

Unemployed vs employed persons: Temperament and subjective well-being of Portuguese adults

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1. Introduction

- In a country where the unemployment rate is around 15% (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2012) and jobs are characterized by high levels of insecurity and instability, it is essential to understand the relationship between subjective well-being and (un)employment.

- The adverse consequences of unemployment are widely documented in the literature: loss of skills, deterioration of social relations, decreased self-esteem, reduction of financial resources and increased risk in health, among other less positive effects. In addition, although less empirically explored, the effects of living precarious job situations are also unfavourable for the health of workers (Araújo, 2009).

- Given the recent and growing attention that has been given to the perspective of positive psychology, based on understanding the positive aspects of human functioning (Seligman, 2000), this exploratory study sought to analyze the levels of subjective well-being in employed and unemployed adults, taking into account variables typically associated with this construct such as temperamental characteristics.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

- Participated in the empirical quantitative study 635 Portuguese adults from different regions of the country (562 employed and 73 unemployed).

2.2. Materials and Procedure

- Data collection took place from November 2009 to May 2011.

- A questionnaire was constructed and applied to access sociodemographic and professional variables.

- The assessment of subjective well-being in its cognitive dimension (level of satisfaction with life) was accomplished through the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) validated by Simões (1992). With regard to the affective dimension of subjective well-being, we applied the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) - Portuguese version developed by Simões (1993), allowing us to access the results of the subjects in positive and negative affect.

- Finally, the characteristics of temperament (strength of excitation, strength of inhibition and mobility of the central nervous system) were evaluated using the Pavlovian Temperament Survey (PTS-AmE) of Newberry et al. (1997).

- Data analysis was performed with SPSS (IBM 20) and the appropriate statistical techniques were selected depending on the type of scale and on the nature of the variables.

3. Results

3.1. Subjective well-being and (un)employment (Table 1 and Table 2)

Table 1. Mean, SD, minimum and maximum in the variables of subjective well-being in employed and unemployed participants.

Subjective well-being (range of the score)	Job situation	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Satisfaction with life (5-25)	Employed	551	15.81	4.20	5	25
	Unemployed	73	12.74	4.29	5	24
Positive Affect (11-55)	Employed	551	35.53	7.61	11	55
	Unemployed	72	33.35	7.13	14	50
Negative Affect (11-55)	Employed	552	22.36	7.50	11	55
	Unemployed	72	26.94	8.73	13	47

Table 2. Comparisons (t tests) depending on the job situation in the variables of subjective well-being.

	gl	t	p
Satisfaction with life	614	4.81	.000
Positive Affect	613	2.46	.014
Negative Affect	614	3.83	.000

3.2. Temperamental characteristics and subjective well-being in (un)employment

- We explored the importance of two independent variables, namely the job situation (employed or unemployed) and the characteristics of temperament (strength of excitation, strength of inhibition and mobility), on the results in satisfaction with life, positive and negative affect.

- Statistically significant results emerged specifically regarding:

(1) the strength of excitation and negative affect [$F(1) = 8.92, p = .003$];
(2) the strength of inhibition and negative affect [$F(1) = 02.09, p = .003$];
(3) the mobility both with life satisfaction [$F(1) = 13.11, p = .001$] and positive affect [$F(1) = 35.39, p = .000$].

Thus the strengths of excitation and inhibition seemed relevant in negative affect, while mobility was manifested most important in satisfaction with life and positive affect.

- In the analysis of correlations between temperament variables and subjective well-being results, we found that employed participants that showed higher values in the strengths of excitation and inhibition reported less negative affect ($r = -.25, p \leq .01$). The mobility proved to be positively associated ($p \leq .01$) with life satisfaction ($r = .23$) and positive affect ($r = .38$) within this group.

- The exploration of these correlations in the group of unemployed participants, showed only statistical significance in the relationship between mobility and positive affect ($r = .42, p \leq .01$) demonstrating higher levels of positive affect unemployed individuals with higher values in mobility.

3.2. Temperamental characteristics and subjective well-being in (un)employment (cont.)

- We also noticed that the results concerning the means in well-being variables even when adjusted to temperament variables, remained lower within unemployed participants than in the other group. These results can be confirmed by consulting the charts presented below: satisfaction with life (Figure 1), positive affect (Figure 2) and negative affect (Figure 3).

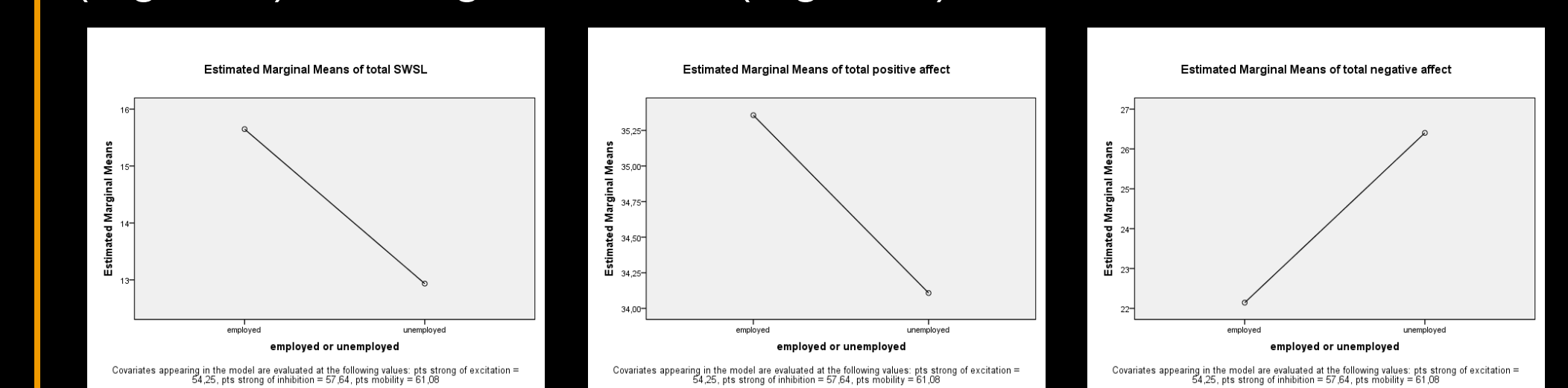


Figure 1. Graph with the means in satisfaction with life in employed and unemployed participants, adjusted to the dimensions of temperament.

Figure 2. Graph with the means in positive affect in employed and unemployed participants, adjusted to the dimensions of temperament.

Figure 3. Graph with the means in negative affect in employed and unemployed participants, adjusted to the dimensions of temperament.

4. Conclusions

- In general, results in subjective well-being were unfavorable to unemployed as would be expected given the literature in this field. It was found that unemployed subjects showed higher rates of negative affect. Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988) reported a positive relation between negative affect and depression or anxiety.

- There was a greater satisfaction with life and more positive emotions in workers than in unemployed. Despite economic difficulties and job insecurity at a global scale, this results suggest some adaptive capacity of Portuguese workers within this sample.

- We tried to understand these results given that Seligman (2000) noted that there are events that contribute more or less to happiness depending on the personality of the individual. We verified that the trend regarding the results of subjective well-being (lower in participants without a job) remained the same considering temperamental characteristics.

- It is crucial to take into account different factors in understanding subjective well-being at (un)employment, including contextual dimensions (such as the job situation) as well as more personal aspects (eg. temperament).

- It will be important to continue to think of intervention strategies targeted to this growing group in our population, in order to minimize the less positive effects of unemployment evidenced in this work.

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