

# JOB SEARCHING HABITS OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED SOCIAL BENEFIT RECEIVERS IN LATVIA

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## Abstract

*Being long-term unemployed means having difficulties not only with job searching itself, but also with organizing the process smoothly in order to achieve results – find a job. The aim of the research was to identify job searching habits of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers in the context of career counseling. 89 long-term unemployed social benefit receivers took part in the survey. They were asked to fill a questionnaire about their job searching process – where and how they are doing it. None of the respondents have mentioned career counselor as a professional that they are seeking help from. The results show that long-term unemployed social benefit receivers prefer to search for job with friends or relatives' help; they don't have any CV or motivational letter ready to submit and they don't want to attend any courses about preparing these documents. Most of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers haven't visited any job interview during the last two months.*

**Key words:** *adult education, career counseling, long-term unemployed, job searching.*

## Introduction

The long-term unemployed social benefit receivers are able-bodied persons who have received monthly benefits for more than 12 times within the last three years and were jobless at least 9 months (SKDS, 2007), and have been receiving social service support at least for the last six months. That is the target group of the research and there is no clear statistic data about how many such people are out of the labor market now, because they tend to get the job for a couple months or even weeks and then lose it again. It is important for professionals who are involved in work with these clients (such as career counselor, social worker, employment agent) to know the habits of job searching of these people in order to provide an adequate assistance in the job searching process.

Most of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers are middle aged people who were born and raised in a different historical situation and it is still hard for them to fit in new, modern and vivid society – they are not able (or willing) to accept new technologies and new ways of job searching trying to use friends and relatives or other types of social networking (which are still good to use). Most of them don't have CV or motivational letter and they don't see any need to get educated about preparing such important and vital documents for job searching.

### *Problem of Research*

Long-term unemployed are out of the work force at least for one year, most of them are not working for many years in a row which makes significant impact not only on their professional

skills, but also on social and job searching skills. Modern world's good practice tends to put responsibilities on individual's shoulders, which means that there all type of assistance is more for short-term unemployed who are still into labor market and who are still willing and able to find a job (Hobbins, 2016). Losing a job is a crisis, but for any human being it is not possible to live in a crisis situation for many years, so being long-term unemployed is more like an individual's choice and free will, but still they are trying to search for a job, maybe, they are not strong and sure in their decisions, but professional's goal is to analyze their habits and find ways to change their job searching style. Bonoli (2014) speaks about long-term unemployed discrimination in recruiting process, meaning many reasons, but mainly mentioning Human resources professionals' idea and stereotype that long-term unemployed are not able to fit into existing group and not able to fulfill organization goals (Bonoli, 2014). It is possible that the reason for this discrimination might be a wrong choice of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers which might be connected with his/her habits of job searching.

Institution that is providing assistance in job searching process is State Employment Agency – registered clients are able to receive career counselor's assistance, are able to receive access to additional education or even get a new profession, also psychological sessions are available in Latvia. Riga Social Service employs a social worker who works with long-term unemployed social benefit receivers, but amount of clients is limited, because of small capability of social workers.

There is no good practice and institutions that might be teaching long-term unemployed social benefit receiver's good job searching habits.

Only now, in 2016 career education starts going global in schools, so children get access and get taught to create individual plans for development, so in future having general development plan (this habit should be implemented to them in order they can use it through the whole life) will help them to avoid unemployment or will help to get through it easier.

### *Research Focus*

Research focus is long-term unemployed social benefit receivers' habits of job searching - how they are searching a job, what kinds of job searching they accept as the best ones. Considering that all of the respondents are jobless for 12 months and more this method should be corrected or totally changed because of the lack of results. Long-term unemployed social benefit receivers, primary, are clients of Social Service and its main goal is direct work with a client, not to research how to work with client in order to get the best result, basically, Social Service is a highly conservative institution that works for years in a same way, but clients change, labor market changes as well and new ways of job searching should be accepted.

Analyzing many real stories of long-term unemployed who have finally found a job, it is important to emphasize that abroad experience speaks mostly about highly skilled and educated people not able to get a job for many months and years which is a sign of high number of competitors in a market of professionals, they are motivated to change, to search and finally find a job, they are not willing to be clients of social service (Leonard, 2014). The last research that was made about long-term unemployed social benefit receivers in Latvia was done in 2007, almost 10 years ago – economic and social background has changed, there is a need to get new data that will be used by practitioners in order to improve services for long-term unemployed social benefit receivers.

## **Methodology of Research**

### *General Background of Research*

This research was designed to explore relationships between long-term unemployed social benefit receivers' job searching habits and their attitude towards career services offered to them. This study uses quantitative approaches - data were collected through long-term unemployed social benefit receivers' questionnaires. This research is a pilot research of PhD research that is going to bring career service for long-term unemployed into Riga Social Service (as for now there is no career services in Riga Social Service for any type of clients). The aim of the research is to start new

approach in work with long-term unemployed that combines social work as a case management and career counselling. The main outcome of the project is to strengthen and motivate long-term unemployed become independent and enter labor market.

### *Sample Selection*

A total of 89 (77 female and 12 male) long-term unemployed social benefit receivers between the ages of 23 and 60 participated in the study. Long-term unemployed social benefit receivers are clients of Riga Social Service and are unemployed for 12 months or more, they were receiving social benefits for 9 months or more.

### *Instrument and Procedures*

Data were collected between August, 2016 and November, 2016. Each of the respondents is a client of the social worker, at the moment of the research there was a case work going on with them. They were asked to fill in questionnaire and express their opinion about job searching habits and career services they were offered. They were asked to share their opinion and experience about what type of resources they are using while searching for a job, if they have prepared a CV or a letter of motivation, how often they attend job interviews and whether they prepare for them, as well, they were asked if they had additional education on job searching topics. Respondents were asked to define what successful career is for them and to define why they are long-term unemployed (is it because of the lack of skills and knowledge or because of socio-economic situation).

### *Data Analysis*

The descriptive statistics indicators (Mean, Standard Deviation) were calculated. The Shapiro–Wilk W was calculated testing for normality of the distribution of participants' age, the non-parametric criteria – Kruskal-Wallis  $\chi^2$ , Spearman rho ( $r_{Sp}$ ) and Pearson Chi-squares were calculated analyzing differences of distribution among the subgroups.

MS Excel and R 3.2.3 (The R Project, 2016) have been used to process the research data.

## **Results of Research**

The current empirical research was carried out in Riga Social Service. There were 89 long-term unemployed social benefit receivers participating in the research. The participants of the research were as follows: 77 female (86.5%) and 12 male (13.5%) between the age of 23 to 60 (Mean (M) = 41.5, Standard Deviation (SD) = 10.46).

The period of unemployment of the respondents vary from 19 to 121 months with average period of unemployment of 55.11 month (or about 4 years and 6 months). This is quite a serious period for one human being, being unemployed for so long means a lack of skills and knowledge not only in a professional field, but also in a social field – how to act being in a group of people, how to interact, how to create and maintain professional relationships, how to solve problems and misunderstandings. Such “social hole” also has a serious impact on job searching habits of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers. Statistically significant negative correlation between period of unemployment and resources for job searching exist ( $r_{sp} = -0.38$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ). It means that unemployed who are longer without a job use less resource in job searching.

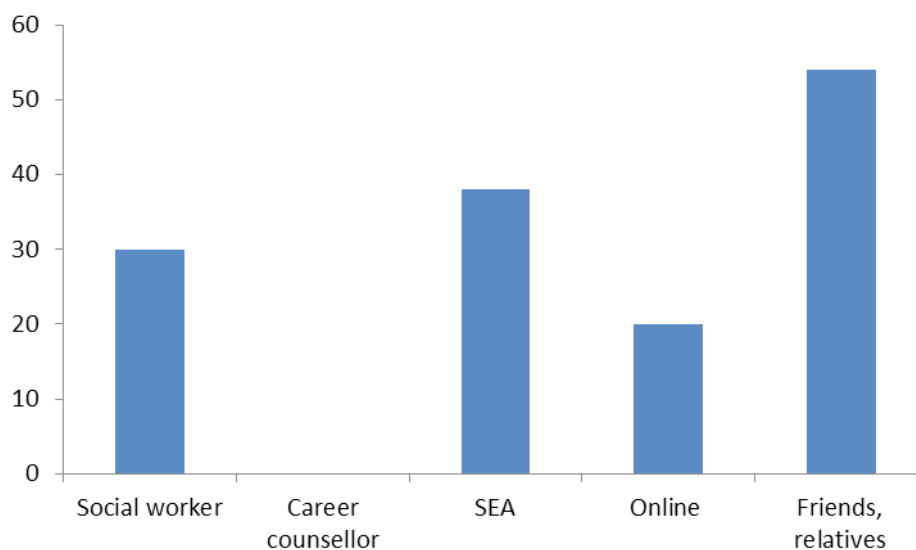
Education of the respondents describes as follows – most of them (61% or 54 respondents) have secondary education (it consists of general and professional secondary education); 26% or 23 respondents completed only basic level of education (they graduated from 9<sup>th</sup> grade in Latvian system of education); 13% or 12 respondents have graduated from university and have higher education. General secondary education connection with lower job searching intense shows up also in the research carried out in 2006 ‘Regional research about unemployed psych-social portrait’ (Hazans, 2006).

Long-term unemployed social benefit receivers describe successful career in all cases meaning *good salary*, or *enough money* or in any other words described adequate payment for the job (level

of adequateness may vary from respondent to respondent). They are mentioning not only financial aspect, but also “*career growth*”, most likely meaning job position change from a lower to a higher one. Only few (12 respondents and 13%) were mentioning that successful career is connected with good relationships with colleagues and can grow better with the help of the people you are working with. No one has mentioned developing professional skills, building up social network or broadening responsibilities as a part of a successful career. More likely respondents understand career as Harold Wilensky defined it in 1960s classical career theories consider it - *succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence* (Wilensky, 1960). Nowadays career is not only a change of a job position arranged in hierarchy, it is a more complicated substance that needs deep understanding and managing in order to get an adequate result.

Respondents asked to mention why they are long-term unemployed 86% (or 77 respondents) replied that this situation is because of an external situation (no workplace, bad economic situation etc.) and only 14% accept that being unemployed for such a long period is only their own fault that represents that most of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers have external locus of control. Statistically significant differences were not found in the locus of control of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers among the subgroups of attained educational level ( $\chi^2 = 2.54$ ;  $p = 0.28$ ).

Respondents were asked to determine the resources that they are using in job searching process (meaning what kind of professionals they are likely to attend; respondents have possibility to choose multiple options):



**Figure 1: Comparison of choice of job searching resources of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers (n=number of respondents).**

As it is seen from the figure above (see Figure 1) long-term unemployed social benefit receivers prefer to search for a job with the help of friends and relatives (61% or 54 respondents), it is mentioned as a resource for job searching; 43% (or 38 respondents) are using State Employment Agency (SEA) as a resource for job searching; 34% (or 30 respondents) consider social worker as a resource for job searching; 23% (or 20 respondents) are using online resources (mostly job searching websites); none has mentioned career counselor as their resource for job searching.

When choosing a method of job searching most of the respondents consider offline job searching as more effective (80% or 71 respondents), 20% (or 18 respondents) prefer online job searching, those respondents are mostly of young age (up to 30 years old).

Between groups of unemployed in context of using different resources of job searching, there is no statistically significant differences in age groups (Kruskal-Wallis  $\chi^2 = 1.92$ ;  $p = 0.38$ ), but statistically significant differences were found in the length of unemployment among the subgroups

of choosing online or offline job searching method (Kruskal-Wallis  $\chi^2 = 7.20$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). Those of respondents, who are longer without a job more often use offline job searching method.

Only 36% of respondents (32 respondents) have prepared a CV to present to the employer and 64% respondents haven't prepared it yet.

Most of the respondents (46% or 41 respondents) haven't participated in any job interview in the last 2 months, 35% (or 31) respondents have participated in one to two job interviews in the last two months; only 19% of the respondents participated in a job interview three to four times in the last two months; no one has participated in a job interview in the last two months more than four times. Statistically significant negative correlation between period of unemployment and frequency of attending a job interview ( $r_{sp} = -0.44$ ;  $p = 0.03$ ). That means that those respondents who are longer without a job attend job interview less.

Responding to the questions if long-term unemployed social benefit receivers prepare for the upcoming job interview 80% replied negatively and only 20% replied positively.

Long-term unemployed social benefit receivers were asked if they need any additional training to prepare for a job interview and 82% replied that they don't need any additional training, 18% mentioned that they would like to have additional training in order to prepare for the job interview.

## Discussion

The general picture of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers shows that mostly they are not motivated to search for a job, they are doing it very formally, and their attitude to the job searching is passive and negative.

Most long-term unemployed social benefit receivers have external locus of control – they are blaming everyone in their situation – that is the first sign that needs to be taken into consideration while working with this group. Only when seeing the problem and also resources in themselves the real result can be achieved.

No one of the respondents has mentioned career counselor as a resource in job searching process. Career counselor can't assist in direct job searching, but they definitely can motivate, strengthen and give real advice on how to act during a job interview, how to prepare a CV, how to create development plan (including job searching activities). State Employment Agency should provide more information about the availability of career counselors and about the assistance they can provide to long-term unemployed.

In general, whole portrait of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers might look negative, but it only shows that situation has not changed many years in a row. Research that took place in Latvia in 2006 shows exactly the same situation, as results show 27% of long-term unemployed are not ready to start work in two weeks if they are offered. This result shows that they are not seeking for a job and not willing to change anything. Despite the fact that since research mentioned more than 10 years have passed nothing has changed, long-term unemployed social benefit receivers prefer to search for a job using their friends and relatives (Hazans, 2006).

While answering the questions of survey a lot of respondents have mentioned that they are not ready to take any job on the market, they mentioned that for them it is more convenient to receive social benefits, but not to take a job with a low salary. That is a direct connection with the answers about what a *successful career* means – for most of the respondents it is only a good salary, so they are not considering taking a job for practicing or gaining new experience, but only for earning money (probably, earning a lot of money at a time). There is almost no real opportunity to get high-paid job after being unemployed for many years. The aim of professionals is to help long-term unemployed social benefit receivers to maintain an adequate level of self-esteem and to have them have real expectation according to a future job.

Most of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers consider offline job searching the most effective way, the younger respondents choose online job searching. Less than a half of the respondents have not prepared a CV, which makes job searching harder – it is easier to create a CV once and then present it to employers. Most of the respondents who prefer online job searching have already prepared a CV, probably, because there are a lot of services offering easy CV setup services, where at the end you have a smooth CV ready to present.

Generally, respondents are not active job searchers, they are not participating in job interviews a lot (means – not applying for job positions), they are not preparing for job interviews (collecting information about the place, tasks) and at the same time they are not willing and not ready to take additional classes/courses in order to improve their skills of participating in a job interview, preparing a CV. Research that took place in Russia shows that job interview training might be effective in improving social skills and direct skills of participating in a job interview, but it is not possible to measure straight impact (Aysina, Maksimenko, Nikiforov, 2016). For long-term unemployed social benefit receivers it might be useful to participate in similar training in order to gain new skills, but more important is to participate in job interviews.

Most likely they are more than satisfied with existing situation, but society pushes them over to job searching as vital process in the eyes of society, main element in job searching as in any process according to human being is *free will* and *true wish* is basic element of the results we want to achieve. For the most of the society it is crucial to work and maintain healthy social lifestyle, on the other hand there always is and will be a group of people who are not willing to work and are ready to take on a marginalized way of life and benefits as their income. The author considers that this system might be broken only if the way of receiving social benefits will be changed and social benefits will be time limited.

The results of this research will help to indicate the main point that should be taken into consideration while working with long-term unemployed social benefit receivers, career counsellors working with long-term unemployed social benefit receivers in Riga Social Service will be able to create module that will take into consideration features of potential clients, that also allows to understand their needs. Results of the research are presented to Riga Social Service social workers and are used in practical work with long-term unemployed social benefit receivers as well as for developing new services for long-term unemployed social benefit receivers.

Most likely, all the existing programs and opportunities that the government, municipality and non-governmental organizations are offering to long-term unemployed won't be effective or will have some results only on a short-term basis (Rivza, Grinevica, 2015). Trying to solve such huge economic and social problems there should be a clear understanding that they are just human beings and they need motivation and goals in order to improve their life and that means deep, individual, therapeutic work.

## Conclusions

The results of the research show, that for long-term unemployed social benefit receivers successful career means earning the biggest possible amount of money, they are not considering successful career as opportunity to develop professionally and broaden their personality and that is the topical issue professionals involved in work with this target group need to take into consideration. Most of the long-term unemployed social benefit receivers in their situation blame society and lack of opportunities in current economic situation. Small amount of respondents consider lack of skills and knowledge as the main reason of unemployment.

In the process of job searching long-term unemployed social benefit receivers mostly rely on friends and relatives, but not on the professional services that are available for them and as a result they stay unemployed even longer than it possibly might be, moreover long-term unemployed social benefit receivers are not often visitors of job interviews, only small amount of respondents have participated in job interviews in the last two months. More than a half of respondents are not preparing for a job interview. Long-term unemployed social benefit receivers are not willing and motivated to attend any additional training in order to improve their job searching and holding skills and that minimalizes their chance of getting job even more.

Problem of long-term unemployed social benefit receivers' motivation is an issue that is going to be covered in authors' next research in order to complete intervention of career service into Riga Social Service.

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