PERSPECTIVAS SOBRE EL DESEMPLEO: MOTIVACIONES PARA LA ORIENTACIÓN PROFESIONAL EN EL SUR DE PORTUGAL

INSIGHTS INTO UNEMPLOYMENT: MOTIVATIONS FOR CAREER COUNSELLING IN THE SOUTH OF PORTUGAL

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RESUMEN

Una mejor comprensión de las motivaciones de los desempleados para buscar orientación profesional puede informar sobre cómo motivar a otras personas para que busquen y se beneficien de los servicios de orientación profesional. Este estudio analizó las motivaciones de 159 desempleados (121, 76.1% mujeres), con una edad media de 42.13 años (*DP* = 10.434). Los resultados de un análisis de contenido condujeron a la identificación de las ocho categorías más prominentes relacionadas con las motivaciones de los participantes para buscar orientación profesional: obtener empleo, adquirir conocimientos, desarrollar la conciencia de sí mismo, recibir apoyo psicológico, explorar nuevas oportunidades, considerar el cambio profesional, perseguir la realización personal y expresar interés en el proyecto. Estas motivaciones varían en función de la edad, el sexo, la nacionalidad, la educación y la duración del desempleo. Esto subraya la importancia de que los orientadores profesionales tengan en cuenta las características sociodemográficas de los desempleados y sus necesidades únicas de orientación profesional.

Palabras clave: desempleados; motivaciones; orientación profesional; análisis de contenido.

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ABSTRACT

A better understanding of unemployed individuals' motivations for seeking career counselling can inform how to motivate other individuals to seek and benefit from career services. This study analysed the motivations for career counselling of 159 unemployed individuals (121, 76.1% women), with a mean age of 42.13 years (SD = 10.434). The results of a content analysis led to the identification of eight most prominent categories related to participants' motivations for seeking career counselling: obtaining employment, acquiring knowledge, developing self-awareness, receiving psychological support, exploring new opportunities, considering professional change, pursuing personal fulfilment, and expressing interest in the project. These motivations vary according to individuals' age, gender, nationality, education, and length of unemployment. This highlights the importance of career counsellors considering the socio-demographic characteristics and unique needs for career counselling of unemployed people.

Key Words: unemployed people; motivations; career counselling; content analysis.

Introduction

Understanding the impact of unemployment on individuals in terms of motives, behaviours, and experiences is crucial for informing their career development, encompassing decision-making and employability (Tate, 2021). The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent & Brown, 2013) provides valuable insights into this phenomenon, explaining unemployment dynamics (Thompson et al., 2017). From the SCCT perspective, there is a strong emphasis on individual empowerment to navigate life roles and challenges (Lent & Brown, 2013). This theory posits that career self-management results from intricate interactions among individual characteristics, such as age and gender, resources like career self-efficacy, and external factors, specifically the context (Lent & Brown, 2020). Consequently, in the context of unemployment, both proximal and distal factors influence the job search experience, shaping job seekers' ability to cope with periods of unemployment and their willingness to initiate behaviours that contribute to a successful job search process (Thompson et al., 2017).

The predictive role of self-regulatory efficacy and personal goals in re-employment success of unemployed people has been highlighted (Thompson et al., 2017). These intrinsic factors extend their influence beyond the job search process and play a crucial role in the development of life projects, involving various cognitive, motivational, volitional, affective and behavioural processes (Silva et al., 2023). As individuals navigate the complex journey of life project development, it becomes clear that adapting to changing contexts requires continuous updating of behaviours, emotions, and attitudes (Lent & Brown, 2013). Unemployment is typically a life transition or challenge to which people respond in a variety of ways (Thompson et al., 2017). Accordingly, how jobless individuals respond to the difficulties of unemployment and how they obtain assistance will depend on their motivation, adaptability, and flexibility (Lent et al., 2022). The responsibility of providing information and designing interventions for the unemployed falls to researchers and practitioners in the area (e.g., Carvalho et al., 2023). Yet this needs to be grounded in

comprehensive research on the unemployed population and specifically on how they are developing in their careers.

Unemployed Adults Conditions

Unemployment shapes an individual's adaptability to transitions in their career trajectory, a process influenced by core cognitive beliefs (Thompson et al., 2017). Successful career behaviours, including job searching, hinge on individual responsibility, self-fulfilment, and goal achievement beliefs (Panari & Tonelli, 2022). Despite this, unemployment is widely recognized as a vulnerable state associated with negative emotions (Amundson et al., 2018). Scholars have examined individual characteristics like age, gender, and education to comprehend the impact of job loss on career development strategies (Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018). These variables can either facilitate or hinder career development amid unemployment challenges (Amundson et al., 2018). The following sections provide a detailed analysis of the most recent research over the last five years on the socio-demographic characteristics of the unemployed individuals, providing a comprehensive overview of the current landscape.

Age

After losing a job, there is a decrease in employability resources such as social support, public support measures, self-efficacy, and positive perceptions about returning to work (Climent-Rodríguez et al. 2019). The older an individual is, the lower their perception of employability and the more negative the impact of unemployment can be (Climent-Rodríguez et al. 2019). Individuals aged 40-65, commonly referred to as older adults, are particularly sensitive to the negative impact of unemployment, facing an increased risk of long-term unemployment and challenges in securing new job opportunities (Clayton & Dottie, 2020). This sensitivity is compounded by the focus on future planning among these adults, exacerbating the impact of unemployment due to a misalignment between their values and the current situation (Germano & Brenlla, 2022). In addition, older people who are unemployed for a long-time risk depleting their social and financial support (Morais, 2022) and facing discrimination (Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018), which puts them in highly vulnerable situations. In contrast, younger people have a greater tendency to seek new experiences, which may explain their stronger training intentions while unemployed (Germano & Brenlla, 2022; Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018). However, youth unemployment can have a corrosive, pervasive, and persistent effect on them, further extinguishing their weak future planning (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2022). Additionally, younger people lack social protection and are more likely to not meet certain contribution requirements (Morais, 2022).

Gender

Gender roles affect a person's self-concept (Knabe et al., 2016) and create gender gaps in how men and women experience subjective well-being during employment transitions (Chung & Hahn, 2021). Although Prechsl and Wolbring (2022) did not find gender differences in subjective status loss due to unemployment, other studies have found gender gaps in other aspects of the unemployment experience, such as cognitive well-being (Knabe et al., 2016). Men appear to be more affected by having a job than women, as having a job has a more substantial impact on

men's subjective well-being (Van der Meer, 2014). Men's traditional gender role as the "breadwinner" (Knabe et al., 2016), and societal pressure on male breadwinners, particularly in association with marriage, may explain why they are more psychologically sensitive to work transitions (Chung & Hahn, 2021). Gender disparities are also evident in social benefits information, with women in Portugal consistently receiving more unemployment benefits than men over the past 15 years (Morais, 2022). Therefore, women's greater vulnerability to unemployment and its consequences is emphasised, with studies suggesting that women may develop more career resources due to their disadvantages (Knabe et al., 2016; Morais, 2022). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that acceptance of challenges is a factor of confidence for Portuguese unemployed women to explore the self and the environment (Taveira et al., 2023), which in some cases may lead them to develop more career resources.

Education

Having higher levels of education, knowledge, and skills is associated with an increased likelihood of finding and retaining employment (OECD, 2022). Individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better mental health outcomes and experience less stress due to greater access to financial and social resources (Rokicka et al., 2018). It is expected that people with higher levels of education will be able to maintain their well-being, as they may be more optimistic and have better chances of reemployment (Möwisch et al., 2021). However, when unemployment affects individuals with higher levels of qualifications, the role of education in employability can be challenged (Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018). These individuals are more likely to turn down employment offers due to intrinsic job characteristics (i.e., type of task, level of autonomy, status) and may experience a greater drop in income and prestige, as well as a breach of their aspirations, which could lead to negative emotions (Möwisch et al., 2021).

Conversely, individuals with lower skill levels are more likely to be at a greater risk of unemployment, particularly during economic downturns (OECD, 2022). These individuals may suffer from unemployment due to lower levels of learning self-efficacy and little confidence in career opportunities (Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018). Due to these vulnerabilities, adults with lower levels of education are often targeted as the audience for career interventions and are more likely to benefit from them (Högberg et al., 2019).

Unemployment Length

Unemployment is a complex phenomenon that affects and excludes many individuals (Fidelis & Mendonça, 2021). Different aspects of unemployment, such as its duration, have been identified as possible factors that influence individuals' personal characteristics and career resources (Möwisch et al., 2021). Prolonged periods of unemployment can lead individuals to adopt a negative self-perception as 'long-term unemployed' or 'unemployable', which can impede their chances of finding new employment (Thompson et al., 2017). The length of unemployment also impacts individuals' psychological well-being and their perception of work (Fidelis & Mendonça, 2021). Over time, this negative self-perception can lead to feelings of pessimism, low affectivity, and avoidance behaviour (Thompson et al., 2017). These factors can further reduce motivation to learn, lower outcome expectations, and decrease self-efficacy (Thompson et al., 2017). However, recent data suggest that rates of future-related variables may be even higher among unemployed clients than among those in employment. This suggests that perceptions of the future may be influenced by various factors, such as the duration of unemployment or contact with a counselling service and should therefore be assessed whenever possible (Coscioni et al., 2023).

The unemployed population particularities may imply a deeper study of this group, which contemplates the people's characteristics and resources, as well as their context (Lent et al., 2022). The study of unemployment, taking into account the age, gender, education and duration of unemployment of people, may be a key factor for the success of studies, interventions and policies for this population. The different motivational, cognitive-affective and social dimensions that play a role in the employability of the unemployed should further encourage the monitoring of the individual variables under consideration. Indeed,

Study Objective

Despite the growing number of research regarding the unemployed population, it is understood that coping with unemployment presents significant challenges (Amundson et al., 2018). Therefore, all recommendations should be contextualised in the individuals' motivations towards the intervention. Otherwise, there is a risk of not meeting their true needs, assuming generalist objectives for all unemployed people, regardless their age, gender, education, or length of unemployment. Thus, the motivational dimension that drives unemployed individuals to seek career counselling remains an unexplored area. Only by exploring the motivations of unemployed individuals can all factors outlined in the theories of career self-management be included in interventions (Lent & Brown, 2013).

To address this gap in the literature, this study aims to qualitatively analyse the motivations of 159 individuals who have sought career counselling while experiencing unemployment. The analysis will consider the age, gender, nationality, education level, and length of unemployment of the participants, as these demographic factors distinctly shape the contours of the unemployment experience. The main objective of this study is to contribute to knowledge about this population, enabling the design and implementation of specific and informed career interventions.

To summarise, this study aspires to shed light on the motivations driving individuals to seek career counselling amidst unemployment, while recognizing the diverse factors that shape these motivations. Employing a qualitative lens, it seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of scholarship, amplifying the underrepresented voices of the unemployed and laying the groundwork for targeted and impactful interventions.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data collection occurred within the framework of the Careers Project (ALG-06-4234-FSE-000047), a partnership for social impact that aims to support employability in Algarve (south of Portugal). Participants were unemployed persons aged 18 or older invited by a governmental institution responsible for employment policies in Algarve to participate in a career psychological intervention. Those interested in the intervention filled in an online survey, at Qualtrics platform, from April to May 2022. Participants provided their consent before answering the survey, and the research procedures were approved by an ethical commission from Portugal (CEICSH 002/2022).

The research team comprised three authors, all identifying as White cisgender females, fluent in both English and Portuguese. The first author, a doctoral student, had experience with vulnerable populations. The second author, a university professor, specialised in career-related topics for specific groups. The third author, a Ph.D. holder, had expertise in analysing gender and social status impact on career development. Their collective understanding of the study's topic informed the choice of research design and analysis methods, ensuring alignment with participants' motivations. No pre-existing relationships or interactions between researchers and participants were present, thus avoiding any potential impact on the research process.

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of 159 participants. The participants' age ranged from 19 to 67 years old (M = 42.13, SD = 10.43), with most people being between 25 and 45 years old (n = 97, 61%). Participants were predominantly female (n = 121, 76.1%). The majority of the participants were Portuguese, while one fifth of them were not from Portugal (n = 32, 20.1% from Brazil, France, Italy, Angola, Colombia, São Tomé, Venezuela). Besides that, all participants were fluent in Portuguese. Regarding their qualification degree, eight (5%) had not finished middle school (1st or 2sd cycle), 16 (10%) had completed middle school (3rd cycle), 61 (38.4%) had completed high school, and 74 (46.6%) had a higher education degree. Concerning the participants' unemployment length, 91 (57.2%) were unemployed for less than a year, 58 (36.5%) were unemployed for between one and five years, six (3.8%) were unemployed for more than five years, three (1.9%) were unemployed for more than 10 years, and one (.6%) was unemployed for more than 20 years. Although potential characteristics influencing data were not explicitly analysed, participants' diverse backgrounds contributed to a comprehensive exploration of motivations.

Table 1
Participant's Sociodemographic Characteristics

	Variable	Frequencies (%) n = 159
Age	18-24	7 (4.4%)
	25-45	97 (61%)
	46-65	53 (33.3%)
	>65	2 (1.3%)
Gender	Female	121 (76.1%)
	Male	38 (23.9%)
Nationality	Portuguese	127 (79.9%)
	Foreign	32 (20.1%)
Education	Middle School Incomplete	8 (5%)
	Middle School	16 (10%)
	Secondary	61 (38.4%)
	Higher education	74 (46.6%)
Unemployment length	< 1 year	91 (57.2%)
	1-5 years	58 (36.5%)
	5-10 years	6 (3.8%)
	1-20 years	3 (1.9%)
	> 20 years	1 (.6%)

Measures

The participants answered a sociodemographic questionnaire which included questions regarding age, gender, nationality, education, and length of unemployment. At the end of the online questionnaire, they were asked about their motivations for the intervention ("What are your main motivations regarding your participation in the career intervention?"). This open-ended question had no limit of characters.

Data Analysis

Content analysis procedures following Bardin's approach were employed. For the qualitative analysis of the motivations to the intervention referred to by the unemployed people, the content analysis procedures proposed by Bardin (2013) were followed. This exploratory qualitative methodology aimed to identify categories of meaning that characterise people's motivations to participate in a free career intervention. Data were initially explored through floating reading, followed by codification and thematic analysis. Three researchers independently conducted analyses, and analytical categories were developed through consensus meetings, ensuring methodological integrity.

During the analysis, all participants and respective responses were considered. In the first phase, a pre-analysis was made based on a floating reading of the answers. This reading was intended to familiarise the evaluator with the content of the data and to organise in an unstructured way aspects to the next phase. In the second phase of data exploration, the codification proceeded. Cutting, aggregating, and enumerating procedures were used to achieve an accurate representation of the data content. Each participant was assigned the letter S (subject) and a number (from 001 to 159). As a unit of context, the subjects' answers to the question on their motivations were considered, and as a unit of analysis, the ideas present in the answer were considered, and a number was assigned to it. The frequency rule was used for the enumeration (Bardin, 2013). To reach the core Meaning, a thematic analysis was performed. In this analysis, for each unit of context (answers to the questions), the various units of analysis (ideas) were cut out, and then grouped into thematic categories of analysis ("cores of record"). As a result of this analysis, categories of meaning emerged which enabled the aggregation and classification of the units of analysis. A total of 159 context units corresponding to 315 units of analysis were identified, emerging a total of 8 units of meaning. The categorization criterion used was the semantic criterion, in which all ideas associated with a given criterion were grouped into the same category of meaning. The selected categories considered the following criteria: mutual exclusion, relevance, homogeneity, objectivity and fidelity, and productivity. The content analysis was performed manually.

After the qualitative analysis, the frequencies, and percentages of the categories by age, gender, nationality, education, and length of unemployment were descriptively analysed through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences - SPSS 28.0).

To manage potential bias, the first author maintained a reflective journal, consulted with the research team weekly, and engaged in iterative discussions during analysis. Analyst triangulation further enhanced data credibility. Regular team consultations ensured consistent coding and themes, reinforcing methodological integrity.

Results

Table 2 shows the eight meaning categories identified, the respective core meaning and the total frequency of each category. The content presented refers to the motivations for the intervention of unemployed participants (n = 159). The most prominent motivation was to obtain employment (n = 64; 40.3%), which refers to the motivation to find a job, expressed by sentences such as "The main objective is to find a job by improving and preparing myself for the current world of work" (S038). The motivation to learn was the second most prominent motivation (n = 52; 32.7%), referring to the motivation to acquire or further knowledge or skills, expressed by sentences such as "I want to continue training and creating new learning and experiences, not only for my CV but also on a personal level" (S136). Next was the motivation to acquire self-awareness (n = 48; 30.2%), which refers to the motivation to gain awareness about oneself, expressed by sentences such as "I want to reflect on personal competences and talents" (S123). Following, the motivation to benefit from career counselling (n = 46; 28.9%) refers to the motivation to find career psychological support and was expressed by sentences like "I signed up for this project because of everything it offers in the way of professional counselling for career changes and mentoring." (S098). The motivation to explore (n = 43; 27.1%) was next, referring to the motivation to discover or explore information, through sentences like "I want to re-evaluate my career path, check out other options and areas of work that could benefit from my experience and knowledge" (S149). Next was the motivation to change the professional path (n = 28; 17.6%), which refers to the motivation to switch one's professional field, expressed by sentences such as "The need to reformulate my professional career and adapt it to new challenges" (S037). This was followed by motivations related to the project's interest (n = 20; 12.6%), which refers to the interest shown in the program, and it was screened through sentences like "It seemed like an interesting topic". The least prominent motivation was for personal fulfilment (n = 14; 8.8%), which refers to the motivation of personal development through the intervention, noted in sentences such as "To improve myself as a person".

Table 2
Motivations for participating in a career intervention

Categories	Description/Core Meaning	Frequencies	Example
To obtain employment	Refers to the motivation to find a job.	64	"Getting a job in my field." (S152)
Learning	Refers to the motivation to acquire or further knowledge or skills.	52	"I want to acquire new knowledge." (S043)
Self-awareness	Refers to the motivation to gain awareness about oneself.	48	"To get to know my potential (personal and professional profile) in order to direct my career with greater self-confidence." (S035)
Career counselling	Refers to the motivation to find career psychological support.	46	"I need guidance from psychologists." (S143)
Exploration	Refers to the motivation to discover or explore information.	43	"I have curiosity." (S028)
Change	It refers to the motivation to switch one's professional field.	28	"I want to change my professional area." (S025)
Project Interest	Refers to the interest shown in the program.	20	"It seemed like an interesting topic." (S123)
Personal fulfilment	Refers to the motivation of personal development.	14	"To improve myself as a person." (S101)

Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of each of the categories for each socio-demographic variable (age, gender, nationality, education, and length of unemployment).

Table 3
Motivations by Age, Gender, Nationality, Education and Unemployment length

		Motivation Frequencies (%) n = 315							
	Variable *n* = 159	To obtain employment *n* = 64	Learning *n* = 52	Self-awareness *n* = 48	Career counselling *n* = 46	Exploration *n* = 43	Change *n* = 28	Project Interest *n* = 20	Personal fulfilment *n* = 14
Age	18-24 (*n* = 7)	2 (28.6%)	3 (42.9%)	1 (14.3%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0%)
	25-45 (*n* = 97)	43 (44.3%)	29 (30%)	32 (33%)	31 (32%)	28 (29%)	18 (18.6%)	8 (8.2%)	12 (12.4%)
	46-65 (*n* = 53)	17 (32.1%)	19 (35.8%)	14 (26.4%)	11 (20.8%)	15 (28.3%)	10 (18.9%)	10 (18.9%)	2 (3.8%)
	>65 (*n* = 2)	2 (100%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Gender	Female (*n* = 121)	52 (43%)	39 (32.2%)	43 (35.5%)	40 (33.1%)	28 (23.1%)	22 (18.2%)	11 (9.1%)	14 (11.6%)
	Male (*n* = 38)	12 (31.6%)	13 (34.2%)	5 (13.2%)	6 (15.8%)	15 (39.5%)	6 (15.8%)	9 (23.7.8%)	0 (0%)
Nationality	Portuguese (*n* = 127)	54 (42.5%)	39 (30.71%)	36 (28.3%)	38 (29.9%)	38 (29.9%)	24 (18.9%)	19 (15.7%)	11 (8.7%)
	Foreign (*n* = 32)	10 (31.3%)	13 (40.6%)	12 (37.5%)	8 (25%)	5 (15.6%)	4 (12.5%)	1 (3.1%)	3 (9.4%)
Education	Middle School Incomplete (*n* = 8)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)
	Middle School (*n* = 16)	7 (43.8%)	4 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	7 (43.8%)	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)
	Secondary (*n* = 61)	23 (37.7%)	21 (34.4%)	19 (31.1%)	23 (37.7%)	13 (21.3%)	14 (23%)	3 (4.9%)	5 (8.2%)
	Higher education (*n* = 74)	33 (44.6%)	35 (47.3%)	26 (35.1%)	20 (27%)	22 (29.7%)	13 (17.6%)	10 (13.5%)	6 (8.1%)
Unemployment length	< 1 year (*n* = 91)	34 (37.4%)	32 (35.2%)	30 (33%)	30 (33%)	19 (20.9%)	19 (20.9%)	9 (9.9%)	10 (11%)
	1-5 years (*n* = 58)	23 (39.7%)	17 (29.3%)	16 (27.6%)	13 (22.4%)	19 (32.8%)	8 (13.8%)	10 (17.8%)	3 (5.2%)
	5-10 years (*n* = 6)	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	10-20 years (*n* = 3)	2 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0%)
	> 20 years (*n* = 1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)

Age

Among participants aged 18 to 24 years, the primary motivation for intervention participation was learning. Additionally, they expressed motivation for employment, career counseling, project interest, and a residual interest in self-awareness. Motivations for exploration, career change, or personal fulfillment were not observed. Participants aged 25 to 45 years were primarily motivated by employment, followed by self-awareness, career counseling, learning, and exploration. They also showed motivation for career change and personal fulfillment. Interest in project involvement remained notable. In the age group of 46 to 65 years, learning was the predominant motivation, followed by employment, exploration, self-awareness, and career counseling. There was also motivation for career change, project interest, and personal fulfillment. Participants over 65 years

primarily sought employment through the intervention, followed by learning and self-awareness motivations.

Gender

For women participating in the intervention, the primary motivation was to obtain employment. They also expressed motivation for self-awareness, career counselling, and learning. Additionally, they showed interest in exploration and career change. Personal fulfilment and project interest were less frequent motivations. Conversely, men participating in the intervention were primarily motivated by exploration. They also expressed motivation for learning and employment. Additionally, they were interested in project involvement, career counselling, and career change. Motivation for self-awareness was noted, while personal fulfilment was not identified as a motivation.

Nationality

The Portuguese participant's primary motivation for participating in the intervention was to obtain employment, followed by a motivation to learn. They also expressed a desire to benefit from career counselling and to explore, along with motivations for self-awareness, career change, and project interest. There was also a residual motivation for personal fulfilment. Among foreign participants, the majority hailed from Brazil (n = 26), with single representatives from Angola, Colombia, France, Italy, São Tomé, and Venezuela. Their primary motivation for participating in the intervention was focused on learning. Following this, they showed significant interest in enhancing self-awareness and securing employment. Additionally, they expressed motivation to benefit from career counselling, explore new career opportunities, consider career transitions, and pursue personal fulfilment. Interest specifically in the intervention project was mentioned less frequently among these participants.

Education

Participants with the lowest education (incomplete middle school) primarily showed motivation for project interest, followed by a desire to learn, and then motivation for employment, self-awareness, and exploration. Among those who had completed middle school, the main motivations were to obtain employment and explore, with additional motivation for learning, career counseling, project interest, and personal fulfillment. Participants with a high school education were motivated mainly by job acquisition and career counseling, followed by learning, self-awareness, career change, and exploration. Those with a higher education degree were most motivated to learn and find employment, with additional motivations including self-awareness, exploration, career change, project interest, and occasionally personal fulfillment.

Unemployment Length

For individuals unemployed for less than a year, the primary motivation for participating in the intervention was to secure employment, followed by a desire to learn, and then motivations for increasing self-awareness and benefiting from career counseling. They also expressed interest in exploring new opportunities and changing their professional path. Motivations for personal fulfillment and project interest were minimal. Among those unemployed for one to five years, the greatest motivation was to find a job, followed by exploring new opportunities, learning, and increasing self-awareness. They also expressed motivation for career guidance and showed interest in the project. Career change and personal fulfillment were secondary motivations. Individuals unemployed for more than five years were motivated primarily by securing employment, followed by learning and exploration. Subsequently, they showed interest in increasing self-awareness, benefiting from career counseling, and considering a career change. Motivations for personal fulfillment and project interest were less prevalent. Finally, those unemployed for more than 10 years focused on securing employment and exploring new opportunities, followed by motivations for increasing self-awareness, benefiting from career counseling, and project interest.

Discussion

This study intends to analyse the motivations of unemployed people to engage in career counselling. The most prominent answers relate to motivation to obtain employment, acquire knowledge, become self-aware, receive career counselling, explore, change the professional path, secure personal fulfilment, and find more about the project. Participants of different age groups, genders, nationalities, with different levels of education and length of time unemployed showed different salience in their motivations for participating in the intervention. Participants were from Algarve, a Portuguese southern region known for its distinct seasonal work pattern. Most of them were people aged between 25 and 45 years, mostly Portuguese women, with a higher education degree, unemployed for less than a year. The Algarve's work pattern is heavily influenced by its status as a major tourist destination, leading to a highly seasonal employment trend. During the peak tourist season, particularly in the summer months, there is a significant increase in demand for jobs in the hospitality, retail, and service sectors. Conversely, in the off-season, employment opportunities in these areas decline sharply, resulting in higher rates of unemployment and underemployment (Ferrão et al., 2022). This cyclical nature of work creates distinct challenges for the local workforce, and the discussion of these results should be understood in light of this phenomenon. Thus, the eight categories and their respective demographic descriptive results are discussed individually below.

Obtain employment

Participating in the career intervention to obtain employment was prominently cited as a motivation among participants, with some notable exceptions. Notably, younger adults (ages 18-24), male participants, foreign participants, and those with lower levels of education did not prioritise obtaining employment as their primary motivation through the intervention.

These findings may reflect ongoing perceptions that career development initiatives are primarily geared towards job placement, implying a need for broader perspectives on career intervention outcomes. Indeed, the salience of employment-related motivations suggests that participants view the intervention as a pathway to enhancing their quality of life through employment opportunities (Tate, 2021). In fact, engagement in career interventions fosters proactive career behaviours and enhances perceived employability and adaptability (Praskova & Johnston, 2020).

Even if the initial hypothesis -that participants solely seek employment through intervention-holds true, this orientation shouldn't be construed negatively. Panari and Tonelli (2022) argue that when unemployed adults perceive engagement in career interventions as an autonomous choice, it signifies a desire to develop skills and personal growth through employment opportunities. This internal motivation potentially enhances behavioural effectiveness, persistence, and subjective well-being (Panari & Tonelli, 2022).

Exceptions to this trend among younger adults can be nuanced by their present-oriented perspectives (Germano & Brenlla, 2022), prioritising immediate skill acquisition over long-term employment outcomes (e.g., S032: "I intend to acquire skills that will prepare me for the labour market"). Young adults, facing disrupted future plans due to unemployment (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2022), may not prioritise immediate job-seeking urgency, potentially due to financial dependency on family (Morais, 2022). Conversely, this could signify a strong inclination towards learning and skill development through the intervention (Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018), as exemplified by participant S032.

Despite stereotypes suggesting men prioritise work more than women (Van der Meer, 2014), male participants in this study did not predominantly cite job acquisition as their primary motivation. This divergence could indicate that male participants view career interventions as opportunities for exploration or have different readiness levels compared to women. Consequently, they may express more generalised motivations (e.g., S140: "because I want to learn something and discover new opportunities").

Cultural differences among foreign participants, predominantly Brazilian, may underscore varied perceptions of career interventions, with an emphasis on self-awareness and learning as significant outcomes (e.g., S048: "I feel a great need to better understand the professional role in my life..."). While literature on cultural influences among unemployed adults is limited, these responses highlight the unique motivations of participants from diverse cultural backgrounds within career intervention contexts.

Lastly, less educated unemployed individuals demonstrated varied motivations potentially influenced by lower learning self-efficacy and career confidence (Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018). These beliefs may shape their expressed motivations, occasionally appearing superficial (e.g., S130: 'Because I like computers and I want to learn'), reflective of their perceived limitations in pursuing career opportunities.

Learning

The motivation to acquire further knowledge through participation in the intervention was significant for the majority of participants. This motivation was particularly pronounced among younger adults, foreign participants, those with higher education levels, and individuals who had been unemployed for an extended period. While these findings might suggest a potential confusion between career intervention and vocational training (Fuertes et al., 2021), participants' responses reveal a different emphasis. They expressed a strong desire not just for theoretical knowledge (e.g., how to construct a Curriculum Vitae) but also for the acquisition of soft skills (e.g., S025:

"Primarily, because the project itself is quite intriguing. Following that, there is learning and personal development. Specifically, understanding and discovering more about my soft skills, for instance."). This aligns with recent literature highlighting the pivotal role of soft skills in perceived employability (Panari et al., 2020).

Self-awareness

The motivation to enhance self-awareness within career interventions was prominently highlighted by participants, though it was notably less significant for male participants and absent among long-term unemployed participants. The heightened salience of this motivation suggests that participants recognize the pivotal role of self-knowledge in their career development, aligning with Lent and Brown's (2013) perspective. Attaining desired self-awareness can empower individuals to formulate proactive career strategies and enhance their employability (Panari et al., 2020). Several participant responses underscore this motivation for self-awareness through the intervention (e.g., S096: "To learn to make informed decisions and gain confidence in creating new projects.").

Career Counselling

The salience of participants' motivation to receive career support underscores their awareness of its potential significance in their lives, particularly notable among those with a moderate level of education (high school). Conversely, this motivation was negligible among older participants and those with lower levels of education. This underscores the critical need for tailored interventions for unemployed individuals (Amundson et al., 2018; Carvalho et al., 2023), emphasizing the specialized training of career counsellors in this domain (Fuertes et al., 2021). Therefore, experts in the field must develop theory- and evidence-based strategies to better address the needs of unemployed individuals seeking career counselling services (Drosos et al., 2021). Future research should delve deeper into the specificities of this population.

It is essential to recognize that unemployed individuals interested in career services are already exhibiting problem-solving and goal-setting behaviors (Tate, 2021). For instance, upon examining responses from unemployed individuals with a high school education level seeking psychological support, they appear to be in a more advantageous position regarding career resources. Alongside their motivation for career-psychological support, these participants demonstrated vocational confidence (e.g., S092: "(...) I know I possess skills that enable me to excel in diverse roles beyond my current ones"), awareness of the importance of life roles (e.g., S118: "I enrolled in this project to retrain for a new career, seeking guidance on my strengths and abilities to succeed in a new work area that aligns with my personal and professional aspirations"), and a commitment to develop an action plan (e.g., S158: "To receive professional mentoring and advice to help me structure an action plan to enhance my career situation").

In contrast, the lack of motivation among older unemployed individuals and those with lower educational levels to receive career support may be linked to potential limitations in their career adaptive resources (Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018). These circumstances likely influence their interest and perceived value in engaging with career counselling.

Exploration

The motivation to discover or explore information was important to some participants considering participation in a career intervention, especially for adults between 25 and 45 years old, men, those with higher levels of education, and the long-term unemployed. However, it was not relevant at all for the youngest and oldest participants.

Participants' motivation to explore during unemployment suggests they perceive this period as an opportunity for learning and growth. This perspective requires them to navigate the complexities of their environment and utilize available resources through seeking help and engaging in activities (Tate, 2021). Participants' motivation to discover new information was, on the one hand, expressed through words like "curiosity" (S028). In this case, participants demonstrated a willingness to discover, but did not specify (e.g., S149: "look into other options and areas of work"). Others articulated a broader motivation to explore themselves and their capabilities (e.g., S112: "To discover my skills, uncover new ones, and explore new opportunities"). This perceived relationship between learning, self-awareness, and exploration aligns with socio-cognitive theories emphasizing the importance of personal resources and contextual variables for effective self-regulation (Lent et al., 2022).

Curiosity to discover new information, whether personal or contextual, was especially relevant in some groups of participants. Thus, the strong motivation to explore of younger adults may be related to their evolutionary stage, as they are trying to define their interests and skills, are open to exploring different options (Germano & Brenlla, 2022), and more easily accept the challenges of career exploration (Taveira et al., 2023). In terms of the gender gap, other authors have pointed to the possibility of women associating career exploration with the need for more personal development and training (Taveira et al., 2023). However, this does not explain why exploration was one of the men's motivations. On the one hand, although this idea was not detected in the male participants' answers, their role as "breadwinners" may lead them to take responsibility for exploring more than women (Knabe et al., 2016). Conversely, one could hypothesise that the fact that they differ from the other groups of people (showing more motivation to explore than to get a job) could mean that they are genuinely interested in studying the context to make more fact-based career decisions (e.g., S129: "Explore how I can improve my job search and new ways to do it").

In terms of education, the adults with higher levels of education may be more motivated to explore since, despite having achieved high levels of education, they have limited job opportunities. Thus, they may see the intervention to explore other career prospects, different from or parallel to those for which they have studied for (e.g., S092: "I hope (...) understanding where I fit professionally"). Finally, this salience of exploration motivations by the long-term unemployed contrasts with what is expected from someone in this condition for so long (e.g., consequences of the vicious circle of unemployment; Drosos et al., 2021). Usually, it is people with shorter periods of unemployment who have more initiative to explore their environment (Taveira et al., 2023). However, this result may indicate that these participants perceive their situation as an opportunity for growth and evolution (Tate, 2021), which may support their positive career development (Amundson et al., 2018).

On the other hand, the youngest and oldest individuals may not be as motivated to explore career information as they may be more focused on other life stages. Younger people may still be focused on increasing their education level, while older people may already be thinking about retirement (e.g., Sousa-Ribeiro et al., 2018). Finally, those with the highest level of education, when unemployed, due to their possible breakdown of aspirations, may be experiencing negative feelings (Möwisch et al., 2021). For example, this career experience may negatively influence their

outcome expectations, and consequently prevent them from committing to the actions (e.g., exploring) that would lead them to achieve their personal goals.

Change the Professional Path

Participating in the intervention to explore a new professional path was a motivation expressed by some participants, though it was not relevant at all for the youngest and oldest individuals, those with the lowest level of education, or the long-term unemployed participants.

The decision to contemplate a career change requires individuals to possess significant self-efficacy and self-esteem (Panari & Tonelli, 2022). This motivation suggests that unemployed individuals believe in their ability to alter their employment status and are committed to taking action towards desired change (Drosos et al., 2021). Participants expressing this motivation varied in their specific goals, indicating diverse reasons for seeking change amidst challenging circumstances (e.g., S037: "I need to reshape my professional trajectory to confront new challenges"). Similarly, others articulated a desire to align personal and professional growth through career realignment based on acquired training and previous experiences (e.g., S042: "To redirect my professional path based on my training and prior experiences"). Some participants also envisioned exploring new interests and skills, potentially with aspirations for self-employment (e.g., S146: "I enrolled in this project (...) to start my own business").

Regarding educational attainment and duration of unemployment, Panari and Tonelli's (2022) argument provides valuable insights. Those with lower educational levels may perceive a career change as too risky or challenging due to lower self-efficacy (Panari & Tonelli, 2022). Long-term unemployed individuals, on the other hand, may experience amplified negative effects of unemployment, which can diminish their confidence and expectations regarding career changes (Thompson et al., 2017). Thus, individuals in these groups may not readily perceive the necessity or feasibility of pursuing a career change.

The discussion on the absence of motivation for change should not solely hinge on the lack of identified individual psychological resources conducive to confidence in change. Age-specific circumstances also play a crucial role—for instance, younger individuals may not contemplate change as they are at the outset of their careers, while older individuals may already be considering scaling back their professional commitments.

Project Interest and Personal Fulfilment

Finally, participating for reasons related to personal fulfilment and a genuine interest in the career intervention was a residual motivation for almost everyone, except for those with the lowest level of education, who were primarily motivated by their interest in the project. The discussion about these categories was aggregated due to its lower frequency. In addition, both were usually associated with other main ideas, for example, self-awareness (e.g., S110: "I found the project interesting and wanted to see how I could grow personally and professionally"). The frequency differences lie in the fact that the motivation for the project interest was detected by itself in some of the short and uninformative answers (e.g., S093: "I am interested").

Although less frequently mentioned, expressions of these motivations should be acknowledged and underscored in the career field. Individuals' reflections on their experiences and goals enable them to take greater accountability for their decisions, evaluating whether participation in career

services aligns with their personal and professional aspirations (Tate, 2021). Therefore, all motivations for participating in interventions should be valued, fostering initiatives that encourage self-reflection and personal growth. Demonstrating the value and potential impact of career psychological interventions is a shared responsibility among career counsellors, career services, and governmental bodies advocating for comprehensive career support (Carvalho et al., 2023).

Limitations and Future Directions

While the study was comprehensive, it's important to note its limitations. The findings may not generalise beyond the specific geographic area due to limited institutional and national investment in career interventions, hindering access for unemployed individuals. Future research should employ collaborative strategies to replicate these projects across diverse regions for representative results. Although the current study included diverse nationalities, the specific socio-economic and cultural contexts of the participants were not comprehensively analysed. Future research should consider stratifying participants based on socio-economic indicators and cultural backgrounds to better understand how interventions can effectively support underrepresented groups within career development contexts. Therefore, caution is warranted in interpreting the study's findings. The hypotheses and discussions draw from recent literature on this population rather than solely from the study data. Future studies should incorporate robust quantitative analyses to strengthen conclusions. Furthermore, future research should consider additional variables such as psychological factors (e.g., perceived self-efficacy) and contextual variables (e.g., socioeconomic status). This approach aligns with the SCCT framework (Lent & Brown, 2013), allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of unemployed individuals' motivations to participate in interventions.

DECLARATIONS

Availability of data and materials: The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Authors' contributions: CLC, MCT, and ADS contributed to conception and design of the study. CC organized the database and performed the qualitative analysis with the ADS's support. CC wrote the first draft of the manuscript and sections of the manuscript. ADS and MCT contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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