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The Impact of Social Competence Training on Satisfaction with Life among the Unemployed : the Role of Sense of Coherence and System Justification

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PSYCHOLOGIA / PSYCHOLOGY

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**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE TRAINING
ON SATISFACTION WITH LIFE AMONG
THE UNEMPLOYED. THE ROLE OF SENSE
OF COHERENCE AND SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION***

Decline of life satisfaction is a common consequence of unemployment together with the negative self-view and perceived lack of control¹. The results of a recent meta-analysis regarding the social and psychological consequences of unemployment showed that unemployment has negative effects on life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, mental and physical health². Moreover, against the predictions of set-point theories, according to which life satisfaction is relatively stable over life and resistant to major events, the unemployment was demonstrated to alter the set-point of life satisfaction³. These results confirm that unemployment in fact “scars”⁴: it brings about negative effects on the future well-being of individuals. After the prolonged

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¹ A. Clark, Y. Georgellis, P. Sanfey, *Scarring: The Psychological Impact of Past Unemployment*, „Economica” 2001, nr 68(270), s. 221–241; P.A. Creed, M. Hood, L.Y. Leung, *The Relationship Between Control, Job Seeking, and Well-Being in Unemployed People*, „Journal of Applied Social Psychology” 2012, nr 42(3), s. 689–701; R.E. Lucas, A.E. Clark, Y. Georgellis, E. Diener, *Unemployment Alters the Set Point for Life Satisfaction*, „Psychological Science” 2004, nr 15(1), s. 8–13; F. McKee-Ryan, Z. Song, C.R. Wanberg, A.J. Kinicki, *Psychological and Physical Well-Being During Unemployment: A Meta-Analytic Study*, „Journal of Applied Psychology” 2005, nr 90(1), s. 53–76; O. Stavrova, T. Schlösser, A. Baumert, *Life Satisfaction and Job-Seeking Behavior of the Unemployed: The Effect of Individual Differences in Justice Sensitivity*, „Applied Psychology” 2014, nr 63(4), s. 643–670.

² F. McKee-Ryan, Z. Song, C.R. Wanberg, A.J. Kinicki, *Psychological and Physical Well-Being During Unemployment: A Meta-Analytic Study*, s. 53–76.

³ R.E. Lucas, A.E. Clark, Y. Georgellis, E. Diener, *Unemployment Alters the Set Point for Life Satisfaction*, s. 8–13.

⁴ A. Clark, Y. Georgellis, P. Sanfey, *Scarring: The Psychological Impact of Past Unemployment*, s. 221.

period of unemployment, life satisfaction does not return to the starting point, even after finding the stable job⁵. Recent research suggests that the reasons behind the deterioration in the psychological well-being of the unemployed are perceived loss of control, defined as contingency (ownership over outcomes) and competence⁶.

Importantly, the results of the meta-analysis of unemployment effects⁷ showed that the negative outcomes of unemployment on well-being are not buffered by availability and amount of unemployment benefits. These findings imply that structural factors such as benefits may actually not be beneficial for the unemployed. Therefore, identifying psychosocial factors buffering against the decline in life satisfaction seem to be a more promising research task. In turn, identifying these factors will allow to plan more effective psychological interventions which would prevent the feeling of powerlessness and the decline of life satisfaction among the unemployed.

1. Sense of coherence and its impact on well-being

According to the salutogenetic approach, represented by a medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky⁸, beside the societal-level structural factors (like the health organization system), the important factors improving health and well-being of individuals are psychosocial resources and generalized resilience, with the sense of coherence (SOC) at its core. According to this theory, the impact of various stressors depends on individual ability to manage the tension brought about by these stressors. Generalized resources and successful tension management enhance the beliefs that the world is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. These beliefs Antonovsky called the sense of coherence, which can be described as the self-confidence stemming from the belief that things are under control. Sense of coherence covers three interrelated factors: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Comprehensibility pertains to perceived predictability of the environment, manageability pertains to the belief that individual has sufficient resources to meet the demands of the environment, and meaningfulness is the belief that the demands faced by an individual are challenges which are worthy of taking action, further investment and allocating the resources.

In line with salutogenetic approach, high level of sense of coherence was demonstrated to enable successful coping with the stressors, buffer anxiety,

⁵ R.E. Lucas, A.E. Clark, Y. Georgellis, E. Diener, *Unemployment Alters the Set Point for Life Satisfaction*, s. 8–13.

⁶ P.A. Creed, M. Hood, L.Y. Leung, *The Relationship Between Control, Job Seeking, and Well-Being in Unemployed People*, s. 689–701.

⁷ F. McKee-Ryan, Z. Song, C.R. Wanberg, A.J. Kinicki, *Psychological and Physical Well-Being During Unemployment: A Meta-Analytic Study*, s. 53–76.

⁸ A. Antonovsky, *Unraveling the mystery of health: How people manage stress and stay well*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1987.

depression and perceived pain, bring about positive psychosomatic health outcomes and to be strongly related to satisfaction with life⁹.

In the context of career development, the high sense of coherence may be related to resources mobilization and perseverance in striving for satisfactory career solutions. In fact, high level of sense of coherence was found to be inversely related to negative career thinking¹⁰ and positively related to competence, and satisfaction with work and with life¹¹ suggested that counselors' help in enhancing the sense of coherence of the persons with disabilities may be beneficial to their professional life and their well-being. Therefore, interventions enhancing sense of coherence of the unemployed may in turn also increase their otherwise dropping life satisfaction.

2. System justification

As unemployment is in fact a stressful event¹², belief that things are under control may be related to coping with it and predict adjustment and well-being. Indeed, both personal control defined as contingency and competence¹³ and belief that world is predictable and just¹⁴ serve as buffers against the decline of well-being of the unemployed, also in the post-Communist countries¹⁵. A review of theoretical and empirical analyses regarding the belief that world is just, highlighted its beneficial psychological influence and its buffering effect

⁹ Ibidem; L.J. Jacobsson, M. Westerberg, J.F. Malec, J. Lexell, *Sense of coherence and disability and the relationship with life satisfaction 6–15 years after traumatic brain injury in northern Sweden*, „Neuropsychological Rehabilitation” 2011, nr 21(3), s. 383–400; D.C. Lustig, D.A. Rosenthal, D.R. Strauser, K. Haynes, *The Relationship Between Sense of Coherence and Adjustment in Persons with Disabilities*, „Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin” 2000, nr 43(3), s. 134–141; D.C. Lustig, D.R. Strauser, *The Impact of Sense of Coherence on Career Thoughts for Individuals With Disabilities*, „Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin” 2008, nr 51(3), s. 139–147; L. Findler, K. Shalev, A. Barak, *Psychosocial Adaptation and Adherence Among Adults With CF: A Delicate Balance*, „Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin” 2014, nr 57(2), s. 90–101.

¹⁰ R.K. Austin, A.D. Dahl, B.D. Wagner, *The Roles of Negative Career Thoughts and Sense of Coherence in Predicting Career Decision Status*, „Canadian Journal of Counselling/Revue canadienne de counseling” 2010, nr 44, s. 65–77; D.C. Lustig, D.R. Strauser, *The Impact of Sense of Coherence on Career Thoughts for Individuals With Disabilities*, s. 139–147.

¹¹ R. Kalimo, J. Vuori, *Work and Sense of Coherence—Resources for Competence and Life Satisfaction*, „Behavioral Medicine” 1990, nr 16(2), s. 76–89; D.C. Lustig, D.A. Rosenthal, D.R. Strauser, K. Haynes, *The Relationship Between Sense of Coherence and Adjustment in Persons with Disabilities*, „Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin” 2000, nr 43(3), s. 134–141.

¹² F. McKee-Ryan, Z. Song, C.R. Wanberg, A.J. Kinicki, *Psychological and Physical Well-Being During Unemployment: A Meta-Analytic Study*, s. 53–76.

¹³ P.A. Creed, M. Hood, L.Y. Leung, *The Relationship Between Control, Job Seeking, and Well-Being in Unemployed People*, s. 689–701.

¹⁴ C. Dalbert, *Coping with an unjust fate: The case of structural unemployment*, „Social Justice Research” 1997, nr 10(2), s. 175–189.

¹⁵ J. Dzuka, C. Dalbert, *Mental Health and Personality of Slovak Unemployed Adolescents: The Impact of Belief in a Just World*, „Journal of Applied Social Psychology” 2002, nr 32(4), s. 732–757.

against stress¹⁶, thus treating such beliefs as personal resource that enables coping with difficult situations such as unemployment¹⁷.

However, accumulating evidence suggests that justifying the status quo may in fact be a psychological mechanism allowing to recover the sense of control when experiencing lack of personal control, lack of resources and low status¹⁸. Belief that sociopolitical system is just may serve its palliative function by enhancing life satisfaction and personal happiness, as it gives an easy explanation to perceived social inequalities¹⁹ thus preventing social change.

Paradoxically, according to system justification theory low-status groups' members tend to justify system even more than high-status ones. Therefore, justifying the system rather than motivate individuals to protest and truly increase their well-being, blinds them instead, so they remain in their lower status positions. "People who suffer the most from a given state of affairs are paradoxically the least likely to question, challenge, reject, or change it"²⁰. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that those who lack personal control would be more likely to seek control in justifying the social system, but with increasing sense of control, this tendency should be reduced.

3. Social competence

Baron and Markman²¹ suggest that in the context of professional activity high social skills influence the quality of social interactions and enable individuals to expand their social networks thus enhancing the success probability. And as social skills can be enhanced through appropriate training, those who participate in them may greatly benefit in the professional field, especially financially²². In fact, training social skills, as evidenced by the results of the meta-analyses of the interventions for children and youth, can in

¹⁶ A. Furnham, *Belief in a just world: research progress over the past decade*, „Personality and Individual Differences” 2003, 34(5), s. 795–817.

¹⁷ C. Dalbert, *Coping with an unjust fate: The case of structural unemployment*, s. 175–189; A. Furnham, *Belief in a just world: research progress over the past decade*, s. 795–817.

¹⁸ J.T. Jost, M.R. Banaji, B.A. Nosek, *A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo*, „Political Psychology” 2004, nr 25(6), s. 881–919; J.T. Jost, O. Hunyady, *The psychology of system justification and the palliative function of ideology*, „European Review of Social Psychology” 2002, nr 13, s. 111–153.

¹⁹ J. Napier, J.T. Jost, *Why are Conservatives happier than liberals?*, „Psychological Science” 2008, nr 19(6), s. 565–572.

²⁰ J.T. Jost, B.W. Pelham, O. Sheldon, B. Ni Sullivan, *Social inequality and the reduction of ideological dissonance on behalf of the system: evidence of enhanced system justification among the disadvantaged*, „European Journal of Social Psychology” 2003, nr 33(1), s. 13.

²¹ R.A. Baron, G.D. Markman, *Beyond social capital: How social skills can enhance entrepreneurs' success*, „The Academy of Management Executive” 2000, nr 14(1), s. 106–116.

²² R.A. Baron, G.D. Markman, *Beyond social capital: the role of entrepreneurs' social competence in their financial success*, „Journal of Business Venturing” 2003, nr 18(1), s. 41–60.

fact be effective²³ and beneficial²⁴, also in the professional context²⁵. Therefore, providing unemployed persons with training enhancing their competence might bring about a wide array of psychological benefits.

We hypothesize that social skills training empowers unemployed individuals by enhancing sense of coherence and decreasing system justification, overall preventing a decline in life satisfaction. In more detail, we predict that training social skills enhances satisfaction with life which otherwise would drop, as it is a common consequence of a long-term unemployment. Higher level of social skills makes the social interactions smoother, more effective, and more satisfactory for both sides. Therefore, we expect that training social competence will not only prevent a decline in life satisfaction, but that it will also enhance it. Moreover, we predict that the effect of enhanced social skills on satisfaction with life is mediated through the sense of coherence, the crucial factor in buffering the stress of daily life and shaping satisfaction with life. More satisfactory and effective social interactions stemming from enhanced social skills might increase feelings of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness, and in turn increase life satisfaction. Current psychological literature suggests that also belief in just system might be perceived as a resource enabling more efficient coping with unemployment. But on the other hand, system justification may stem from the lack of personal control, lack of resources and low status, and therefore enhancing social competence may in fact decrease system justification.

In order to disentangle these effects, we conducted a longitudinal-experimental study, in which we measured beliefs and life satisfaction at two time points in two groups of unemployed persons, one undergoing an extensive training of social skills, and other serving as a control group.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

Participants were 80 persons (56 women) aged from 19 to 57 ($M=33.70$; $SD=10.76$) who had been unemployed at the moment the program was launched. Participants were recruited via Social Welfare Centre in Plock, Poland.

²³ M.M. Quinn, K.A. Kavale, S.R. Mathur, R.B. Rutherford, S.R. Forness, *A Meta-Analysis of Social Skill Interventions for Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders*, „Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders” 1999, nr 7(1), s. 54–64.

²⁴ J. Durlak, R. Weissberg, M. Pachan, *A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents*, „American Journal of Community Psychology” 2010, nr 45(3–4), s. 294–309.

²⁵ R.G. Heimberg, J. Cunningham, J. Stanley, R. Blankenberg, *Preparing Unemployed Youth for Job Interviews: A Controlled Evaluation of Social Skills Training*, „Behavior Modification” 1982, nr 6(3), s. 299–322.

4.2. Design and Procedure

The design was longitudinal-experimental. Forty unemployed persons were randomly selected among the eligible candidates to participate in the trainings (intervention group with social competence training) and those who were not selected formed the control group (with no intervention, N=40). All the participants were asked to fill the questionnaires twice: before the training had begun for the intervention group and again after 8 months. The intervention group met for eight months, three times a week for three hours. The program covered both practical exercises and lectures on social competence and interpersonal relations. Participants were taught self-presentation techniques, assertiveness, etc., and how to use those skills in their everyday life, especially when applying for the job. The training was divided into parts focused on various social competences: assertiveness, teamwork skills, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, negotiating and conflict resolution, self-presentation techniques, and creativity. Each part was preceded by a short lecture presenting the role of a certain social skill in social relations. Then participants were presented with dvd clips showing socially desirable behaviors in various contexts, such as job interviews, workplace negotiations, self-presentation to a potential employer. Participants were then asked to discuss the situation and behavior of individuals presented in each clip. They were then encouraged to define the social skill behind the presented behavior and to discuss socially desirable behavior in a given context. Social Competence Training was financed by the European Social Fund Human Capital Program (granted to Social Welfare Centre in Plock).

4.3. Measures²⁶

At both Time 1 and Time 2 participants were presented with identical questionnaires including measures of satisfaction with life, sense of coherence, system justification and belief in life as a zero-sum game.

In order to pair participants' answers at Time 1 and at Time 2, participants were asked each time to generate their personal code according to a given rule (two first letters in your mother's name, two first letters in your own name, two last cyphers in your house number, and number of the day you were born).

• **Satisfaction with Life.** Satisfaction with Life was measured using SWLS²⁷.

Participants were asked to read 5 statements (i.e. In most ways my life is close to my ideal) and to respond on 7-point Likert-type scales whether they agreed with those statements (from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree). Both at Time 1 (SWL 1) and at Time 2 (SWL 2) the reliability of the scale was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$ and $.91$ accordingly).

²⁶ In order not to violate the anonymity requirements, we did not track information about the changes in the participants' employment status.

²⁷ E. Diener, M.Y. Chan, *Happy People Live Longer: Subjective Well-Being Contributes to Health and Longevity*, s. 1-43.

- **Sense of Coherence.** Sense of Coherence was measured using SOC scale²⁸. Participants were asked to answer 29 questions regarding comprehensibility (11 questions), manageability (10), and meaningfulness (8) on 7-point Likert scales (differing for various questions). The reliability of the scales was high both at Time 1 (SOC 1) and Time 2 (SOC 2) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ and $.96$ accordingly).
- **System Justification.** Tendency to perceive socio-political system as just was measured using Kay's and Jost's²⁹ scale. Participants were asked to respond to 8 statements on 7-point Likert scales (from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree). The reliability of the scales was high, at Time 1 (SJ 1) Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$ and at Time 2 (SJ 2) $\alpha = .91$.
- **Belief in Life as a Zero-Sum Game.** Belief in Life as a Zero-Sum Game was measured using scale by Różycka-Tran, Boski, & Wojciszke³⁰. Participants were asked to respond to 10 statements on 7-point Likert scales (from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree) The reliability of the scales was unsatisfactory both at Time 1 and Time 2 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .51$ and $.68$ accordingly) and therefore these scales were skipped in the analyses described below.

5. Results

5.1. Change in Satisfaction with Life (SWL)

A 2 (group) x 2 (satisfaction) MANOVA with repeated measurement on the last factor showed significant main effects of the group, $F(1,78)=34.20$; $p < .001$; and satisfaction, $F(1, 78)=9.48$; $p < .01$. Importantly, these effects were qualified by the significant interaction effect, $F(1, 78)=39.79$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2=0.33$. As illustrated in Figure 1, pairwise comparisons showed that although at the beginning the intervention and control groups did not differ ($MI=3.65$, $SD=1.18$; $MC=3.58$, $SD=1.34$), satisfaction with life significantly decreased in the control group ($MC=2.01$, $SD=.72$; $p < .001$) and significantly increased in the intervention group ($MI=4.18$, $SD=1.20$; $p < .05$). As a result, satisfaction at Time 2 in the control group was significantly lower than in the intervention group ($t(78)=9.81$; $p < .001$).

²⁸ A. Antonovsky, *Unraveling the mystery of health...*

²⁹ A.C. Kay, J.T. Jost, *Complementary Justice: Effects of „Poor but Happy” and „Poor but Honest” Stereotype Exemplars on System Justification and Implicit Activation of the Justice Motive*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2003, nr 85(5), s. 823–837.

³⁰ J. Różycka-Tran, P. Boski, B. Wojciszke, *Wiara w grę o sumie zerowej jako aksjomat społeczny: badanie w 37 krajach*, *Psychologia Społeczna* 2014, nr 9, s. 92–109.

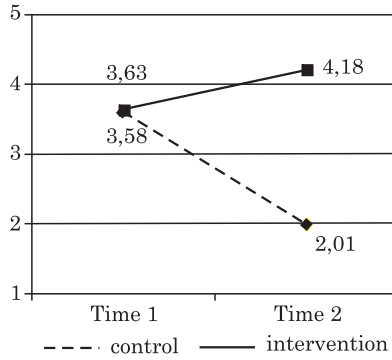


Figure 1. Impact of Intervention on Satisfaction with Life of the Unemployed

5.2. Change in Sense of Coherence (SOC)

A similar 2 (group) x 2 (sense of coherence) MANOVA with repeated measurement on the last factor showed significant main effects of the group, $F(1,78)=54.69; p<.001$; and sense of coherence, $F(1, 78)=4.35; p<.05$. Again, these effects were qualified by the significant and strong interaction effect, $F(1,78)=65.85; p<.001; \eta^2=.45$. Pairwise comparisons showed a similar pattern as before. At the beginning the intervention and control groups did not differ ($MI=4.65, SD=.73; MC=4.54, SD=.74$), after 8 months sense of coherence decreased in control group ($MC=3.50, SD=.61; p<.001$) and increased in the intervention group ($MI=5.26, SD=.81; p<.001$) (Figure 2). As a result, sense of coherence at Time 2 in the control group was significantly lower than in the intervention group ($t(78)=11,00; p<.001$).

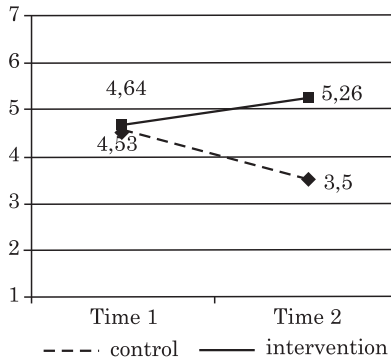


Figure 2. Impact of Intervention on Sense of Coherence of the Unemployed

5.3. Change in System Justification (SJ)

A similar 2 (group) x 2 (system justification) MANOVA with repeated measurement on the last factor showed a significant main effect of the group, $F(1, 78)=10.23$; $p<.01$; but not of the perception of the system, $F(1, 78)=1.83$; $p>.05$. Again, the interaction effect was significant, $F(1,78)=5.84$; $p<.05$; $\eta^2=.07$. This time pairwise comparisons showed that at the beginning the intervention and control groups did not differ ($MI=3.28$, $SD=.97$; $MC=3.05$, $SD=.83$), and system perception as just did not change in the control group ($MC=2.93$, $SD=.80$; $p<.001$), but it increased in the intervention group ($MI=3.72$, $SD=.92$; $p<.01$) (Figure 3). As a result, system justification at Time 2 in the control group was significantly lower than in the intervention group ($t(78)=4.12$; $p<.001$).

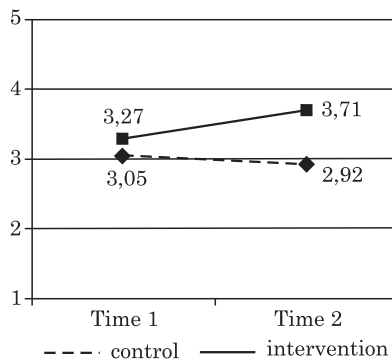


Figure 3. Impact of Intervention on System Justification among the Unemployed

5.4. Mediational Model of Impact of Training on Satisfaction With Life

We tested the hypothesized model using AMOS. We hypothesized that the relations between the variables measured at Time 1 (SOC1, SJ1, and SWL1) were the same as between the variables measured at Time 2 (SOC2, SJ2, and SWL2), and that the intervention caused the change in these variables at Time 2, but that it did not affect the relations between them. Therefore, we put 3 constraints on this model – paths between SWL, SOC and SJ were kept constant at Time 1 and 2 – and then we tested it against the model in which these paths were free parameters.

The model without constraints had a good fit ($\chi^2(6)=4.05$; $df=9$; $p=.67$; $CFI=1.00$; $RMSEA=.00$). The constrained model also had a good fit ($\chi^2(9)=8.87$; $df=9$; $p=.45$; $CFI=1.00$; $RMSEA=.00$), and the χ^2 difference between model without constraints and the constrained model was insignificant ($\Delta\chi^2(3)=4.815$; $p>.05$), and CFI and $RMSEA$ indicators of the constrained model dropped less than .001 in comparison to the model with no constraints. These results indicate that the model with constraints is well-fitted to the data, and that the relations

between the variables measured at Time 1 (SOC1, SJ1, and SWL1) were the same as between the variables measured at Time 2 (SOC2, SJ2, and SWL2). These results show that after controlling for the initial levels of satisfaction with life, sense of coherence and perception of the system as just, the training of social competences significantly increased satisfaction with life (although it did not affect the relations between the sense of coherence, system perception and satisfaction with life).

As illustrated in Figure 4, there was a significant direct effect of intervention on satisfaction with life. Importantly, the positive impact of social competence training on satisfaction was mediated by both increased sense of coherence and decreased perception of system as just. The total effects of intervention on satisfaction with life, sense of coherence and system justification were positive as showed by the results of a series of ANOVAs. But when sense of coherence was controlled for, the direct effect of intervention on system justification was negative. This result shows that intervention as predicted decreased system-justifying beliefs directly, but enhanced sense of coherence suppressed this effect.

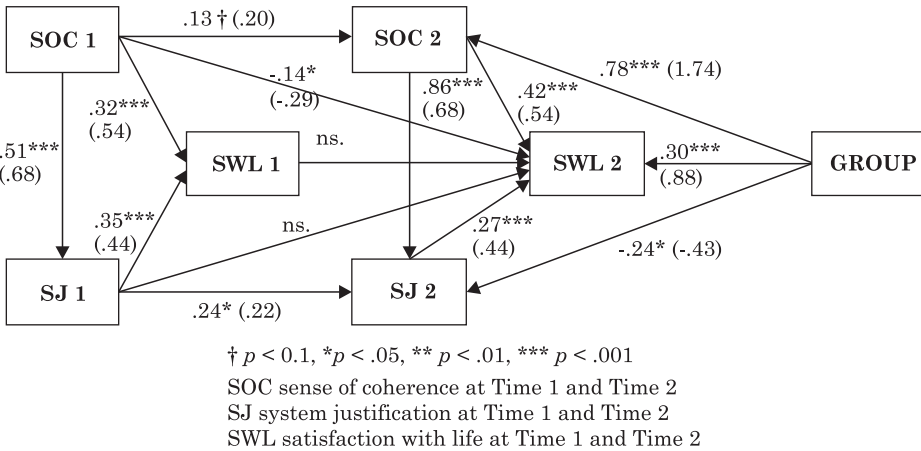


Figure 4. Mediation Model of Impact of Intervention on Satisfaction With Life

6. Discussion

The results of the longitudinal experimental study showed that training the social competence of the unemployed may be effective in preventing the otherwise significant decline in their satisfaction with life and in enhancing satisfaction with life. Previous research showed that unemployment “scars”, bringing about negative mental, health, and social consequences, and that structural factors do not prevent the decline in well-being. The results of the research presented here showed that social psychological interventions may

be effective in preventing this decline. Social skills training not only prevented the otherwise predictable decrease in satisfaction with life of the unemployed, but in fact it enhanced this satisfaction, partially due to the increased sense of coherence. These unemployed who participated in the intervention have experienced significant and high increase in coherence that in turn has led to increase in satisfaction with life.

Interestingly, when all other variables were controlled, intervention decreased the system justification. In line with previous theorizing and research, system justification in itself had the palliative function³¹, increasing subjective well-being. However, it is worth noting that the system justifying beliefs were also influenced indirectly through changes in the sense of coherence. However, contrary to the predictions, the higher levels of sense of coherence were associated positively with system justification, both at Time 1 and Time 2. Consequently, these results suggest that the sense of coherence enhanced through the intervention affected positively system legitimizing beliefs. This finding contradicts system justification theory, but is in line with contemporary research showing that those who are disadvantaged do not legitimize the system to a higher extent³². This study also complements previous research on just world beliefs as a resource enabling coping with unemployment³³, showing that system justification is not only positively associated with satisfaction with life, what may be interpreted as a palliative function of system justifying beliefs, but it is also positively associated with sense of coherence.

It has to be noted however, that this particular intervention was an intensive and costly one, and at the same time requiring a certain level of time-investment and effort from the unemployed. As a result, the mere intensity of the program rather than its curriculum may have produced the beneficial results presented here. Unemployed persons who undergone such an intensive training program might have perceived themselves as persons who are regarded as significant by others, for whom others care, and these factors (not controlled in this study) might have been responsible for the observed beneficial changes among the intervention group. Alternatively, the investment of time and effort in the course partaking might have been the underlying mechanism that resulted in participants reporting higher levels of life satisfaction.

Moreover, when trainings take part within the groups, the observations are not independent. Treating them as independent might increase Type 1 error rates³⁴. In the research presented here only one group participated in the

³¹ J. Napier, J.T. Jost, *Why are Conservatives happier than liberals?*, s. 565–572.

³² M.J. Brandt, *Do the disadvantaged legitimize the social system? A large-scale test of the status-legitimacy hypothesis*, „Journal of Personality and Social Psychology” 2013, nr 104(5), s. 765–785.

³³ C. Dalbert, *Coping with an unjust fate: The case of structural unemployment*, s. 175–189; A. Furnham, *Belief in a just world: research progress over the past decade*, s. 795–817.

³⁴ S.A. Baldwin, D.M. Murray, W.R. Shadish, *Empirically supported treatments or type I errors? Problems with the analysis of data from group-administered treatments*, „Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology” 2005, nr 73(5), s. 924–935

training, and corrections for nested data could not have been made. Therefore, although this study showed strong beneficial effects, they should be treated as preliminary.

Nevertheless, these results show that even if unemployment “scars”, significantly decreasing the well-being and quality of life, it does not necessarily have to alter the set-point, provided social and psychological interventions were delivered. Greater satisfaction with life was demonstrated to have vital consequences for health and longevity³⁵, income³⁶ and major life events such as marriage or having a child³⁷. Therefore, preventing the decline of satisfaction following events like job loss is a task of major social importance. Despite the limitations, the research presented here has important implication for practice, showing the way to improve quality of life among the unemployed. Enhancing social competence of the unemployed may be crucial to prevent a decline in their life satisfaction and enhance the belief in their own abilities to cope with the stressful experience of unemployment.

SUMMARY

Decline of life satisfaction is a common consequence of unemployment together with the negative self-view and lack of personal control. The effectiveness of the training of the social competencies in changing the sense of personal coherence, social beliefs and life satisfaction of the unemployed was probed. Eighty unemployed persons participated in a longitudinal study with a control group. Although the participants did not differ significantly at the beginning of the study, these unemployed persons who participated in the social competencies training reported after 6 months significantly higher sense of personal coherence, more positive vision of social system and enhanced life satisfaction. Unemployed from the control group after 6 months experienced a significant decline in life satisfaction, deterioration of sense of personal coherence and reported more negative vision of social system. The model of impact of social competence training on the change of life satisfaction of the unemployed being mediated by the change of the sense of personal coherence and change in system justification was tested and proved to fit the data. In conclusion, training social competence of unemployed may be crucial to prevent a decline of their life satisfaction and enhance the belief in their own abilities to cope with the stressful experience of being unemployed.

KEY WORDS: satisfaction with life, social competence, sense of personal coherence, social beliefs, unemployment

³⁵ E. Diener, M.Y. Chan, *Happy People Live Longer: Subjective Well-Being Contributes to Health and Longevity*, s. 1–43.

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