of the unemployed answered disagree while 30 per cent chose strongly agree as an alternative.

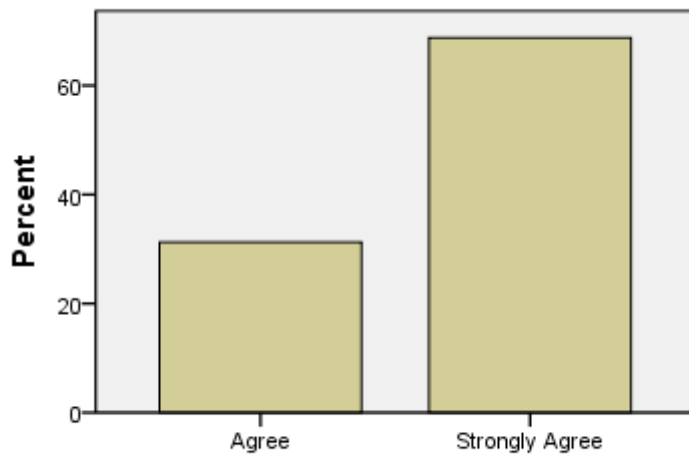


Figure 5. Percentage of the unemployed who felt they did not have much to be proud of

As can be read from figure 5, the majority, 69 per cent, strongly agreed to the question while 32 per cent agreed. None of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed in their answer

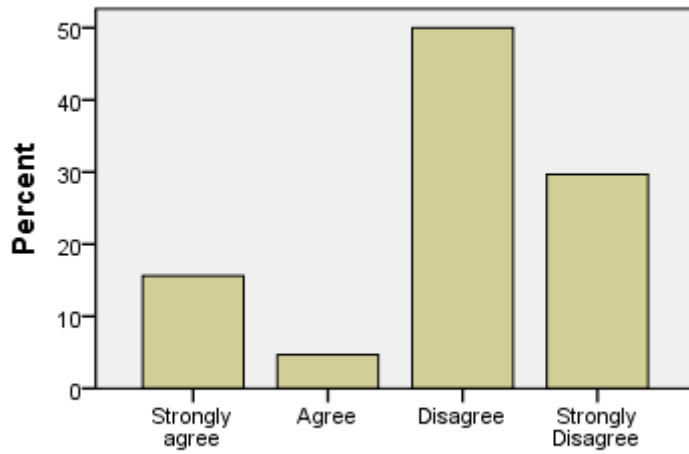


Figure 6. Percentage of the unemployed who took a positive attitude toward themselves.

As can be seen in figure 6, 50 per cent among the unemployed, disagreed while, less than 5 per cent chose agree as an answer.

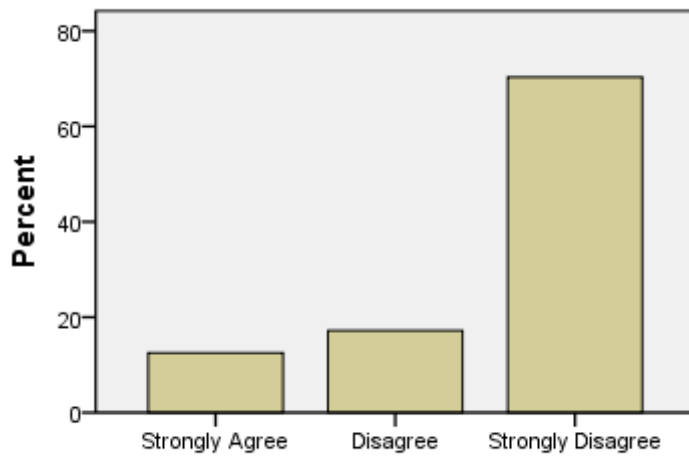


Figure 7. Percentage of the unemployed who were satisfied with themselves.

As can be seen in figure 7, the results show that the majority, 70 per cent chose strongly disagree as an answer while a small part chose strongly agree.

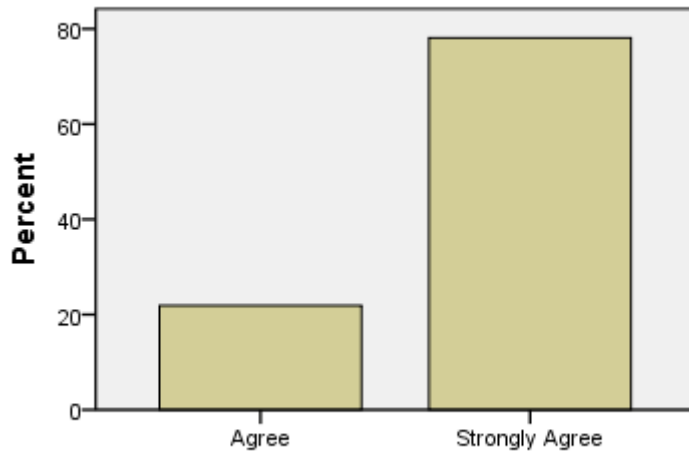


Figure 8. Percentage of the unemployed who wished they had more respect for themselves.

As can be seen in figure 8, the majority of the unemployed strongly agreed with the question while none of the unemployed disagreed or strongly disagreed to the question.

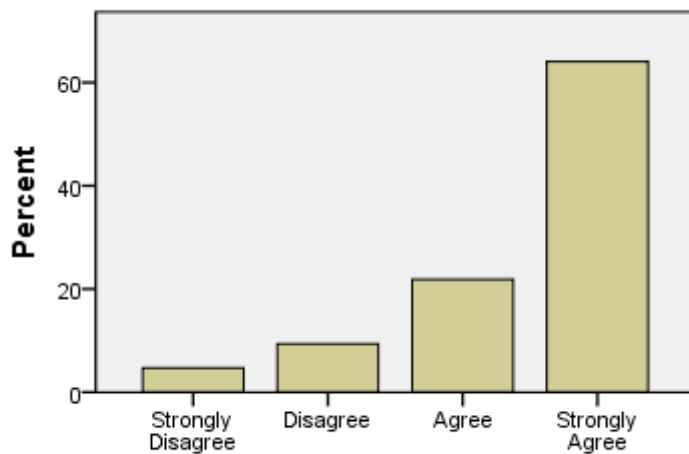


Figure 9. Percentage of the unemployed who felt useless at times.

The majority of the unemployed strongly agreed with the question while a small part strongly disagreed.

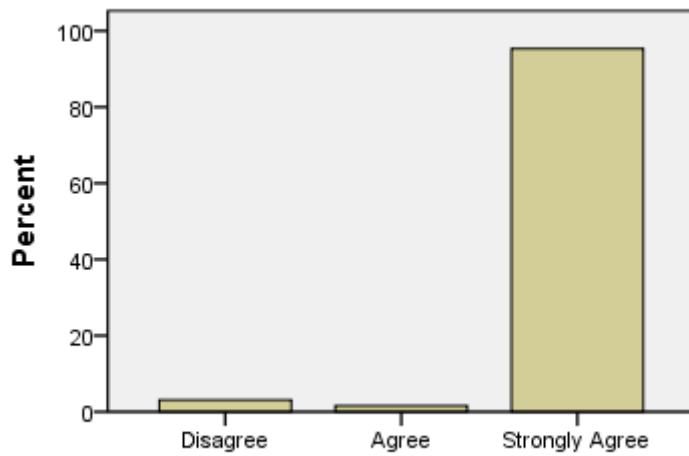


Figure 10. Percentage of the unemployed who at times thought they were no good at all.

As can be seen in figure 10, the majority strongly agreed to the question while a small part disagreed.

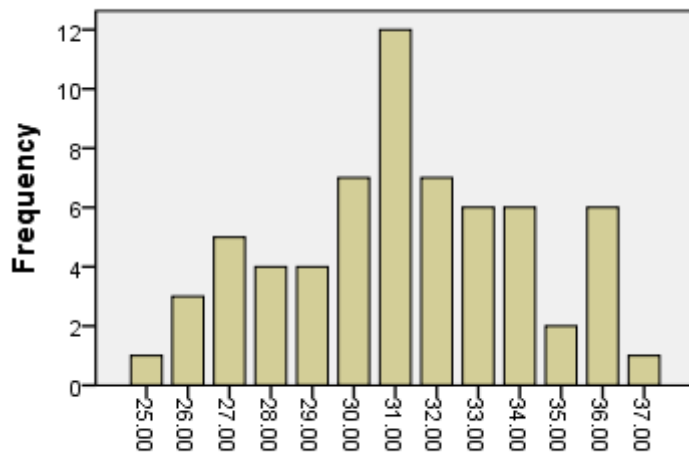


Figure 11. Frequencies of the unemployed scores from the self-esteem scale

The results show that the majority, 47 (73 %) unemployed, scored 30 or higher on the self-esteem scale while 17 (27%) scored 29 and below.

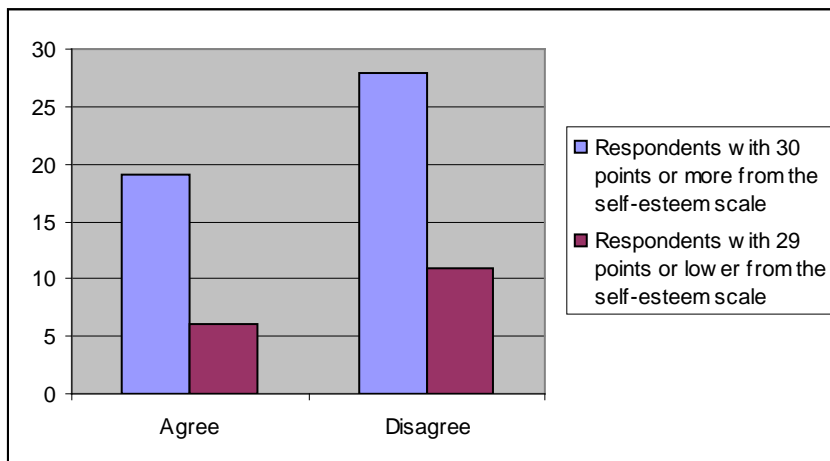


Figure 12. Frequencies of the unemployed respondents' answers on whether they received social support when unemployed.

As can be seen in figure 12, the results show the extent to what the respondents agreed or disagreed to the question regarding social support from friends in relation to their score from the self-esteem scale. The majority among the unemployed 19 (40 %) of the 47 respondents with 30 points or higher, indicating low self-esteem, felt they had social support from friends during job loss or being unemployed. Those who disagreed from the same group consisted of 28 (60 %) respondents. Among the respondents with 29 points or lower points, indicating high self-esteem, 6 (35 %) out of 17 felt they had social support from friends when unemployed, while 11 (65 %) disagreed with the question.

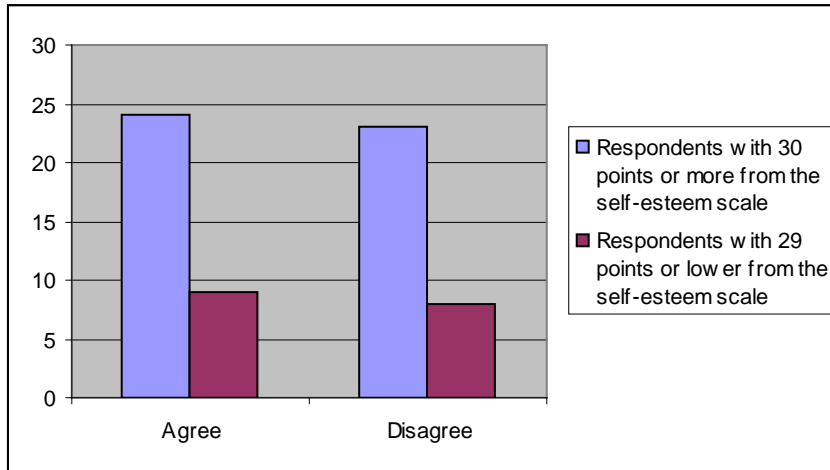


Figure 13. Frequencies of the unemployed respondents' answers in relation to whether they received social support from family and the relation to their self-esteem score.

As can be seen in figure 13, the results show to what extent the respondents agreed or disagreed to the question regarding social support from family in relation to their score from the self-esteem scale. 24 (51 %) of the 47 respondents with 30 points or higher, indicating low self-esteem, felt they had social support from family regarding job loss or being unemployed, while 23 (49 %) of the respondents disagreed to the question. Nine (53%) of the 17 respondents with 29 points or lower, indicating high self-esteem, felt they had social support from family regarding job loss or being unemployed, while 8 (28 %) of the respondents with 29 points or lower, indicating high self-esteem disagreed to the question.

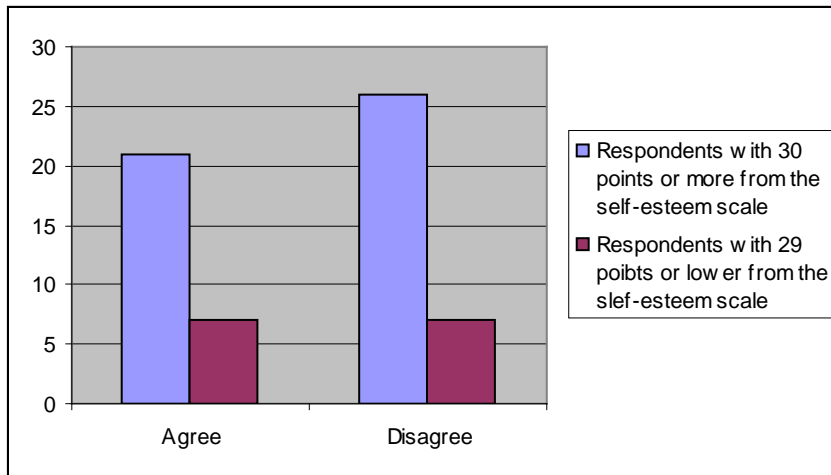


Figure 14. Frequencies of the unemployed answers to coping with a stressful situation, in relation to their self-esteem score.

As can be seen in figure 14, the results show to what extent respondents agreed or disagreed to the question regarding coping with a stressful situation, in relation to their score from the self-esteem scale. 21(45 %) of the 47 respondents with 30 points or higher, indicating low self-esteem, felt they could handle a stressful situation well, while 26 (55%) disagreed to the question. Among the respondents with 29 points or lower (high self-esteem), 10 (59 %) felt they could handle a stressful situation well while 7(41 %) disagreed.

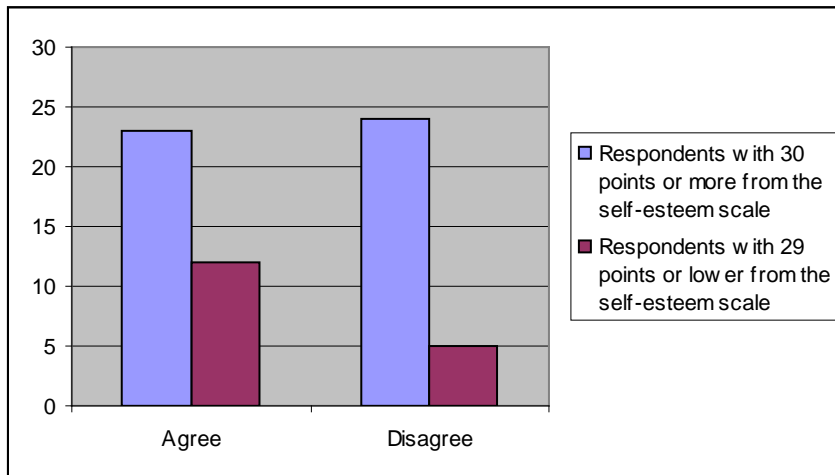


Figure 15. Frequencies of unemployed respondents' answers to question about facing a stressful situation, in relation to their self-esteem score.

As can be seen in figure 15, the results show to what extent respondents agreed or disagreed to the question; faced with a stressful situation, I do what I can to change it for the better, in relation to their self-esteem score. The results show 23 of the 47 (49%) respondents with 30 points or higher (low self-esteem) agreed to the question, while 24 (51 %) disagreed to the question. 12 (70%) out of 17 respondents with 29 points or lower (high self-esteem) agreed, while 5 (29%) in the same group, disagreed.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of the main results:

The purpose of this study was to examine whether self-esteem can be affected by unemployment and whether social support, self efficacy and perceived control have any effects on self-esteem during unemployment.

The majority of the unemployed scored 30 or higher on the self-esteem scale which indicates a low self-esteem according to Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Regarding social support from friends during job loss or unemployment, the majority of the unemployed with a low self-esteem, felt they didn't have social support from friends during unemployment. A small part of the unemployed who had high self-esteem, felt they had social support from friends during unemployment. The result also showed that half of the unemployed with low self-esteem thought they had social support from family during job loss or unemployment. The majority of the unemployed with a low self-esteem felt they couldn't cope with a stressful situation. The majority among the unemployed with a high self-esteem felt they could cope with a stressful situation.

5.2 Discussion of the method

The questionnaire was introduced with a description of the purpose of the study, and the questions were constructed in the simplest way possible: to avoid leading and difficult questions, that might have had an effect on the results (Troost, 2007). The questionnaire used Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale was chosen because it is the most commonly used scale in scientific studies about self-esteem (Blaschovich & Tomaka, 1991). The scale has also been proved to have a high reliability and validity in various studies when measuring self-esteem (Cheng & Furnham, 2003). Therefore this scale was a natural choice for the study.

The questionnaires were distributed at the jobcentre during the course of a couple of meetings, with the help of a jobcentre manager. This method was chosen because it enabled the gathering of a large sample of answers for the study. However, it is

acknowledged that this might have had a negative effect on the respondents and might have had an impact on their answers. The respondents in that context might have felt forced to fill in the questionnaire in fear of losing their job seeking allowance, or might have felt depressed at the time. The job centre might be an environment that will have negative effect on how people feel about themselves, and therefore they might have answered according to how they felt on that particular day. It is possible, that the answers would have been different if the respondents had filled in the questionnaire in another setting, where they feel more relaxed and more at home.

A convenience sample was used in the study, and for this the natural choice was to distribute questionnaires in a job-centre. The advantage of choosing this method was the possibility to get a large sample of unemployed. However, using a convenience sample makes it difficult to generalize the results. If possibly more representative sample had been chosen for the study, it is possible the results would have been easier to generalize.

A pilot study was never conducted in this study given that the time limit for the essay was limited. Carrying out a pilot study, could; nevertheless have been useful, in order to improve the quality and efficiency of the study and also avoid misunderstandings and wrong interpretations. A couple of questions regarding coping with a stressful situation might have been misinterpreted, since there was no clear description on what exactly a stressful situation meant. Questions like; I feel that I can handle a stressful situation well and: when faced with a stressful situation, I do what I can to change it for the better, might therefore have been misinterpreted by the respondents. Among the respondents, almost 50 per cent of the unemployed with low self-esteem agreed to these two questions. According to Dolan (2007), being unemployed and experiencing low self-esteem can be a stressful and emotionally demanding situation. However, this might not have been the case for the respondents. A stressful situation might have meant something different, rather than being unemployed.

If the study had been made with a qualitative method rather than a quantitative, it is possible that the results would have been different. Using unstructured interviews instead of set questionnaires may reduce misunderstandings and interpretations with the respondents. A qualitative study may have yielded more data on how social

support and coping affects self-esteem during unemployment, and it would have led to the collection of information that is rich in depth and detail.

The type of scale that was used in this study was a Likert scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The score in the self-esteem scale was added up as previously explained. A low score indicates a high self-esteem and a high score indicates a low self-esteem. This method might cause confusions with the readers. If it had been scored reverse, would have meant a low score indicating a low self-esteem and a high score indicating a high self-esteem. This might have been easier for the reader to interpret without any misunderstandings.

Finally, the-scores from the self-esteem scale were divided into two groups of respondent's scores. One group consisted of 47 unemployed who scored 30 points or more and the other group consisted of 17 unemployed who scored 29 or less on the same scale. The reason for dividing the respondent's scores into two groups, was to see how social support, coping and perceived control affect people with low self-esteem and high self-esteem. The weakness of doing this in this study might be that the numbers of respondents are not equally in each group, and therefore this might have had an effect on the results.

5.3 Discussion of the results

The results show that the majority of the unemployed scored 30 points or more on the self-esteem scale, which indicates having a low self-esteem according to Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This is something that is supported by several studies which shows that unemployment have negative effects on individuals self-esteem (Axelsson, Andersen, Edén & Ejlertsson (2007). Although the majority of unemployed scored 30 or more, it raises issues about what makes a person maintain a good self-esteem during unemployment. Some researchers argue that unemployment affects your self-esteem, while others claim that self-esteem is not affected by unemployment, but is just a personality trait that is constant and is not dependent on any situation or surrounding (Shamir, 1986). Despite the fact that several studies have shown the negative impact unemployment has on one's self-esteem, social support during unemployment has also been shown to be an important aspect. It has been

argued that social support is a vital aspect in coping with stressful events such as unemployment (Water & Moore 2002). In this study, there were no major differences among the group with low self-esteem and the group with high self-esteem, regarding receiving social support from family during unemployment. The majority of respondents in the group with a low self-esteem felt they did not have social support from friends during unemployment. This supports the notion of the significance that social support has during unemployment, and that lack of it has negative effects on the self-esteem. However, it is difficult to say whether it is the lack of social support from friends, or if it is in fact something else that contributes to a low self-esteem among this group, since 40 per cent with low self-esteem felt they had social support from friends during unemployment. It may be various reasons for this. One strong view might argue that: it is just a personality trait that is constant and is not dependent on social support from friends or any other environmental factors (Shamir, 1986).

According to Jönsson (2003), unemployment is something that is connected with shame. Shame, in turn, leads to one's self-image becoming worse, and these attitudes may affect individual's health in a negative way. He also argues that shame is associated with trust. If the person has difficulties trusting a person in his surroundings, it will lead to the person thinking he is less worthy, which in turn will contribute to lower self-esteem. Although, social support seems to help some individuals during unemployment regarding self-esteem, it may be, that some unemployed have been exploited by societal attitudes and have difficulties trusting people and regardless of social support from friends, will still have a low self-esteem.

On the subject of coping during unemployment, the results showed that the majority of the unemployed with a low self-esteem felt they could not cope with a stressful situation. In the same group, 45 per cent answered they could cope with a stressful situation. There was no major difference in the answers in the group with high self-esteem. Thoits (1995) argues that the most common indicator of a persons' coping mechanism is reliance on one's sense of control, or mastery over his life. This supports the fact that the majority in the group with low self-esteem did not feel they could cope with a stressful situation. The unemployed with a low self-esteem, who believed they could cope with a stressful situation, might have felt they had control over their lives during their unemployment.

Wiener, Oei & Creed (1999) describes the importance of perceived control in relation to unemployment. Low perceived control was found to have a strong correlation with unemployment. The results in their study also showed that individuals with jobs had higher levels of perceived control compared with those who were unemployed. If a person's coping mechanism is reliance on one's sense of control or mastery over his life one would assume, the group with low self-esteem had a low perceived control. However, these are speculations and it is possible that the respondents interpreted the question regarding coping with a stressful situation in a different way. There is a possibility, that the respondents interpreted a stressful situation as something other than being unemployed, and for that reason it is difficult to say whether they experienced low perceived control during their unemployment or not.

Owusu-Ansah (2008) argues that an event can be considered as threatening if the person lacks control over events in his life, and therefore perceives the stressor as uncontrollable. Whereas, people who perceive they have control of events see the stressor as challenging and controllable. The results showed that nearly 50 per cent of the respondents with a low self-esteem agreed to the question; faced with a stressful situation, I do what I can to change it for the better. In the group with high self-esteem 70 per cent agreed to the same question. It might be that these people believed they have control and see unemployment as something challenging and controllable regardless of their self-esteem. The respondents who disagreed to the question might see unemployment as something threatening and uncontrollable – regardless of their self-esteem. Individuals who perceive having a high internal locus of control or high perceived control therefore tend to better control their behaviours and their ability to cope with stressful events in life (Owusu-Ansah 2008).

Self-esteem is complex, and it is difficult to generalize the results from this study. However, it seems that social support, self efficacy and coping are important aspects regarding self-esteem.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

Studies have shown the importance that social support, coping and perceived control exert on self-esteem. The results from this study show, that the majority of the unemployed had a low self-esteem during unemployment. The majority of the respondents with a low self-esteem did not feel they had social support from friends, although 40 per cent felt they had social support. The majority of the group with low self-esteem did not feel they could cope with a stressful situation. A suggestion for future research would be to have follow-up studies of a qualitative character. This method might get more rich and detailed first person data describing how social support, coping and perceived control affect self-esteem during unemployment. By using follow-up studies it may be possible to see how these aspects affect self-esteem and change over time.

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Annex 1

Information letter:

My name is Pia Pettersson and I am currently doing a Bachelor of Science in Public Health. I am doing my senior year and the final assignment is to write a C-thesis. I have chosen to write my essay about unemployment and self-esteem. The purpose of this essay is to investigate the role of unemployment in relation to self-esteem. I will not use the information from this survey in any other way than in my essay. Your answers will be treated with confidentiality and the results will be presented group-wise and therefore no identification will be possible. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary.

For any enquiries call or e-mail

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Annex 2

Below are a numbers of questions regarding age, gender, marital status, length of unemployment, education, social support (meaning emotional support and help from friends and/or family) and coping(meaning a person's ability to handle a stressful and emotionally demanding situation).

Answer the questions by circle the option that best suits you.

1. Gender: **Male / Female**

2. Age:_____

3. Marital status: **Single / Married / Divorced / Other**

4. How long have you been unemployed? **0-6 months / 7-11 months / 1 year/ 2 years or more**

5. Are you part of any unemployment schemes that offer help and/or advice on getting back into work? **Yes/No**
If yes, what unemployment schemes are you part of_____

6. Have you got friends/family members who are unemployed? **Yes/No**

7. What is your highest level of education you possess? **GCSE / A-levels / Bachelor's degree / Masters degree / Doctorate / PhD (Doctor of philosophy) / None**

8. I feel that I have social support from friends in situations, such as a job loss or being unemployed. **Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree**

9. I feel that I have social support from my family in situations, such as a job loss or being unemployed. **Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree**

10. I feel that I can handle a stressful situation well. **Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree**

11. When things do not go according to my plans, my motto is “where there is a will, there is a way”. I keep trying until I find a way to make it work. **Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree**

12. When faced with a stressful situation, I do what I can to change it for the better. **Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree**

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself:

If you **STRONGLY AGREE**, circle **SA**

If you **AGREE** with the statement, circle **A**

If you **DISAGREE**, circle **D**

If you **STRONGLY DISAGREE**, circle **SD**

		STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1.	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
2.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
3.	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.*	SA	A	D	SD
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.*	SA	A	D	SD
6.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD

7.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
8.	I wish I could have more respect for myself.*	SA	A	D	SD
9.	I certainly feel useless at times*	SA	A	D	SD
10.	At times I think I am no good at all.*	SA	A	D	SD

Any additional information:

Thank you for your participation!