



Social predictors of unsuccessful entrance into the labour market—A socialization process perspective

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Abstract

Social determinants over the life course, including childhood family characteristics, were studied in predicting unsuccessful entrance into the labour market at the age of 31 years. Among men, unsuccessful entrance into the labour market was predicted prospectively by the mother's receptive attitude towards receiving social aid and contentment with existing circumstances in early childhood, the family's low social status in adolescence, and low vocational education in early adulthood. Among women, it was predicted prospectively by low school attainment in adolescence and low vocational education in early adulthood, and associated cross-sectionally with having more than two children. Among both genders having a low income, poor subjective health and poor life satisfaction, as well as receiving little social support associated with unsuccessful entrance into the labour market. The results emphasize the role of childhood social factors in preventing long-term unemployment in young adulthood.

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1. Introduction

Socialization into work life can be presumed to start long before entering it. For most people in Europe and in North America, their first contact with work is vicarious: as children they watch and listen to their parents and learn about the world of paid employment. Children's understanding of work and employment is influenced by their parents' employment and economic circumstances (Dickinson & Emler, 1992; Emler & Dickinson, 1993). Between the ages 4 and 11, a child's understanding of the world of work steadily increases (Berti & Bombi, 1988), and from the age of about 7 or 8 years, children can accurately report on their parents' job satisfaction (Abramovitch & Johnson, 1992). Furthermore, there is some evidence that children's perceptions of their parents work attitudes and experiences shape the development of their own work beliefs and attitudes (Barling, 1990, 1991).

A strong job orientation may be a precursor of success in the labour market (Schaufeli, 1993), in addition to more objective precursors like education (Kivinen & Rinne, 1996). The European labour market is still strongly segregated by gender, and this segregation is both vertical and horizontal. For example, men still occupy better-paid jobs and work in different fields of work than women (Siltanen, Jarman, & Blackburn, 1995). The role that work plays in an individual's life is presumed to be different for men and women; for example, married men are still expected to be the main providers of family income (Leonard, 2001). Furthermore, early sex-role socialization influences e.g., preferences for various activities that enhance different skills and personality traits needed later on the labour market (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Mooney-Marini & Brinton, 1984). Thus the predictors for successful entrance into the labour market are expected to differ for men and women.

Poor socio-economic conditions in childhood and a lack of educational qualifications are known to increase the risk of unemployment in young adulthood (Montgomery, Bartley, Cook, & Wadsworth, 1996). Family background, in terms of social resources, strongly affects children's level of achievement and young people's educational career (Kivinen & Rinne, 1996) as well as teenage aspirations for adult occupational attainment (Schoon & Parsons, 2002).

Various researchers have claimed that socialization into work life is still an incompletely understood process and requires further research (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). Childhood antecedents of later vocational behaviors need to be better understood both in relation to career outcomes as well as in relation to their broader impact on psychological well being and quality of life (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2002). Our data allow us to study the predictors of unsuccessful entrance into work life in a prospective setting starting from the mother's pregnancy on, which has not been possible in most studies. In this paper, we study the role of childhood social and material resources (e.g., maternal attitudes, standard of living, and education) from the theoretical perspective of socialization process and cumulation of resources needed on the labour market. We analyse the social factors in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, which predict unsuccessful entrance into the labour market by the age of 31 years. In addition, we examine whether the predictors differ among men and women.

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