

EEPIC: Enhancing employability through positive interventions for increasing career potential. A high support career guidance intervention to improve the well-being and employability of the long term unemployed in Ireland

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Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims:

Labour market activation policy (that is, government programmes that aim to help the unemployed find work) has undergone significant change in Ireland since 2012 and its impact on job seekers, particularly in terms of well-being and re-employment, has not yet been established. Prior to 2012, there were few conditions attached to being paid through social welfare support. Pathways to Work is the Irish Government's labour market policy developed to help people with a health condition or disability get work, but despite its stated focus on long-term unemployment, there seems little evidence of active implementation of targeted approaches which takes into account long-term unemployment and its impact on psychological well-being. This study aims to assess the effect of a newly developed therapeutic career guidance intervention (programme) on the psychological well-being and employability of long-term unemployed job seekers in a disadvantaged urban area.

Who can participate?

Unemployed job seekers aged 18-60 years who are in receipt of a job seekers payment for at least 12 months.

What does the study involve?

Participants are randomly allocated to one of two groups: the intervention (a therapeutic career guidance service) or control ('service as normal') group. Those in the intervention group receive a therapeutic career guidance intervention and are individually coached and guided by experienced guidance practitioners. Participants are assessed on, for example, their well-being, self-management of their career, and hopefulness before the start of the study, after the study period ends and then again at 6 months later.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Participation in this study will allow people to participate in a new high support programme which aims to improve well-being and employability. No negative effects or risks are expected as the programme is based on a positive psychology approach.

Where is this study run from?

This study will be conducted at an non-governmental organisation (NGO) located in Dublin, Ireland.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

September 2015 to November 2016

Who is funding the study?

Irish Research Council

Who is the main contact?

Nuala Whelan

Contact information

Type(s)

Scientific

Contact name

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

N/A

Study information

Scientific Title

A randomised controlled trial to evaluate the effectiveness of a high support career guidance intervention on the well-being, hopefulness, self-efficacy and employability of the long term unemployed in Ireland

Acronym

EEPIC

Study objectives

This study aims to assess the changes that occur for a group of unemployed individuals as a result of their participation in a new high support intervention versus routinely available support. A high support guidance intervention will be effective in increasing levels of psychological well-being when compared to the current employment support services (PTWP) received by the long term unemployed. The high support guidance intervention will also be effective in increasing the employability of the long term unemployed.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

National University of Ireland Maynooth, Ethics Committee, 05/06/2014, ref: SRESC-2014-028

Study design

Single-centre partially-blinded randomised controlled trial with two parallel groups

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Psychological well-being

Interventions

Participants in this study will be randomly selected from a pool of jobseekers, referred by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) Intreo office to a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) for activation, on a weekly basis. The 120 participants will be randomly assigned over a four month period to the intervention or control group at a ratio of 1:1. The duration of the intervention will vary according to client needs (intervention group), and according to their 'Probability of Exit' (PEX) score (control group) as used by the DSP at the point of registration with the maximum duration of either intervention not exceeding six months. This is due to the timeframe of this study which will measure outcomes post intervention and again at a six-month follow up in order to ascertain to what extent outcomes from either intervention are maintained, improved or have deteriorated over time.

Participants will be invited, as part of the RCT, to complete a range of assessments at key points (at baseline and after completion of their participation in the intervention/ control group) in order to measure the impact of the service or intervention on key dimensions including well-being, self-esteem and career identity.

The EEPIC Intervention

A high support therapeutic guidance intervention will be delivered to 60 long term unemployed job seekers. This focuses on the development of a career plan and strengthening the human, social and psychological capital required to implement this plan. Many long-term unemployed job seekers experience decreased well-being, high levels of psychological stress, and low self-

esteem and job search self-efficacy which can act as barriers to returning to work due to low levels of motivation and attendant ineffective job seeking strategies.

The intervention consists of a four stage process which aims to support the job seeker in developing the skills necessary for labour market access while building self-efficacy and esteem and improving psychological well-being:

Stage 1: The individual's needs (education, training, skills, personal situation, employment history, perceived employability competencies, work values, barriers to employment, well-being etc.) will be assessed using a profile form adapted from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee and EMERGE initiatives. Identification of specific needs and their severity is vital in understanding the barriers faced by the individual and the types of supports and actions required to enable them to move towards the labour market. The outcome of the individual needs assessment will determine the extent to which guidance practitioners may need to support the individual to engage with relevant services to address issues which pose barriers to progression (e.g. addiction, literacy). Interaction with other services and supports will be documented by the practitioner in their case notes.

Stage 2: A tailored career guidance process is implemented to support the job seeker in identifying latent skills, abilities, aptitudes, preferred behaviour style in the workplace, and values. This process aims to build career clarity, career identity, and improve self-esteem and career efficacy. Vocationally-orientated career guidance tools and approaches are used to reveal hidden strengths, aptitudes and preferences, while limitations are also acknowledged and documented. This information is used to inform the development of a career plan.

Stage 3: The job seeker and guidance practitioner work together to develop a career plan which includes a career objective or aspiration, a number of shorter term career goals which should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) and potential barriers to progression. A timescale for this plan is also identified and a method to achieve it is discussed, particularly in relation to responsibilities and extent of contact required (e.g. weekly/fortnightly meetings with the guidance practitioner).

Stage 4: The career plan is implemented in a supportive and positive way. This involves the job seeker and the practitioner working together to accomplish the planned career goals, to maintain levels of motivation, to build resilience against setbacks and adapt and re-plan as required.

This intervention will be implemented on a one-to-one basis with the guidance practitioner and the client working together to identify key strengths, career identity and learning needs. The overarching aim of this intervention is to build psychological capital (increase self-awareness, improve self-esteem, build career and self-efficacy) and to assist the individual to become more resilient in the labour market.

The intervention also aims to build both the human capital (i.e. personal factors that may affect chances of re-employment, such as experience, training, skills and knowledge) and social capital (i.e. interpersonal aspects of employability such as interpersonal skills, social network and supports) of the individual.

The successful implementation of a career plan relies heavily on the client-practitioner commitment and the relationship. This intervention is, therefore, highly dependent on the skills and approach of the practitioner involved in delivering the service. It also relies on the continuum of support offered so that the client is supported throughout their journey towards, and into, the labour market. This involves building networks with those who can offer support, such as mentors within the education and training sector and within the workplace.

Control group intervention

Control group participants will receive the 'service as normal' as is provided nationally by the DSP's Intreo service, the Irish state public employment service. This service will also be delivered

within the NGO.

The normal service consists of a number of steps:

Step 1: Once the individual has attended a GIS, a first appointment is made and the timing of this appointment is determined by the individual's PEX score which can be classified as 'low', 'medium' or 'high'. 'High PEX' clients are invited to attend a meeting with a case officer six months after attendance at the GIS, 'medium PEX' clients attend within two weeks whilst 'low PEX' clients attend immediately. At this first appointment, a Personal Progression Plan (PPP) is agreed. Within the current study, case officers will also be required to use the Cantrils Ladder scale to assess the client's perceived progress towards the labour market at the first appointment.

Step 2: Case officers decide on, and conduct, systematic follow ups (e.g. phone call, email, text) after the first meeting in order to check in with the client and to see how they are progressing. The level of contact is normally agreed in the PPP and a follow-up category is set in the Department's IT database which calculates when the client is due for systematic follow-up.

Step 3: The case officers are required to conduct Activation Review Meetings (ARM) by DSP, the purpose of which is to review progress towards employment, and again the timing of these meetings is dependent on the client's initial PEX score.

1. High PEX clients receive an ARM meeting at 6 months and every 3 months thereafter

2. Medium PEX clients receive an ARM meeting every 3 months

3. Low PEX clients receive an ARM meeting every 2 months

4. Under 25s (High, Med and Low PEX) receive monthly ARM meetings

Within the current study, Case officers will also be required to use Cantrils Ladder at the ARM meeting to assess perceived progress towards the labour market.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Increased well-being: This will be assessed using two measures, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and the Satisfaction with Life scale:

1.1. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) is a 12-item self-report questionnaire most widely used to assess levels of psychological distress and to screen for minor psychological disorders. The GHQ has been widely validated and shown to be highly reliable, with a reported Cronbach's ranging from 0.82 to 0.90

1.2. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a five-item self-report questionnaire developed to measure global cognitive judgemental aspects of life satisfaction. Life satisfaction has been identified as the cognitive judgemental component of subjective well-being where judgements of satisfaction are dependent on a comparison with a person's own standard as opposed to a criterion set within the scale, or in a particular domain

Participants subjective well-being will be assessed prior to the intervention or normal service, post intervention and again at 6 month follow up.

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Self esteem, measured by the Rosenberg Self- Esteem Questionnaire, a 10-item scale designed to measure global self-esteem

2. Career self-efficacy will be measured by the Career Self Efficacy Questionnaire which was adapted by Kossek, Roberts & Demarr (1998) from Sherer and Adam's (1983) General Self Efficacy Scale to measure a context-specific form of self-efficacy. This is an 11-item self-report questionnaire which measures an individual's belief in his or her ability to manage their own

career

3. Resilience will be measured by the Brief Resilience Scale, a six-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess the ability to bounce back or recover from stress
4. Hopefulness will be measured by the Sate Hope Scale, a six-item self-report scale which assesses goal directed thinking in a given moment
5. Perceived progress towards the labour market will be measured by Cantril's Self Anchoring Ladder, a 10-step ladder where the top of the ladder represents the best possible situation for an individual and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible situation. The Scale has been used in research as a type of well-being assessment, and measures well-being as defined by judgments of life or life evaluation. However, this scale has been adjusted so that the focus is on career goals and the best and worst possible situation for the individual in relation to their career
6. Re-employment or labour market participation will be assessed by rates of progression into employment post intervention at T2, and at six-month follow up. This will be measured by a single item which asks individuals to indicate whether they are currently unemployed (coded as 0) or currently employed (coded as 1).
7. A measure of re-employment quality will be measured by using the following dimensions:
 - 7.1. Job satisfaction will be assessed by a single item (answered on a 4 point scale) "All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your new job?"
 - 7.2. Job Sustainability will be assessed by a single item answered on a 7-point scale ("How likely is it that you will actively look for another job in the next year?"
 - 7.3. Satisfaction with level of earnings will be rated on a 5-point scale with 1 indicating 'very unsatisfied' and 5 indicating 'very satisfied'
8. Access to education / vocational training will be assessed by rates of progression into education and /or training and its relevance to the individual's career plan post intervention at T2 and at six- month follow-up. This will be measured by a single item which asks individuals to indicate whether they are currently registered on an education or training course relevant to their career plan (coded as 2), are waiting to start an education or training course relevant to their career plan (coded at 1) or are not participating in education or training (coded as 0)
9. Participant's self esteem, career self-efficacy, resilience, hopefulness and perceived progress towards the labour market will be assessed prior to the intervention or normal service, post intervention and again at 6 month follow up. Re-employment or labour market participation, re-employment quality (job satisfaction, job sustainability, satisfaction with levels of earnings) and access to education/vocational training will be assessed post intervention and at six month follow up

Completion date

31/12/2017

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Participants are unemployed job seekers who:

1. Must be clients of the public employment services (DSP/Intreo) and in receipt of a job seekers payment
2. Are referred by the DSP/Intreo office to Pathways to Work (Activation)
3. Have a duration of unemployment > 12months
4. Are aged 18-60 years
5. Are male/female
6. Have attended a Group Information Session (GIS)

Participants must provide written, informed consent before engaging in either intervention (EEPIC Informed Consent Form)

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Adult

Lower age limit

18 years

Upper age limit

60 years

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

Job seekers who have:

1. Disclosed serious mental health issues
2. Disclosed serious drug use issues
3. Have not attended their first post-GIS appointment following at least three attempts to engage them and who have been referred back to DSP/Intreo

Date of first enrolment

01/09/2015

Date of final enrolment

30/09/2017

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

Ireland

Study participating centre

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

Dublin

Ireland

D11CF67

Sponsor information**Organisation**

Maynooth University

ROR

<https://ror.org/048nfjm95>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Research council

Funder Name

Irish Research Council

Alternative Name(s)

An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn, IrishResearch

Funding Body Type

Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Research institutes and centers

Location

Ireland

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be stored in a publically available repository. Anonymised data will be made publicly available through the Irish Social Sciences Data Archive (ISSDA) (<https://www.ucd.ie/issda/>) and the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) (<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/iqda>) upon completion of the trial.

IPD sharing plan summary

Stored in repository

Study outputs

| Output type | Details | Date created | Date added | Peer reviewed? | Patient-facing? |
|---|----------|--------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Protocol article | protocol | 26/02/2018 | | Yes | No |
| Participant information sheet | | | 13/03/2023 | No | Yes |