

# The experiences and motivation of unemployed people in South Africa: A person- and variable-centred perspective

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# Introduction

- Key in transitioning to employment:
  - well-being (i.e. affective experiences),
  - the value one attaches to employment (i.e. employment commitment)
  - effort that one invests into searching for a job (i.e. job search intensity).
- The reason(s) for searching for a job (i.e. the “why” of job search) are associated with these affective, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes.
- Psychological interventions are therefore both necessary and important for ensuring well-being, but also to ensure that the unemployed remain responsive to opportunities.
- Even more so in countries with a high unemployment rate – yet in South Africa, these interventions are lacking.

## Introduction (cont.)

- Before designing and implementing these interventions, it is essential to know whether the unemployed are one homogeneous group or rather a heterogeneous group consisting of several homogeneous subgroups.
- This knowledge will enable professionals to tailor interventions to the needs and expectations of the different groups, increasing the effectiveness of the interventions.

# Aims

- Explore whether different psychosocial profiles could be identified and whether these profiles are associated with socio-demographic variables;
- Explore whether different motivational profiles could be identified in specific communities in South Africa and whether profiles are associated with differences in affective, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes; and
- The pathways (i.e. psychological need satisfaction and frustration) through which job search motivation influences affective, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes over time.

# Participants

- North West and Gauteng Provinces
- A survey was used and data were collected with the Unemployment Experience, the Self-Regulation: Job Search questionnaires and the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Need Frustration Scale.
- A total of 381 unemployed people participated in the first study.
- The final sample for the second study consisted of 867 unemployed people, 244 of whom participated in the third study

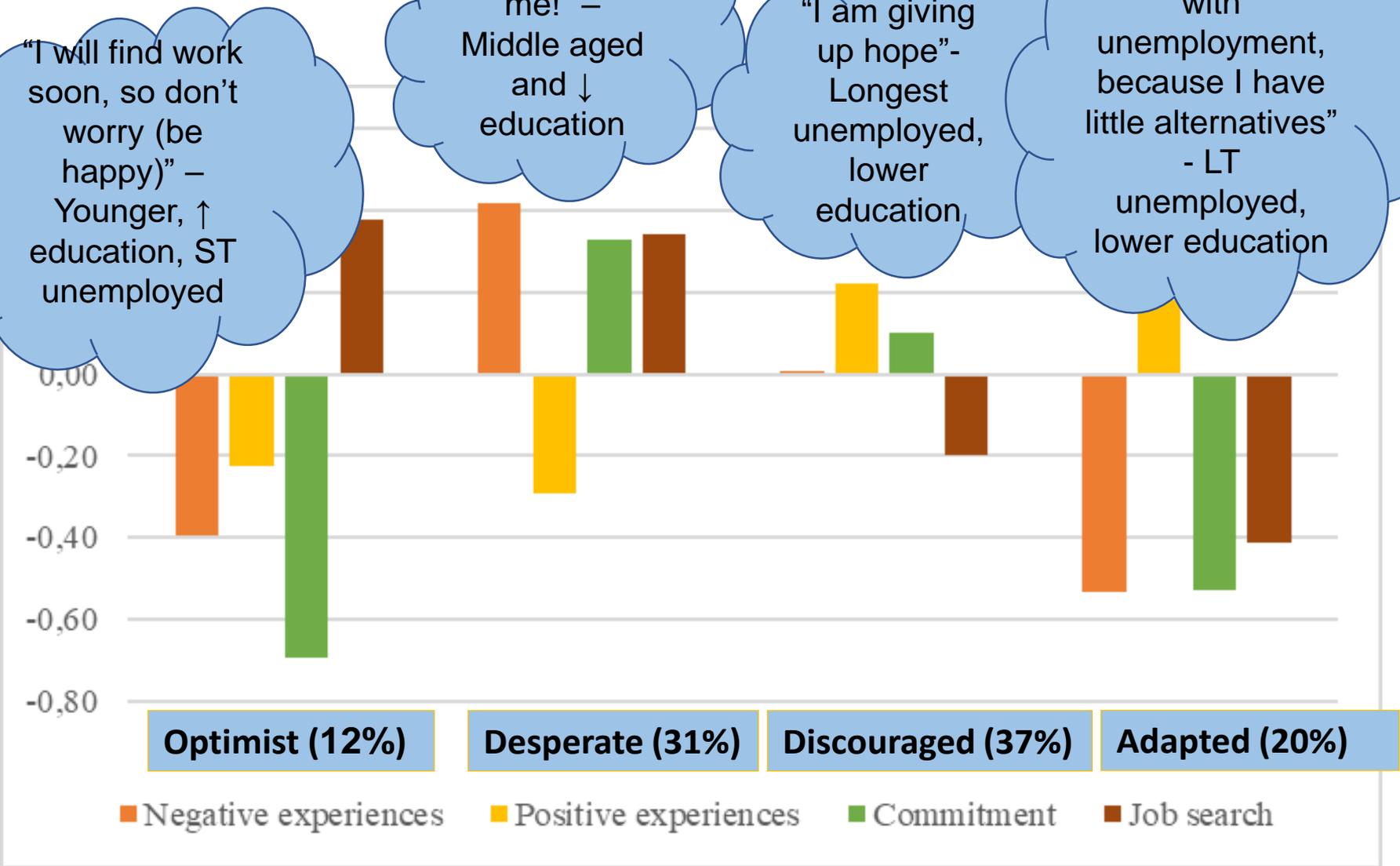
# Results: Study

“I will find work soon, so don't worry (be happy)” – Younger, ↑ education, ST unemployed

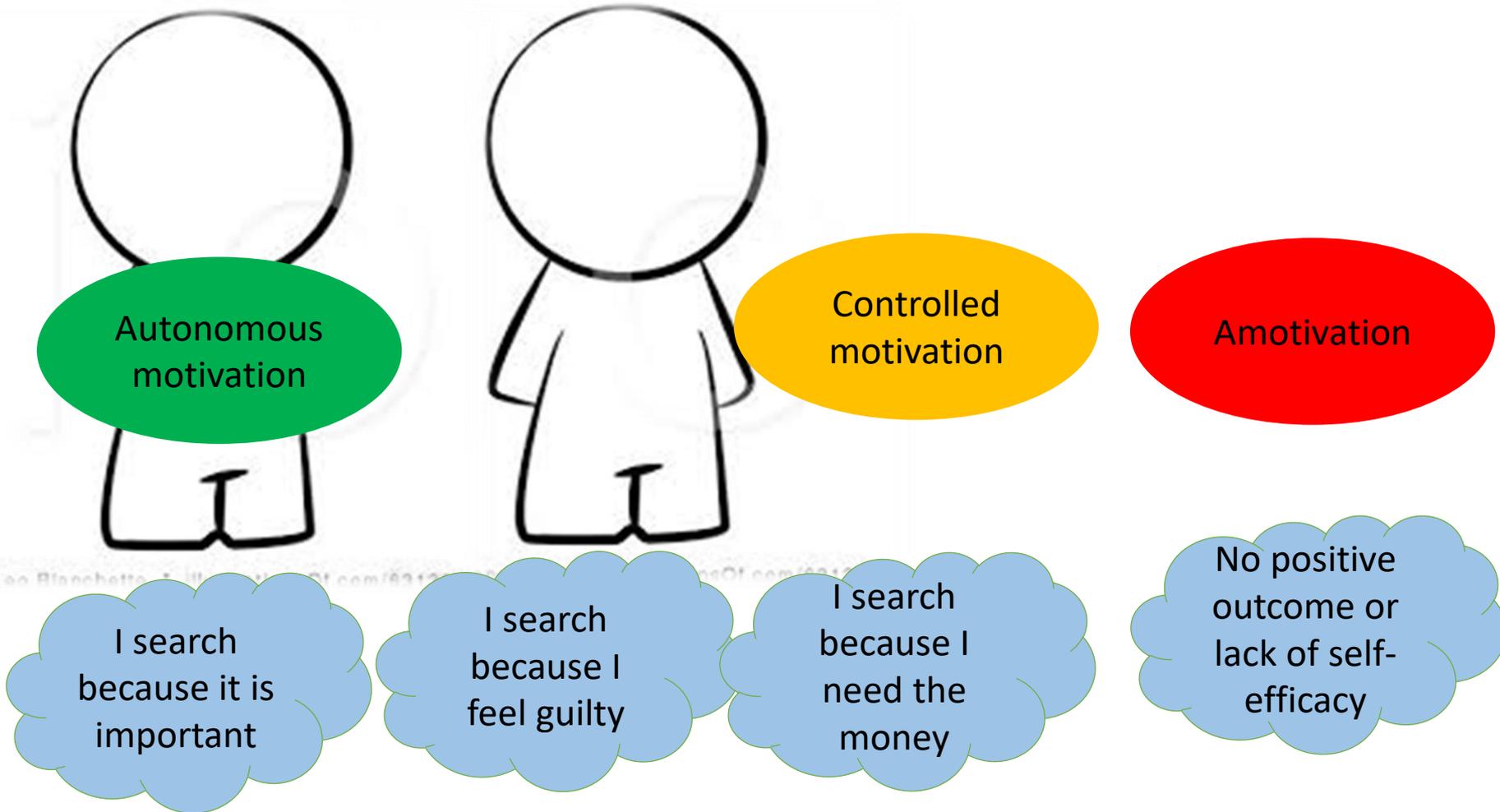
“Please help me!” – Middle aged and ↓ education

“I am giving up hope”- Longest unemployed, lower education

Learned to live with unemployment, because I have little alternatives” - LT unemployed, lower education



# Results: Study 2



Searching  
may help  
me to find  
a job

: Stu

Even if I  
try, it will  
make no  
difference

I have to  
but it is  
also  
important

can't have  
it takes



Identified and not  
amotivated (34%)

Motivated but  
structurally  
impaired (33%)

Undifferentiated  
(10%)

Amotivated  
(23%)

■ Amotivation: Structural

■ Amotivation: Personal

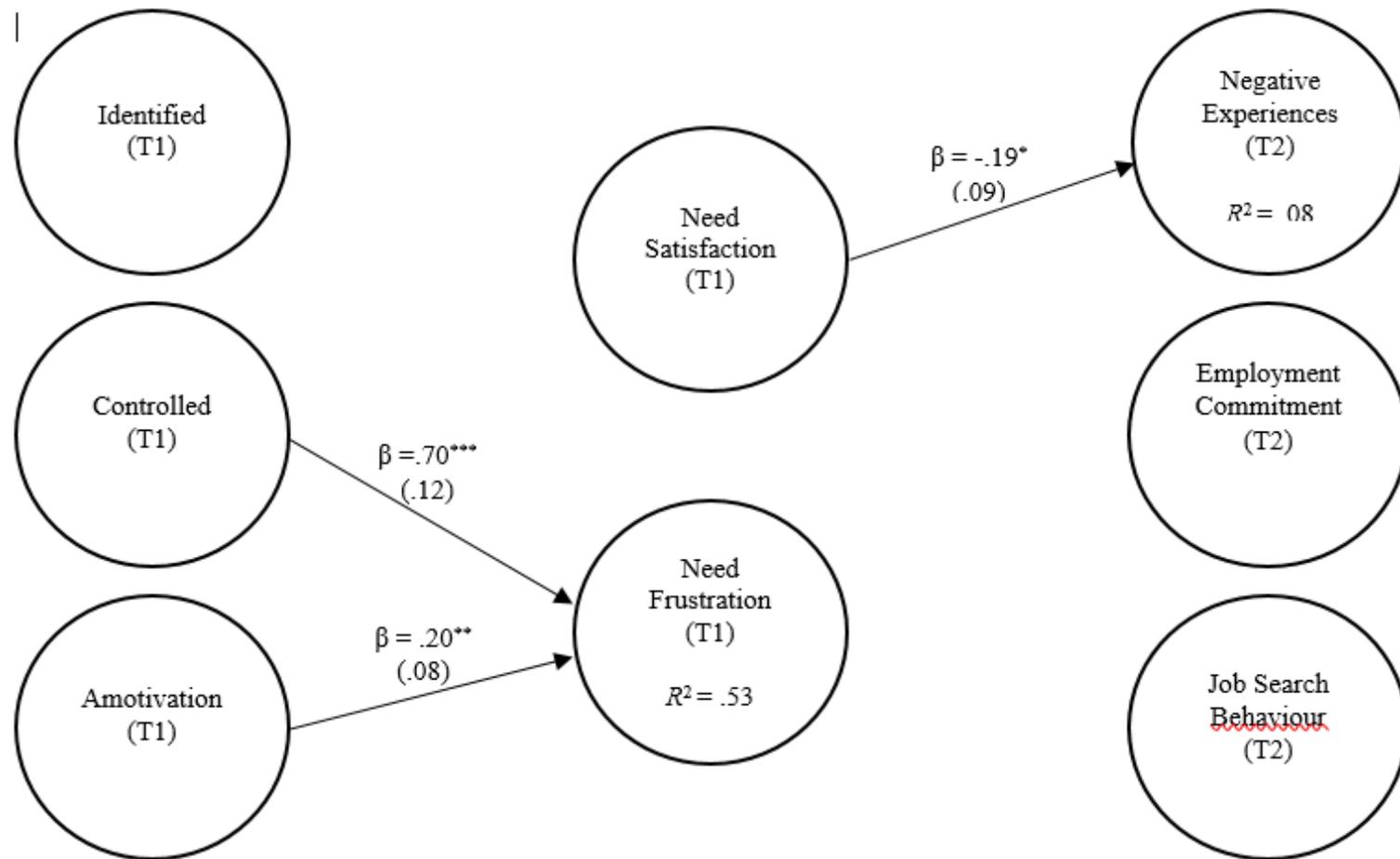
■ Controlled

■ Identified

# Results: Study 2



# Results: Study 3



# Discussion

- “The unemployed” are not one homogenous group by illustrating that four different psychosocial profiles and motivational profiles can be identified.
- The types of unemployed identified – the majority of which are either desperate and discouraged or motivated (but structurally amotivated) and amotivated – illustrate the severity of the psychological consequences of unemployment.

# Discussion (cont.)

The optimists and identified suffer little psychologically and show less commitment to employment, but are nonetheless searching for employment.

The desperate and motivated (but structurally impaired) suffer the most psychologically, show quite some commitment to employment and do search for jobs.

The discouraged and amotivated do not really suffer psychologically, but also seem to attach little value to employment and reflect this in their little effort to search for a job.

The same goes for the adapted and undifferentiated, but they are even less committed and involved in search initiatives.



## Discussion (cont.)

- Theoretically, the motivated (but structurally impaired) and the amotivated should be more at risk for experienced need frustration because both these profiles present with high levels of amotivation.
- The motivated (but structurally impaired) also present with high levels of controlled motivation and are, therefore, most at risk.
- The opposite is true for the identified (and not amotivated) and the undifferentiated.

# Discussion (cont.)

The optimists and identified - more resilient.

The desperate and motivated (but structurally impaired) – psychologically at risk.

The discouraged and amotivated – economic risk.

Adapted and undifferentiated – most at risk from an economic perspective.



# Implications for practice

- Due to the detrimental psychological outcomes for the motivated (but structurally impaired) – and by implication the desperate:
  - interventions focus on reducing amotivation and controlled motivation
- How?
  - This could be achieved by removing the perceived barriers or providing the means by which to overcome these barriers.
  - Such interventions could also assist the amotivated groups to become more responsive.
  - Lowering controlled motivation → removing financial or social pressures, which will benefit the motivated (but structurally impaired).

# Implications for practice

- Given that psychological need satisfaction can lower the negative experiences of the unemployed, interventions should focus on enhancing the satisfaction of the psychological needs.
- Many suggestions were made along this line (see Rocchi, Pelletier, & Desmarais, 2017 and Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, in press).
  - *Autonomy satisfaction* may be enhanced by providing the unemployed with **choice**, a **reason** for performing a particular activity, and **acknowledging** their opinions.
  - Acknowledging unemployed persons' **achievements**, **believing** in them, and giving **positive feedback** would enhance perceived competence.
  - Showing **care**, **warmth** and **genuine interest**, and conveying **unconditional positive regard** for the unemployed would enhance perceived *relatedness*.
- The desperate and motivated (but structurally impaired) can benefit the most from such interventions.

# Implications for practice

- Following the caution not to blindly “activate” the discouraged, adapted, undifferentiated, and Amotivated:
  - job creation and entrepreneurial interventions are recommended in conjunction with psychological interventions to enhance psychological need satisfaction.
- These interventions would also help to create more optimists and identified (and not amotivated).
- Alternatively, the unemployed should be encouraged to participate in other activities that can provide them with a sense of psychological need satisfaction while searching for (self)employment opportunities.

# Conclusion

- Taken together, our results highlight the need for interventions tailored to the needs of different groups as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach.
- It also emphasises the need for combined interventions. Such combinations focus on occupational skills training and psychological interventions and are effective for enhancing psychological well-being.
- These interventions would be more successful if jobs are created or support is provided for self-employment.

**NGiyathokoza!** ro livhuwa!  
dankie! ke a leboga! **enkosi!**  
**inkomu!** thank you! **udo livhuwa!**  
ke a leboha! **ngiyabonga!**  
**siyabonga!**

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<http://www.optentia.co.za/project.php?id=MQ%3D%3D>