

Burnout without a job: An explorative study on a sample of Italian unemployed jobseekers

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Abstract

Background: Search for work is in itself a job and its outcomes are similar to those of job burnout: it can generate feelings of exhaustion, detachment from the commitment to research, and a sense of ineffectiveness. The aim of the present study is to investigate the construct of burnout within the category of long-term unemployed people engaged in job search activity.

Design and methods: The study has a cross-sectional, descriptive, and exploratory nature. Two hundred eight Italian unemployed jobseekers compiled an adaptation of the OCS Burnout scale, by Maslach and Leiter. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to investigate the psychometric features of the instrument. The relations between the instrument and age and months of job search variables were assessed through Spearman's Rho coefficient of co-graduation. Finally, a MANOVA was carried out.

Results: The questionnaire is able to intercept and describe the dimensions of respondents' burnout with respect to four dimensions: Exhaustion, Disengagement, Effectiveness in job search, Disillusion. Correlation analysis shows that the duration of the job search period has a positive relationship with Exhaustion, Disillusion, and Disengagement; a negative relationship with Effectiveness in job search. Finally, MANOVA shows that older unemployed people rate themselves less effective in job searching and more exhausted, compared to younger unemployed people.

Conclusions: The psychosocial effects of job search on the unemployed are still little studied, and this research, through the construct of burnout, proposes a comprehensive and articulated key to its understanding.

Keywords

Job burnout, unemployment, jobseeker, psychosocial risk, psychosocial well-being, measurement

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Introduction

Unemployment is a relevant public health issue. In Europe, especially in the years following the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2007,¹ unemployment reached ever greater levels, and had a constant upward trend. Specifically, in the working population group (15–64 years old), the peak was in 2013, with 10.8% unemployed. Subsequently, in 2019, the trend reversed, and the unemployment rate stabilized at 6.3%. However, the trend has a great diversification among different countries. Italy peaked in 2014 with an unemployment level of 12.7%, and

has been characterised by a slow recovery, with unemployment rates still as high as 10% in 2019.²

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In this scenario, from the first months of 2020, the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic started to impact, leading to an overall resumption of the growth trend of unemployment.³ The effects of the pandemic on unemployment continue to unfold. In addition to the measures agreed at European level,⁴ the Italian government initially implemented several measures to counter unemployment, such as a freeze on dismissals and measures to support the many workers and companies affected by the pandemic.⁵ However, due also to difficulties in accessing some of the forms of support, for some specific job categories and forms of enterprise, the estimated impact of the pandemic on unemployment remained high. In addition, the proportion of unemployed people is expected to further increase, and it will affect a proportion of the population that is currently inactive, due to the restrictions still in place and to the climate of insecurity that characterises the current world of work.⁶

Generally speaking, unemployment has important consequences on both socio-economic and psychological levels, as well as on people's health and well-being. As regards health consequences, the most frequently seen in the literature fall into a few categories. The first concerns distress symptoms: suicide risk, psychiatric disorders, depression, anxiety, apathy, mood swings, demoralisation, frustration, anger, irritability, guilt, inadequacy, worry, pessimism, despair, difficulty in concentrating, loneliness, isolation.⁷

Physical symptoms related to unemployment include cardiovascular, immunological, gastrointestinal, respiratory and biochemical disorders, asthenia, headaches, eating, sleeping and sexual disturbances.⁸

Unemployment also has important social consequences: it causes an increase in the rate of separations and divorces and a fall in the birth rate, as well as an increase in crime and in the use of alcohol, drugs, and narcotics.⁹

Psychological studies focussing on the consequences of unemployment have found a reduction of self-esteem and self-efficacy, of satisfaction with one's life and with themselves, of levels of aspirations, and a loss of sense of identity, status, and sense of purpose. McKee-Ryan et al.⁸ found that during unemployment, job centrality negatively relates to mental health and life satisfaction, while social undermining and financial strain negatively relate to individual well-being. According to the authors, possessing good coping strategies, financial resources, and social support, and using time in a structured way all positively relate to the well-being of the unemployed. Moreover, their negative assessments of job loss negatively affect their well-being, while positive expectations for future re-employment are linked to greater well-being. However, active engagement in job search negatively relates to mental health: the job search experience is stressful. Finally, McKee-Ryan et al.⁸ show that unemployment protection benefits do not relate significantly, and do not protect against the negative effects of unemployment. This suggests that the decline in well-being is not only due to financial deprivation, but that

the quality of work, and the value people ascribe to it, are also very important factors. As a confirmation of this, in their study, Kossen and McIlveen¹⁰ interpret unemployment as being deprived of decent work. The main predictor considered by the authors is marginalisation, which leads to a decrease in aspirations and access to decent work, and structurally limits social mobility, with negative psychological effects at different levels, including reduced educational opportunities for families. From this perspective, high self-efficacy¹¹ can paradoxically become an obstacle. Indeed, if the socio-economic context is unresponsive to the aspirations and to the commitment of the unemployed, there is a risk that these will become unsuccessful and frustrating. Furthermore, a high volition¹² increases the chances of finding a job, but if one is unable to access a decent job for a prolonged period of time, this has a negative impact on optimism and volition itself. Finally, being unemployed decreases the feeling of control in terms of agency.^{10,11} Other studies have analysed unemployment in relation to some dimensions of Psychological Capital (PsyCap).¹³ For example, Merino et al.¹⁴ found that among unemployed people, eustress positively relates to environmental mastery, vitality, and resilience, while distress negatively relates to environmental mastery and optimism. Fernández-Valera et al.¹⁵ focussed on the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between unemployment duration and psychological distress. Indeed, if the unemployed are able to generate or maintain psychological resources, such as self-efficacy, they can protect themselves from the consequences of unemployment, and mitigate negative psychological processes that can lead to a decline in their level of health. Ultimately, according to the authors, maintaining appropriate beliefs about one's own resources and work capacity increases the intention to seek work, and prevents unemployment from having a negative impact on the health of the unemployed.

Several authors have pointed out that the search for work is in itself a job¹⁶⁻¹⁸ which can generate feelings of fatigue and exhaustion of psychophysical energies, a sense of detachment, disinvestment from the commitment to research and, over time, experiences of ineffectiveness of one's efforts, leading to disillusion. This process and its outcomes are similar to those of job burnout.

Burnout is one of the most studied work syndromes over the last 40 years, in the tertiary and social-health contexts, and has been recently included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases¹⁹ as an occupational phenomenon. It is not classified as a medical condition and is defined as a chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by three dimensions: (a) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; (b) increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativity and cynicism related to one's job; (c) reduced professional efficacy. Maslach et al.²⁰ defined it as a syndrome characterised by emotional exhaustion, cynicism,

and a reduced personal sense of accomplishment. It is a reaction to the chronic emotional strain arising from working with people who are in need, or who have particular problems. It is a specific form of work-related stress in which the main stressor is the relationship with the person in need of help.

In the last two decades, a conception of burnout as an organisational pathology related more broadly to service work has emerged. More recently, this syndrome has been framed within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model of job stress,^{21,22} according to which organisational contexts are fundamentally characterized by the co-presence of job demands (e.g. time pressure, inadequate physical environment, workload) and job resources (e.g. control over one's work, participation, perception of organisational support). In this model, burnout is a result of the combination of excessive job demands (leading to exhaustion) and inadequate job resources (leading to job disengagement). In light of this, some authors have reiterated the importance of vocational aspects.^{23,24} They have identified, in addition to the three dimensions already mentioned, disillusion: this, as seen, was already in the defining models of Edelwich and colleagues, and of Pines, Aronson et al.,^{25,26} according to which it is necessary to consider the meaning that work has, on an existential level, in terms of the worker's role in society and of the very meaning of one's life. Thus, disillusion in burnout embodies attrition and, in the most severe cases, the destruction of vocational ideals and of job expectations.

In recent years, research on burnout has further broadened in its range of interest, and now includes very different fields of application, such as burnout in students,²⁷ in athletes²⁸ and in volunteers.²⁶

The consequences of job burnout most frequently found in literature can be ascribed to the different phases of this phenomenon, which, in principle, follow one another in time. In the exhaustion phase there is a collapse of psychophysical energies with symptoms typical of anxiety-depressive states, such as high resistance to engage in an activity, apathy, demoralisation, difficulty in concentrating, despair, nightmares, mood alteration, irritability, feelings of inadequacy, guilt, frustration, and sense of failure.^{20,21} The stage of cynicism is characterized by a drop in motivation and progressive decline in the quality of one's commitment, detachment, and lack of emotional involvement, resulting in an uncaring or hostile attitude towards others, as well as pessimism.^{26,29} In the inefficacy stage, the worker experiences a drop in self-esteem, a lack of personal and professional accomplishment, no confidence in their own abilities and resources, a perception of inadequacy and incompetence, diminished desire for success, and feelings of loss of control of one's own life.^{30,31}

Some authors have previously highlighted how the construct of burnout can be used to describe the psychological

process of job loss and unemployment. For example, Amundson and Borgen^{16,32} described the emotional 'roller coaster' one can experience, after suffering job loss, in searching for a new job. In their studies, job burnout is read through the lens of Edelwich and Brodsky and Pines et al.'s model.^{23,24} Also these authors argue that job search is a job in itself, and emphasise that, after the grieving phase resulting from job loss, people invest their energies, enthusiasm and (sometimes unrealistic) expectations in looking for a new job. However, if the search goes on unsuccessfully over time, unemployed people experience stagnation, frustration, and anger, sometimes leading to alcohol and drug abuse. Finally, if the search is still unsuccessful, unemployed people experience a state of apathy, during which they spend a minimal amount of time looking for work and engage in a negative spiral of low energy and self-confidence.¹⁶ Lim et al.³³ analysed the relationship between financial strain, marginalisation, and PsyCap in relation to fatigue during job searches by unemployed people. The results show that, with regard to unemployment, financial strain positively relates to fatigue, as people have to split their resources into two different coping strategies: one aimed at finding the new job, and one focussed on managing the difficulties of the moment. Also marginalisation positively relates to fatigue. In fact, social contacts play an instrumental role in relation to the job search, as well as being a function of emotional support and regulation of leisure time. These effects, caused by social contacts, mitigate fatigue. Lastly, Psychological Capital, being a personal resource that provides the energy needed to cope with job search activities, negatively relates to fatigue.

What has been argued so far shows that it is plausible to use the construct of job burnout as a framework for understanding the psychological experience of unemployed people. However, there is scant scientific literature on this key to interpreting unemployment.

Aims of the study: to investigate the construct of job burnout within the category of long-term unemployed people engaged in job search activity. This aim is divided into two specific objectives:

1. Evaluate the factorial structure, the psychometric features, and the reliability of the adopted version of the instrument to the target sample of long-term unemployed jobseekers (i.e. an adaptation of job burnout/engagement scale, by Leiter and Maslach³⁴);
2. Describe the relationship between job burnout and some socio-demographic variables related to long-term unemployment and job-seeking, assessing the criterion-oriented validity (i.e. whether the instrument subscale scores correlate with age, months of job search), and assessing if it can adequately discriminate between known groups (i.e. referring to gender).

Method

The proposed study is cross-sectional, descriptive, exploratory, and quantitative in nature. The data collection took place during the first 2 months of 2020 (just before the first lockdown occurred in Italy due to the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic), through a research protocol divided in two parts: the first contains a job burnout/engagement scale adapted to the context of long-term unemployment, the second includes a section on socio-demographic data.

Participants

The sample was recruited, on a voluntary basis, among the users of three Employment Centres of Sardinia (Italy). In total, 208 questionnaires were collected. There were 89 male participants (42.79%) and 119 females (57.21%). The age range was from 18 to 63 years, with 16.5% aged between 18 and 25, 34% aged between 26 and 35, 24.8% aged between 36 and 45, 18.4% aged between 46 and 55, and 6.3% aged 56 or older. The level of educational qualification ranged from primary or secondary school (24.3%), to 50% with a high school diploma, 5.8% with a bachelor's degree, and 19.9% with a first level master or a higher qualification (second level masters or PhD). The average duration of the job search was 37 months (SD=56 months). The study was authorised by the Ethics Committee of the University of Cagliari (approval number 0179701, dated 25 August 2021).

Instruments

The questionnaire used is an adaptation of the 16 items of the OCS (Occupational Check-up System) job burnout/engagement scale of Leiter and Maslach³⁴ to the target sample. The items were modified as minimally as possible compared to the Italian version of the instrument, mainly by replacing the wording 'my job' with 'job search'. The original instrument was able to return the workers' health status, with regard to the three dimensions, namely 'Exhaustion', 'Cynicism', and 'Job efficacy' (in this study renamed 'Effectiveness in Job Search'), of job burnout/engagement. The adapted instrument was intended to achieve the same result regarding the health status of job-seekers. The items featured a 7-point Likert scale, which expressed how often (from 0 to 6, i.e. from 'Never' to 'Daily') one experiences the situation indicated by each of the 16 assertions.

The second part of the questionnaire collected the socio-personal variables: gender, age, nationality, educational qualification, profession, or professional field sought, and job search time.

Data analyses

A quantitative approach was applied in order to investigate the psychometric features of the instrument, regarding

their administration to a sample of long-standing unemployed jobseekers. We performed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), applying Robust Diagonally Weighted Least Squares method (RDWLS), with robust promin rotation, starting from the polychoric correlation matrix. The optimal implementation of parallel analysis was used for identifying the number of factors to retain.³⁵ The reliability of each factor was computed by the ORION index (acronym for 'Overall Reliability of fully-Informative prior Oblique N-EAP scores').³⁶

These analyses were carried out by the software FACTOR (released 12.01.02)^{37,38}; this open-source package outfits traditional EFA procedures, incorporating recent developments for their application (e.g. robust methods for ordinal data).

The relations between scale and other socio-demographic variables (age, months of job search variables) were assessed through the application of Spearman's Rho coefficient of co-graduation. Finally, a Factorial Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was carried out to assess if independent grouping variables (in our case gender and the level of age—under 40 years old/over 40 years old) explain a statistically significant amount of variance in the questionnaire scales.³⁹ These latter analyses were carried out by the open source software JASP.⁴⁰

Results

First, we carried out the EFA. Results from parallel analysis suggested the retention of four latent factors. The final solution of the EFA showed that these four factors explained 67.73% of the variance. The reliability was good for all factors ($F1=0.889$; $F2=0.955$; $F3=0.937$; $F4=0.0817$) (see Table 1).

The Spearman's Rho coefficient of co-graduation was computed between dimensions and socio-demographic variables: age, months of job search (Table 2).

Then, a Factorial Multivariate Analysis of Variance was applied to evaluate the differences in the means of questionnaire scales, regarding the gender and age (under 40 years old/over 40 years old). This analysis showed a significant multivariate principal effect of the variable 'age', (Wilk's Lambda=0.914; $df=4$; 201, $p<0.001$), but not for the variable 'gender' or for the interaction 'gender'*'age'.

Then, the univariate tests applied highlighted a significant effect for the scale of 'Effectiveness in Job Search' ($F=6.348$, $df=1$; 204, $p=0.013$; Partial Eta²=0.030), in which older participants (over 40 years old, mean=3.50; standard error=0.11) obtained a lower score than younger participants (mean=3.89; standard error=0.09).

A significant univariate effect was observed also for the scale of 'Exhaustion' ($F=9.908$, $df=1$; 204, $p=0.002$; Partial Eta²=0.047), in which participants aged 40 or more had higher scores (mean=3.30; standard error=0.18) than younger ones (mean=2.55; standard error=0.14).

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the items and pattern matrix regarding the application of EFA.

VARIABLE	Mean	Confidence interval (95%)	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis	F1	F2	F3	F4
1 - I feel emotionally drained by the job search (Mi sento emotivamente logorato/a dalla ricerca del lavoro)	3.44	(3.10 3.79)	3.71	-0.31	-1.06	0.01	-0.05	0.85	0.05
2 - I feel exhausted at the end of a day devoted to job hunting (Mi sento esausto/a alla fine di una giornata dedicata alla ricerca del lavoro)	2.80	(2.45 3.16)	3.98	-0.02	-1.29	-0.11	0.07	0.89	0.09
3 - I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day devoted to job hunting (Mi sento stanco/a quando mi alzo al mattino e devo affrontare un altro giorno dedicato alla ricerca del lavoro)	2.57	(2.21 2.94)	4.23	0.32	-1.16	-0.02	0.03	0.86	0.01
4 - Dealing with the job search all day long is really an effort for me (Occuparmi tutto il giorno della ricerca del lavoro è veramente uno sforzo per me)	2.69	(2.33 3.06)	4.26	0.07	-1.33	-0.01	0.03	0.78	-0.07
6 - I feel exhausted by the job search (Mi sento esaurito/a dalla ricerca del lavoro)	2.69	(2.33 3.06)	4.24	0.16	-1.23	0.14	-0.10	0.84	-0.04
8 - I have become less interested in my profession since I started looking for work (Sono diventato/a meno interessato/a alla mia professione da quando ho iniziato a cercare lavoro)	2.60	(2.22 2.98)	4.62	0.23	-1.32	0.04	0.91	-0.001	0.04
9 - I have become more detached towards my profession (Sono diventato/a più distaccato/a dalla mia professione)	2.52	(2.14 2.91)	4.68	0.21	-1.38	0.01	0.94	0.03	-0.03
13 - I just want to find a job without having hassle (Voglio solo trovare un lavoro senza avere seccature)	3.49	(3.11 3.88)	4.74	-0.35	-1.28	0.59	-0.1	-0.02	0.13
14 - I doubt the significance of my job search activity (Dubito del significato della mia attività di ricerca del lavoro)	2.38	(2.02 2.76)	4.35	0.34	-1.17	0.90	0.06	-0.05	-0.04
15 - I've become more sceptical that looking for work is really worth anything (Sono diventato/a più scettico/a sul fatto che cercare lavoro serva veramente a qualcosa)	2.93	(2.55 3.32)	4.62	0.05	-1.34	0.75	0.07	0.05	-0.03
5 - I can effectively solve problems that arise in the job search (Riesco a risolvere in maniera efficace i problemi che si presentano nella ricerca del lavoro)	3.57	(3.27 3.87)	2.87	-0.34	-0.59	0.04	-0.03	-0.03	0.62
7 - I feel I am doing all I can in the job search (Sento di fare tutto quello che posso nella ricerca del lavoro)	4.20	(3.91 4.50)	2.69	-0.64	-0.54	0.07	-0.11	0.23	0.67
10 - I think I am good at job search (Penso di essere bravo/a nella ricerca del lavoro)	3.60	(3.30 3.92)	3.02	-0.29	-0.72	0.04	-0.04	0.05	0.67
11 - When I get some results in the job search, I am happy (Quando ottengo qualche risultato nella ricerca del lavoro, sono contento/a)	5.01	(4.78 5.24)	1.60	-1.17	0.47	-0.12	0.12	0.04	0.60
12 - I have achieved many positive results in my job search (Ho raggiunto molti risultati positivi nella ricerca del lavoro)	2.50	(2.18 2.82)	3.23	0.47	-0.74	-0.12	0.04	-0.16	0.55
16 - I am confident that I can make things work in the job search process (Nella ricerca del lavoro sono certo/a di riuscire a far funzionare le cose)	3.52	(3.22 3.83)	2.86	-0.07	-0.93	0.07	0.05	-0.16	0.62
Eigenvalue						5.17	2.94	1.41	1.33
Proportion of explained common variance						0.32	0.18	0.08	0.08

Item numbering is the same as in the original OCS Scale of Burnout.³⁴

Table 2. Rho coefficients.

			1	2	3	4	5
1	Age	Spearman's rho	—				
		p-Value	—				
2	months of job search	Spearman's rho	0.46***	—			
		p-Value	< 0.001	—			
3	Exhaustion	Spearman's rho	0.20**	0.25***	—		
		p-Value	0.003	< 0.001	—		
4	Disillusion	Spearman's rho	0.12	0.22**	0.43***	—	
		p-Value	0.07	0.001	< 0.001	—	
5	Disengagement	Spearman's rho	0.12	0.22**	0.42***	0.32***	—
		p-Value	0.08	0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	—
6	Effectiveness in job Search	Spearman's rho	-0.09	-0.18**	0.07	0.009	-0.05
		p-value	0.16	0.009	0.31	0.89	0.42

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

Overall, the results of the proposed exploratory study confirm our objectives. With regard to the first aim, the EFA conducted on the OCS Scale of Job Burnout,³⁴ adapted to the sample of unemployed jobseekers, shows that the items of the questionnaire are able to intercept and describe the constituent dimensions of respondents' burnout. From a semantic point of view, in fact, both the 'Exhaustion' dimension (Factor 3, see Table 1) and the one we renamed 'Effectiveness in Job Search' (Factor 4, see Table 1), concerning effectiveness in carrying out job search activities and which, like the dimension of the original OCS Scale instrument, has an inverted and positive polarity with respect to the other two dimensions, are confirmed. In contrast, a more specific and in-depth discussion is to be done about the 'Cynicism' dimension, which in our study is divided into two distinct factors. The first one consisting of two items (Factor 2, see Table 1), which can more appropriately be called 'Disillusion', refers to the attrition of confidence in the possibility of finding, through research activity, a job consistent with one's motivations, interests, aspirations, and qualifications. The second factor, consisting of three items (Factor 1, see Table 1) can more appropriately be called 'Disengagement' from the possibility of finding, through one's search efforts, a job whatever it may be. As previously argued, this interesting result is in line with the descriptive models of the burnout syndrome, proposed by Edelwich and colleagues and Pines et al. which has more recently been taken up empirically by some authors.^{23–26} These authors take up and emphasize the ability of burnout not only to bring about psychological, motivational, and emotional detachment from one's job, but also to wear down or even destroy the motivations and vocational ideals of workers, which, in the case of the long-term unemployed jobseekers, transform into disillusion with respect to the possibility of finding, through the search activity, a job that allows them to realise and express their motivations, interests, and ideals.

The second objective is achieved in two different ways. First, correlation analysis shows a positive and significant relationship of the duration of the job search period (expressed in months), with 'Exhaustion', 'Disillusion', and 'Disengagement', and a negative relationship with 'Effectiveness in Job Search'. This result is definitely consistent with the temporal and evolutionary dynamics of the process of activation of psychophysical resources, their deterioration and exhaustion, typical of a stress-related syndrome such as burnout,^{20–22,34} in this case applied to long-term jobseekers.^{10,15–17,32,33} Furthermore, the factorial MANOVA shows that from an age perspective, older unemployed people (aged 40 or more) rate themselves as being less effective in job searches and more exhausted by this activity, compared to younger unemployed people, and all of this is regardless of gender. This finding also confirms—albeit indirectly—the impact of the time factor (both job search duration and demographic)^{7–9} on the exacerbation of burnout risk.

Strengths and limitations

This study has some limitations. First, the sample identified is on a voluntary and convenience basis, and this may have resulted in a selection bias in questionnaire respondents. Second, the questionnaire is self-reported, and it will be appropriate to accompany it with additional objective indicators (e.g. economic and psychophysical conditions) that would allow a more complete representation of this phenomenon. Finally, it is likely that the existential experiences and problems of the unemployed jobseekers, given their complexity, can not be fully represented and intercepted by a structured questionnaire: subsequent studies on the topic of unemployed burnout of jobseekers will certainly be complemented by qualitative and subjective survey methods (e.g. semi-structured interviews).

Despite these limitations, the results of this study are promising, and allow for further and more focused

specification of the usefulness of the construct of burnout for unemployed jobseekers.

Conclusions

Unemployment, especially when prolonged, has devastating effects on people's psycho-physical health, their social relationships, and their economic condition. This issue, which is already well-known and studied in the scientific literature, requires further study regarding the effects on the psycho-social well-being of the unemployed (tending to be medium or long term) who are actively engaged in job searches. As argued, some studies, such as those focussed on loss of well-being^{7,8,10,17} or on PsyCap,^{14,15} have highlighted some aspects of the issue.

This exploratory study highlights the point that the use of the construct of burnout declined on the activity of job search, and it seems to be able to describe in a refined and articulate way the experiences of those who are in 'jobless burnout', and to give a comprehensive reading of it, through the future proposal of an empirical survey instrument of simple compilation and decoding.

Moreover, having a key to understanding the psycho-social effects of job search on the unemployed becomes even more important at this historical stage, which is characterised by the consequences of the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic on the labour market. Indeed, the changes in the world of work globally imposed by the pandemic^{2,3} have certainly exacerbated the issue of unemployment, given the large number of organisations and companies around the world that have been closed, drastically downsized, or that are having serious difficulty in maintaining or restoring pre-pandemic levels of employment. Although the data collected for this research predates the first lockdown that occurred in Italy (in fact, we had to stop collecting questionnaires precisely because, as of March 2020, the Employment Centres were closed, and it was not possible for unemployed people to fill out the questionnaire), the proposed results can be useful in providing an articulate and comprehensive key to the experiences of unemployed jobseekers, given that these have inevitably grown in the meantime, precisely because of the effects of the pandemic on the world of work.

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Author contributions

Conceptualization, M.N., G.F.; methodology, M.N., G.F. and M.A.; validation, M.N., G.F. and M.A.; investigation, M.N. and G.F.; resources A.U. and C.G.C.; data curation, G.F. and M.A.; writing-original draft preparation, M.N., G.F., A.U. and C.G.C.;

writing-review and editing, C.G.C., and M.A.; project administration, M.N., C.G.C. and A.U. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Ethical approval and consent to participate

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and was authorised by the Ethics Committee of the University of Cagliari. It was conducted in full compliance with the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association (APA), which has been integrated into the 'Associazione Italiana Psicologia' (AIP) code of ethics.

Informed consent statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. In accordance with Italian privacy law, the research ensured the anonymity and privacy of all participants.

Significance for public health

Unemployment and its psychophysical and social effects on individuals are a central public health issue, given the consequences in quantitative and qualitative terms that this can have on territorial welfare and health structures, especially in light of the effects of the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic on the labour market globally. The psychological and social effects of job search on the unemployed are still little studied, and this research, through the construct of 'jobless burnout', proposes a comprehensive and articulated key to its understanding.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study will be available from the corresponding author.

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