

**“I look like a mess...
Am I needed in the profit-oriented society?”
The labour market and employment situation
of some vulnerable categories of unemployed
and inactive people in Slovenia***

LJILJANA RIHTER**

Faculty of Social Work
University of Ljubljana
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Izvorni znanstveni rad
UDK: 331.5.024.5:364.65
Priljeno: siječanj 2007.

BARBARA KOBAL

Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia
Ljubljana, Slovenia

In Slovenia there is little information available on the labour market and employment situation for some of the most deprived categories of unemployed people. This article presents the research methodology developed and the most outstanding results regarding the labour market and employment situation of the most vulnerable categories which were obtained in the research project supported by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. We focused on seven vulnerable categories: homeless people, people with mental health problems, people with drug addiction problems, people with alcohol addiction problems, people with experience of violence, people undergoing post-penal treatments and people without a work permit. Despite the common notion of professionals that individuals from the vulnerable categories are not motivated for job searching and employment respondents from the vulnerable categories claim they do want a job but under reasonable circumstances. Therefore a lot of obstacles should be removed first in order to improve the labour market and employment situation.

Key Words: job search, employment, vulnerability.

* The article is based on the research report of the research project entitled ‘Social and Economic Inclusion of Deprived Groups – Possible Measures to Increase the Employability of the Most Vulnerable Categories of Long-term Unemployed and Inactive People’ (Trbanc, Boškić, Kobal and Rihter, 2003), which was financed by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs together with a grant of EU’s Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion. The research project was carried out by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Slovenia. The project coordinator was Martina Trbanc, M.A.

** Liljana Rihter, Faculty of Social Work, Topniška 31, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, liljana.rihter@fsd.uni-lj.si

INTRODUCTION

Institutional systems in Continental Europe have been traditionally concerned with combating social exclusion (Jordan, 1996), where social exclusion is defined as the process by which individuals or households experience the deprivation of various resources and/or deprivation in the field of social ties with the broader community and society as a whole (Johnson, 2000) from which it is difficult to escape (Berghman, 1995); or, according to Gore (1995), as the process of diminishing social solidarity, where a part of the population no longer participate in significant opportunities within society. The process of social exclusion is usually triggered by a combination of factors and circumstances: economic deprivation (low income, unemployment, etc.), lack of social capital (low education, no qualifications, poor functional literacy, limited social contacts, inability to search for various information on available possibilities), an unfavourable objective situation (a labour market with few employment opportunities, a restrictive or ineffective social security system, education that is costly and difficult to access), and loose integration within the social network (family, relatives, friends, etc.) (Trbanc, Boškic, Kopal and Rihter, 2003). In literature, the term 'vulnerability' is often linked to 'social exclusion'. Jordan (1996: 5) has argued that individuals are "...vulnerable when they have fewest personal capacities and material resources..." and when they face hazards associated with childhood, old age, illness, disability, or handicaps. Reichert (2003) focuses on vulnerable categories by defining them as categories that have traditionally encountered discrimination on the basis of gender, national origin, ethnicity, age, etc., listing the same categories, but adding women and cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities. Initial research into social exclusion in the European Union cited only a handful of categories as

risk categories for marginalization (young people, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, immigrants and ethnic minorities, travellers, and Roma) (Commission of the European Communities, 1992), but additional categories were later added by member states (MDDSZ, 2000).

Strategies for combating social exclusion and/or increasing social inclusion in Europe focus on labour market policies and social insurance as collective measures for social integration (Jordan, 1996), in line with the view that social exclusion is "a sign of incomplete provision or failure to exercise the social rights of citizens..." (MDDSZ, 2000:16). In the late 1990's, Slovenia joined European Union efforts. In the years that followed, various research projects focusing on poverty and social exclusion and based on subjective (the Slovene Public Opinion survey, carried out by the Centre for Research of Public Opinion and Mass Communications at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana) and objective criteria were conducted. In 2000, the first National Programme for the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion (MDDSZ, 2000) was adopted, and it included a great deal of statistical data about poverty and social exclusion. In 2004, the Action Plan on Social Inclusion (MDDSZ, 2004) brought about the need to obtain the data on some of the most vulnerable categories, with the goal of assessing their employment and labour market situation and proposing appropriate measures. These categories are relatively small, specific, and difficult to access through general surveys that rely on samples representative of the whole population. In Slovenia, a large amount of employment information and some employment policy measures were available for certain categories of unemployed persons (i.e. women, young/old unemployed persons, the physically disabled, the Roma population), whereas very little information could be found for cer-

tain categories (the homeless, people with mental health problems, etc.) (MDDSZ, 2002). In response, the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Affairs decided to support a research project with the following goals: to identify and define vulnerable categories for which little information is available; to develop a special methodological approach; to collect and analyse the data and present the results, in so much as they concern the employment situation and proposals which could assist measures for increasing the employability of persons from these categories.

Although there have been a number of measures aimed at intensifying the employment of Slovenia's unemployed (each year a special National Programme of Active Employment Policy is adopted), these tend not to be based on the actual needs of real people and are therefore not always effective. In response, the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Affairs, in accordance with the European Social Agenda, has begun to boost employment rates by "...strengthening policies aimed at better reconciling work and family life and helping disadvantaged groups and individuals gain access to, and remain in, the labour market" (Bollerot, 2002:29). In order to achieve these goals, it was necessary to obtain information both from the potential users of various employment programmes and from the professionals who offer assistance to individuals from vulnerable categories. The need for an in-depth study of some of the vulnerable categories derives from at least two sources. The first is the findings of Bill Jordan (1996:243), who argued that the solution to the problems of poverty and social exclusion does not in fact require the integration of "...the poor and excluded into mainstream employment, civic responsibility...", but rather the policy study how the poor and excluded survive and seek ways to support these activities. The other source is implicit in paradigmatic

changes in social work practice (Milošević-Arnold, 1998) that emphasize partnership between potential service users and professionals, whose task is to give users an opportunity to explain their own situation and needs. Using qualitative research approach, the main goal was to elucidate the labour market situation and outstanding problems of people from some vulnerable categories.

This article explores the risks, vulnerabilities, pathways and the labour market or employment situation of persons from the following categories (Trbanc et al., 2003):

1. Homeless people: "In Slovenia's Centres for Social Work, professionals have defined two categories of homeless people: the first category consists of rough sleepers, and the second of people who sleep in shelters, almshouses, and the like" (Trbanc et al., 2003:12).
2. People with mental health problems include people who occasionally use medical services, people with a long history of hospitalisation in mental institutions, and people who experience a one-off deep emotional crisis (Zaviršek and Škerjanc, 2000). People with mental health problems become stigmatised and are labelled as mental patients, making their full and active participation in everyday life activities very difficult (Kržan and Zupančič, 2001).
3. People with drug addiction problems, including those who suffer from the harmful consequences of the abuse of illegal substances and those who are in the process of rehabilitation or in the post-rehabilitation phase.
4. People with alcohol addiction problems, including those who regularly abuse alcohol and those who are in the process of healing and rehabilitation, or those who have already completed their rehabilitation.

5. Persons who have experienced (domestic) violence are the victims of violence as a form of control imposed on an individual; in a majority of cases, the victims are women (Reichert, 2003).
6. People undergoing post-penal treatment, including persons serving a prison sentence and persons who have completed their prison sentence.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Because the observed categories are relatively small, they are difficult to access through surveys carried out using samples representative of the whole population. The research was therefore based on the qualitative approach.

Five focus group discussions with field experts were organised in five larger cities (the problems in question are more heavily concentrated in larger urban areas) in Slovenia. Professionals from Centres of Social Work and counsellors from local Employment Offices specializing in the issues in question, as well as professionals from regional Employment Offices, participated in the discussions. 6 to 10 participants attended each discussion, with 42 persons taking part in the entire project. The sample was not representative for Slovenia, but then again this was not the goal of the research. Instead, the project attempted to obtain information from various actors involved with particular problems and to facilitate as objective and neutral an analysis as possible. The guidelines for the focus group discussions were prepared by the research team (Trbanc et al., 2003).

Because only users themselves can adequately describe their employment situation, the next step of the project included structured interviews with persons from the vulnerable categories (63 people) and with representatives of non-governmental organisations (12 people) that offer assi-

stance to and provide programs for individuals from these categories. The individual interviews were prepared by researchers (Trbanc et al., 2003) and carried out by the professionals from the Centres of Social Work and representatives of non-governmental organisations, who helped to locate and organize interviews with persons from these categories.

Data collection took place between May and July, 2003.

All interviews were transcribed and analysed using a strategy called cross-case analysis; first, individual responses to common questions are grouped together (analyses of interviews with individuals from vulnerable categories and representatives of non-governmental organizations) or different perspectives on central issues are analysed (in the case of focus group discussions). The second phase consists of content analysis, which entails the identification, encoding, and categorization of primary patterns within the data (Patton, 1990). The data obtained from the discussions and interviews were organized and analysed in terms of each individual vulnerable category.

THE LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF PEOPLE FROM VULNERABLE CATEGORIES

Persons from the vulnerable categories presented below have the right to participate in all available programmes and measures of the active employment policy in Slovenia under the general categories of difficult-to-employ and/or the long-term unemployed. Each year the government adopts active employment policy programmes. These follow the main guidelines of the National Programme on Labour Market Development and Employment by the Year 2006 (MDDSZ, 2001), which include: raising the level of education of the

active population, reducing structural and regional imbalances in the labour market, raising employment rates, and the development of social partnerships in the search for solutions to unemployment problems. The most frequented programmes are psycho-social rehabilitation and re-qualification programs; programmes for occupational rehabilitation, on-the-job training, and public work are also popular (Trbanc et al., 2003).

The research started from the assumption that persons from vulnerable categories face discrimination in the job market: they have problems finding employment, are unemployed for long periods of time, do odd jobs, and frequently become apathetic. Bollerot (2002:20) emphasises a "...lack of employability among a section of the labour force which does not meet the needs arising from the renewed growth". The labour market is full of jobseekers who do not face the aggravating circumstances and problems of persons from vulnerable categories, thus creating a very unfavourable situation for the latter. An analysis of the data collected in this project confirms this hypothesis.

Homeless people

The life situation of homeless people is problematic and complex. Their vulnerability stems from a number of factors: the inaccessibility of housing, the vagaries of the job market, the unavailability of economic resources, etc.; a loss of home is often accompanied by a failure to maintain employment. These persons also run a high risk of emotional difficulties, substance abuse, and physical illness (Cohen, 2001). Our research (Trbanc et al., 2003) revealed

similar patterns. Homeless people have extremely poor prospects for finding a steady job – frequently, they do not even look for employment. In the interviews, homeless persons listed the following as the most problematic obstacles to finding a paid job:

- appearance ("Untidy", "I look like a mess");
- language ("I do not speak Slovenian very well", "I am not skilful in presenting myself");
- health ("I do not feel I am capable of work");
- work conditions and situations ("I will not work for 30,000 or 60,000 SIT¹ per month", "it is difficult to get leave, so I take the days off myself", "unfair employers").

Professionals at the Centres of Social Work and counsellors working at Employment Offices also stressed that the homeless face stigmatization. Potential employers recognize local homeless people and will not employ them. The most important factor of the decreased working capabilities of homeless persons is lifestyle, especially in cases of long-term homelessness and inactivity, where frequent health problems are often accompanied by a loss of vocational knowledge and skills and work habits. Nonetheless, the homeless often do various odd jobs (helping out on farms², seasonal work, cleaning, physical work at open markets and in a variety of black market businesses). It often happens that "employers" do not pay for the work done, but homeless people do not take any legal action against their "employers". Researchers have labelled these activities 'shadow work' (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Wagner, 1993). One discrepancy between research conducted in

¹ According to the Bank of Slovenia's average exchange rate as of September, 2003 (daily average rate taken on 11 September, 2003), SIT 30,000 (Slovenian tolar) equalled EUR 127.7; SIT 60,000 equalled EUR 255.4.

² Those working seasonally on farms are also given shelter.

other countries and our project should be mentioned: illicit activities, such as drug dealing, were not mentioned by the homeless persons who participated in our project. Although it could be argued that obviously illicit activities are not conducted by homeless people in Slovenia, one must keep in mind that the interviews in question were conducted by professionals who offer help and services to the homeless, and whom the participants might not have trusted enough to mention 'problematic' activities.

Most of the interviewed homeless persons were older. Many had lost their jobs and homes during the transition period. Some mentioned that several years of work had been "stolen" from them, as they had falsely believed that their employer had arranged wage contributions for health and social protection and pensions. In light of this information, Černič Mali's interpretation (1999), which views homelessness as not only a consequence of personal characteristics, but also of the changes in economic and social protection systems, seems reasonable.

Some homeless persons stated that in the past, their expectations in life were not realistic. They were unaware of the long-term consequences of their decisions. It was much easier for them to find a job when they were younger, so they frequently changed or quit jobs. In most cases, they wanted better paying jobs that offered more leisure time. Problems began to appear later in life. Their way of life resulted in various chronic illnesses, which in turn led to poorer work performance. They can no longer perform many of the jobs that are readily available in the labour market, and also face employer discrimination due to their age and appearance. They have also underdeveloped social networks. Most of them said that they do not have any friends, family, or relatives who could offer them material support or with whom they could discuss their distress

and problems. All the homeless persons who were interviewed had a low level of basic (functional) skills, that is, those skills needed to function normally in today's society. They have a hard time writing applications, reading instructions, reading timetables, completing forms, etc.; none of them knew how to use a computer.

People with mental health problems

People with mental health problems are at a disadvantage when competing with other jobseekers. Not only are they stigmatized; in many cases, their ability to work is limited. The prevailing opinion of the professionals from the Centres of Social Work and Employment Offices is that people with mental health problems are rarely able to hold a full-time job; they are particularly unsuited for jobs where employees are expected to achieve set results or conform to norms (such as a set number of products per hour). Consequently, as these experts have also pointed out, unemployment is detrimental to mental health. Some long-term unemployed persons are unable to find work because of their passive approach and apathy. For these individuals, retirement (provided the preconditions for retirement have been met) is often the solution. Though most professionals believe that (disability) retirement is an ideal solution in cases where mental health problems have been medically diagnosed and assessed as a disability, Kopal and Oreški (2005) have argued that retirement during active working years can have serious consequences on an individual's social networks and financial situation.

Another view states that, in some cases, people with obvious mental health problems tend to ignore and deny their problems and avoid medical diagnosis and assistance. In these cases, the reactions and support of the immediate personal environment (i.e.

family members) are crucial for identifying and solving acute problems.

Representatives of non-governmental organizations working in the field of mental health have stressed that a loss of social networks and employment often pushes people with mental health problems to the outskirts of society. This results in financial problems, a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, and frequent hospitalization. They have also observed that some of their users have problems expressing their needs, and sometimes have very unrealistic expectations and plans.

The main obstacles to employment are a restricted ability to remain focused and decreased motor skills, which are a consequence of medication. Although individuals who have had mental health problems since puberty are often unable to complete their education, a lack of education is generally not a problem for people with mental health problems. The symptoms of mental disorders usually appear during or soon after high school, but initially these are not so serious as to prevent a person from completing his/her education. More severe problems tend to appear when a person begins his/her career and is already employed. When the illness culminates, the individual begins to fall into periodical crises or a permanent crisis, which cause significant variations in job performance. As there are many 'healthy' people in the labour market, employers often look for ways to dismiss 'problematic' employees once they have been identified. Employers occasionally take advantage of a person's mental health crisis by creating a situation where an individual 'voluntarily' agrees, in writing, to terminate the employment contract. Once this happens, the person in question is no longer entitled to unemployment benefits as an unemployed person, and can only apply for social assistance at Centres of Social Work.

Interviews with persons with mental health problems show that these individuals are aware of their situation. Almost all respondents cited their condition as the source of their problems and stated that improved health would improve their quality of life. Most respondents listed family (domestic) circumstances, situations, and relationships as the main cause of their health problems. They have work experience, if not as employees, at least as participants in public work or part-time work as students, and had had healthy relationships with their co-workers and superiors. Most respondents would like to get a job, in so much as this is possible. Some feel that they are no longer capable of working and would prefer to retire.

These findings are similar to those of two small-scale research projects (Kržan and Zupančič, 2001; Razpet, 2001), which concluded that people with long-term mental health problems have a great deal of difficulty due to their financial situation, and would like to work more or have an additional source of income; they need society, understanding, friends, love, and especially work and employment, since financial resources are key to the independence that they desire. It can therefore be argued that retirement during one's years of active employment should not be a primary solution.

People with drug addiction problems

Definitions of addictive behaviour are social constructs. When addictive behaviour is defined in moral terms, individuals become stigmatized and perceived as persons from whom society must be protected (Hanson, 2001). The professionals from Centres of Social Work and counsellors from local and regional Employment Offices stated that employed drug users find it difficult to keep a job due to noticeable

fluctuations in work ability, which are the result of abstinence crises and the need to use substances. Their employment situation largely depends on the employer's (in)tolerance. Employment in the family business is the best solution for drug users, because employees and co-workers know the person in question and tend to be more tolerant of his/her drug problems. Another view states that it is in fact possible to live with drugs and hold a steady job. In such cases, drug users have to take responsibility for themselves and require a flexible job.

Most people with substance abuse problems who have sought assistance at Centres of Social Work are unemployed. Even those in the post-rehabilitation phase have serious difficulties competing for jobs because of the stigmatization and prejudice of employers. Their unfavourable starting position in the labour market is also the result of low levels of education. People with substance abuse problems characteristically begin to abuse drugs at a very early age (in some cases in primary school), and are unable to complete their formal education. A low level of education usually leaves them with undesirable and low paying jobs that are incompatible with their wishes and ambitions. For this reason, they often opt for social benefits and/or occasional part-time jobs or criminal activities.

Representatives of non-governmental organisations also confirmed that employed drug users usually have low paying odd jobs and jobs in the black market (i.e. taxi drivers, work in the kitchen, work at gas stations, in large supermarkets, in stores, etc.). They are constantly afraid that their drug abuse will be noticed and they will lose their job. Serious drug addicts have additional difficulty keeping jobs due to activities related to drug use. A typical eight-hour workday that does not provide an opportunity to leave the place of work is a major obstacle. Those who are in a methadone programme should not have any major

difficulties at their place of work, although it is possible that, after some time, the quality of their work will drop. The information indicated that most drug addicts are unemployed. Some wish to find a job, but many feel that competing for jobs would be useless because no one wants to hire a drug addict, and, in either case, no suitable jobs are available.

Analyses of interviews with persons with drug addiction problems showed that most are unemployed; some do odd jobs which do not count towards their working years and for which no social or pension contributions are paid, or work in the black market. Those who were once employed or are currently employed had or have good relations with their co-workers and noted the fact that work increases their vocational or professional knowledge and skills. On the other hand, several work experiences that ended badly due to insufficient payment for the work done (payment was either withheld or was low or irregular) or unsuitable work schedules (different hours each day due to the employer's needs, night work) were noted. Also, these persons felt as if they had no rights. One respondent pointed out that employers would probably dismiss a drug addict if they found out about his/her addiction.

Most interviewees from this category would like to find jobs, but are also aware that the first step toward a suitable permanent employment is the removal of certain obstacles such as addiction, health problems and a low level of education. Some say they would initially require flexible jobs in order to accommodate treatment in a methadone programme. Others would accept jobs only under certain conditions ("It depends on where or what I would do... I would not want to have a job which pays on the basis of my effectiveness."). Some are not prepared to accept just any job or prefer to deal drugs, as this brings greater financial rewards than income from regu-

lar employment ("I wasn't motivated to search for a job since I earned much more money by dealing drugs than I could have earned at a part-time or full-time job."). Only one respondent with drug addiction problems had no problems searching for a job. The following were mentioned as major obstacles to looking for work: low levels of education; employers who do not respond to written applications and demand that applicants appear in person, creating a need for suitable attire which represents additional costs; stigmatization, especially in smaller villages or towns where everyone knows each other, and a lack of available jobs. Respondents with relatives and friends have already 'exploited' their help in looking for a job (finding work through the help and recommendations of friends and relatives); in many cases, however, they left these jobs because of employer exploitation, and not only because of sub-standard work performance.

Professionals from the Centres of Social Work, counsellors from Employment Offices, and representatives of non-governmental organizations explain the relationship between drug addiction and (un)employment by pointing out that regular employment is not suited to the lifestyle of a drug addict and that drug addicts are usually dismissed if employers learn of their problems (Vučak, 2000). Most respondents, however, believe that they are capable of work, but that employers tend to exploit them due to their vulnerability, ultimately leading to their voluntary dismissal. Their statements therefore partly refute the view that employment is not a part of the lifestyle of a drug user, and also challenge the belief that substance abuse victims alone are responsible for endangering their continuity at work (Akabas and Bikson, 2001). All parties participating in the research agree that most people with drug addiction problems are unemployed; those who do work usually do not hold re-

gular employment, but rather occasional jobs or jobs in the black market without the guaranteed rights deriving from legal work contracts. This is in line with the Jordan's conclusion (1996) that a decline in opportunities for the formal employment of less skilled workers has led to the semi-legal or illegal activities of poor and excluded people, who thereby seek to compensate for the inequities of the market.

People with alcohol addiction problems

In Slovenia, little information about unemployed people with alcohol addiction problems is available due to the fact that these persons are not registered separately in Employment Offices and are not treated solely for alcohol addiction at Centres of Social Work (treatment tends to focus on other problems, such as domestic violence, treatment of the whole family, homelessness, etc.). The same situation is also present in other countries (Hanson, 2001). In one Centre of Social Work, nearly 90 percent of all cases are related to alcohol abuse and addiction. Even though the data on the number of people with alcohol addiction problems is incomplete, professionals from the Centres of Social Work and counsellors from Employment Offices agree that this figure is growing, or at best holding steady. The reasons for this can be found in high unemployment rates.

Professionals from the Centres of Social Work usually do not deal with people who face alcohol addiction problems in the work place, but with those who face problems in domestic life and manage to function 'normally' at their jobs. Nonetheless, it is impossible to conclude that the employment of persons with alcohol addiction problems is not problematic. Obviously, many employed persons have alcohol addiction problems; this indicates that employers are more tolerant towards alcohol addiction than other addictions, especially

drug addiction, and also that alcoholics try to control their addiction problems when at work. As Bernik (1995) discovered, persons with alcohol addiction problems can work until their problems become visible, which, in a majority of cases, only happens after longer periods of time (Ignatov and Kalamar, 1999). At the same time, many people with alcohol addiction problems are registered as unemployed at Employment Offices – many have rejected rehabilitation-healing programmes or simply do not want to admit that they have a problem. These persons are practically unemployable, since most employers will not give a job to someone with an alcohol addiction problem, as research has pointed out a decrease in job productivity due to alcohol related problems (Hanson, 2001), which is something rather undesirable in profit oriented societies.

Representatives of non-governmental organisations that offer programmes for recovering alcoholics have stated that most of their users are employed and occasionally do have problems at work. These are mainly related to promotion, seeing as these individuals have to prove that they are reliable workers more often than other employees. Recovering alcoholics do not seem to have any problems when looking for a job. Individuals in an acute stage of alcoholism face more problems in the work place. Many lose their jobs, and it is very difficult for them to find new employment. Odd jobs are often the only option for people with serious alcohol addiction problems. In today's economy, it is relatively rare for an employer to be engaged in someone's rehabilitation to the point that they offer the individual in question leave (paid or unpaid), encourage him/her to seek help for his/her addiction in a rehabilitation-healing programme, and

ultimately allow him/her to return to work. This had been common in the past.

Both employed and unemployed respondents from this category could be found. Most respondents who were once employed, and those who are currently employed, had or have good relationships with their co-workers and employers. One respondent claimed that he lost his job on the grounds that he was an alcoholic, but also emphasised that he began drinking seriously only after he had been dismissed, and that he had never drunk at work. Only two respondents admitted that their problems are related to alcohol ("The biggest problem I have is connected to my self-employment, because my bank account is blocked. The main reason for this problem is alcohol."; "I lost my job because of alcohol."). Of those respondents who are currently unemployed, only some would take a job if available, and these are mainly persons who are currently abstinent ("Since I've been abstinent I've been thinking of how to get a job."). Other respondents who are unemployed do not feel they have any chance of finding a job, or stated reasons why they cannot look for employment ("I am not searching for a job because I cannot leave everything at home, I mean my pets I have to take care of."). When looking for work, the most common obstacles are: a lack of work experience due to long-term unemployment, age, and state of health ("Employers ask if you are an alcoholic because the consequences of long-term alcoholism are obvious at first sight.").

People who have experienced domestic violence³

Professionals from the Centres of Social Work and counsellors from Employment

³ Carlson and Choi (2001) argue that the term 'violence' connotes a narrower range of behaviours than the term 'abuse', and therefore suggest the use of the term 'abuse', which encompasses patterns of behaviour involving the threat or use of physical or sexual violence or emotional, psychological abuse with the potential to cause harm, injuries, or even death. In this article, the term 'violence' is used in reference to other literature (Romito, 2001; Reichert, 2003), but its meaning is identical to that of 'abuse' as used by Carlson and Choi (2001).

Offices generally agree that incidents of domestic violence are no more common among the unemployed than among other categories of the population. Relevant literature paints a similar picture, emphasizing that violent behaviour is present among all social classes and social groups, regardless of the level of one's formal education (Romito, 2001). Nonetheless, it is possible that, in some cases, the long-term unemployed become less tolerant, violent, and more aggressive due to their situation and as a reaction to distress and feelings of helplessness.

At first glance, occurrences of domestic violence would seem to be unrelated to an individual's work situation. Often, however, quite the opposite is true. While a victim is at work, his/her behaviour cannot be directly controlled by the perpetrator. Paid work increases the possibility of financial independence, and can also be a source of positive affirmation and self-confidence. Hence it is not rare for a perpetrator to persuade his/her victim to voluntarily leave his/her job. When this occurs, the victim's chances of regaining a job depend significantly on how long he/she has not worked, as well as other characteristics (level of education, age, etc.).

Opinions are divided as to the number of people who have faced domestic violence and what their most urgent needs are. One discussion at a Centre of Social Work stressed that housing is the greatest problem faced by women who are or have been victims of domestic violence, and that their employment situation is no worse than in other population categories. At another Centre of Social Work, however, the opinion was expressed that, in that particular region, one of the greatest issues for women experiencing domestic violence was their economic dependence on the perpetrator due to lack of employment.

Generally, more than a half of the women who seek help at Centres of Social Work are employed and have regular salaries. The situation of victims whose partners do not allow them to have a job or who have had to change residence in order to avoid extreme forms of violence is more problematic. In such cases, it is rarely possible for the victim to continue a job in the area where he/she had previously lived, and the danger of unemployment becomes much more acute.

Most women who were regularly employed prior to their stay at shelters for battered women try to keep their jobs. Many of them use their yearly paid leave or request unpaid leave. One danger that women in shelters for battered women who manage to keep their jobs face is the possibility that the perpetrator will come to their place of work. In this situation, the employer's response varies. Some women reported that they had lost their job because the perpetrator constantly came to their place of work or called on the phone.⁴ Another problem is the distance between the shelter and place of work. For safety reasons, women are usually sent to shelters relatively far from their place of permanent residence. A greater distance between shelter and place of work means greater travel expenses and more time away from the safe house, making it easier for the perpetrator to find the victim. Also, mothers must find someone to look after their children while at work. Some women mentioned that their children are frequently ill, which means they are often on child-care leave. For many women, it is hard to work while staying in a shelter. Employers are reluctant to grant them unpaid leave and, most importantly, they cannot afford to take it.

Most women interviewed in Slovenian shelters have children. If their life situation is not successfully resolved, there is a great

⁴ Similar as Romio (2001) points out.

danger that their problems will be reproduced in the next generation. This social problem (the reproduction of marginality) was not only pointed out by research (Reichert, 2003), but has also been confirmed by experienced therapists working with non-governmental organizations. The majority of interviewees stated that they grew up in families where domestic violence formed a part of everyday life. These women believe that, besides violence, unemployment is one of their greatest problems. Some became unemployed as a consequence of violence. One interviewee consented to retraining (for another occupation) because she could no longer perform her previous occupation due to her injuries. Some respondents lost their job due to pregnancy. Most respondents lost their jobs because their former employers had gone bankrupt, which, though not directly linked to the experience of violence, had a significant impact on their economic (in)dependence. Following dismissal, they could no longer find regular jobs. The majority of respondents had worked in the black market. All but one respondent, who already has a regular job, would like to find a steady job.

The respondents listed the following as key obstacles to searching for a job: state of health; level of education attained and basic (functional) skills (problems writing job applications and using a computer); baby-sitting, child-care; age, and finding a permanent job where all health care and pension contributions are covered by the employer and count towards their years in the workforce.

Professionals and volunteers from non-governmental organizations and professionals from Centres of Social Work tend to have different views on the needs of victims of domestic violence. Although some stress the importance of employment and the need for employment (and economic independence) after leaving a shelter (this thesis is supported by Sullivan, Basta, Tan

and Davidson, 1992), women are rarely successful in finding regular work, and some find jobs in the black market. On the other hand, professionals from regions and/or cities where housing is a major problem (Mandič, 1999) claim that finding a job is of secondary importance, and that finding a place to live is the primary goal.

The social networks of persons who have experienced violence are not very helpful in the search for a job, mostly because they consist of people who are unable to help or have (similar) problems themselves, or because victims simply have little social support (Mitchell and Hodson, 1983). Many times, women do not even ask for help because they are afraid that any information they reveal might help the perpetrator locate them.

When looking for work, respondents seek help from the professionals at the Centres of Social Work and especially counsellors at Employment Offices. They also ask for help from therapists in non-governmental organizations, shelters, and safe houses. Some said they did not receive any help from Employment Office counsellors, while others did receive information about job openings and were sent on job interviews. Some interviewees in shelters and safe houses are interested in vocational retraining and additional vocational training because they are aware of the importance of education for improving employment prospects. If we keep in mind that, as Carlson and Choi (2001) pointed out, poorly educated women with low incomes are more likely to experience acts of violence, vocational training and/or retraining would seem to be an ideal measure for preventing further acts of violence.

People in post-penal treatment

Professionals from the Centres of Social Work and counsellors from Employment Offices point out that most people

in post-penal treatment were unemployed even before they began their prison sentence. Some authors emphasize similar findings in their own research (Meglič and Planinšič Florjančič, 2000). If a person has been unemployed and registered at the local Employment Office before serving a prison sentence exceeding six months, he/she must de-register (report his/her imprisonment). Anyone who fails to do this is deleted from the register of job seekers, which can have serious consequences upon re-registration. During any imprisonment exceeding six months, the person involved is ineligible for all measures of active employment policy, such as education or job training.

In cases where a person had been employed prior to incarceration, the employment situation depends on the length of the sentence. If the sentence does not exceed six months, the employment contract is temporarily suspended – it is not terminated, meaning that a person can only lose his/her job if grounds for extraordinary termination exist, or if the employer initiates the bankruptcy procedure. The temporary suspension of the employment contract ceases the day the prison sentence is completed, and the person has the right to return to work within five days. If a person does not return to work within five days of the completion of the prison sentence, the employment contract is permanently terminated (Employment Relations Act, Ur.l.RS 42/2002, Article 51). If the prison sentence exceeds six months, the contract is also permanently terminated (Employment Relations Act, Ur.l.RS 42/2002, Article 111).

The terms of paid work during incarceration are defined by law (Penal Code, Ur.l.RS 22/2000, Act 52). Normally, work is done within the prison complex. During the last six months of imprisonment, prisoners can also work outside of the prison, provided work has been arranged for them. Whether or not a person serving a sentence does any work (inside or outside of the

prison facility) or is enrolled in educational programs depends on the will and ambitions of the individual. Enrolment in educational programs can also be a financial problem, because all part-time (adult) education must be paid for (Pavlinec and Štrukelj, 2002).

Most people are unemployed following release from prison. The professionals from the Centres of Social Work are often confronted with young people lacking work experience and sound work habits who have not, in many cases, even registered themselves as unemployed at the local Employment Office. In some cases, a previously unemployed person who had not de-registered from the Employment Office register for the duration of his/her sentence was deleted from the register, making re-registration following the completion of the sentence impossible and rendering the individual ineligible for any employment policy measures and programmes. If a released person cannot find a job or be included in employment measures or programmes, it is very likely that he/she will start searching for alternative illegal survival strategies, which could potentially lead back to prison.

Lack of education is a problem for most people trying to re-enter the job market following completion of a prison sentence. Housing problems are also common, because these persons often have nowhere to live once out of prison.

Even if released persons have no other outstanding problems (addiction, mental illness, etc.), employers are reluctant to give them work – if they know about the person's past – since they assume this could influence the work process and work relations. Released persons face stigmatization unless they can manage to hide their past and explain their absence from the labour market in some other way.

The professionals from Centres of Social Work and counsellors from Employment Offices have observed that many

people in this category actually do not want a job. Many ex-prisoners treated by professionals argue that it is pointless to look for employment because they can earn much more through alternative strategies – a mix of social benefits, occasional cash-in-hand jobs, and various illegal business activities – than they could with a regular job.

Interviews were conducted only with persons who have completed their sentences. They all feel that improving their employment situation is crucial to improving their life situation, and research conducted by Pavlinec and Štrukelj (2002) shows similar responses. All except one interviewee, who is working on his family's farm, claim that they are currently looking for a job and would like to find one. They also claim that they had good relationships with co-workers and superiors at previous jobs. The respondents are aware of the general lack of jobs and the fact that stigmatization decreases their competitiveness in the labour market. As their main problems in searching for a job, respondents from this category mentioned dishonest and unfair employers (some were promised jobs which never materialized), stigmatization, and a low level of education.

CONCLUSION

The most remarkable finding of the research was that almost all sources of information (professionals, representatives of non-governmental organisations, and people from vulnerable categories) gave similar responses regarding the labour market and employment situation of particular category. To be sure, some small differences can also be noted. For instance, the opinions of representatives of non-governmental organisations were more often in line with those of respondents from vulnerable categories, whereas the opinions of the professionals from Centres of Social Work and local or regional Employment Offices were sometimes quite different.

Each category has its own central problems; these are mainly acute problems, yet individuals with multiple problems, or going through different phases of the same problem, can be found within each category. Sometimes it was difficult to place an individual in one category because of the complexity of his/her problems; for instance, people who have experienced violence often have mental health problems (Carlson and Choi, 2001).

It is clear that the labour market and employment situation of persons from vulnerable categories is unfavourable due to the following factors (Trbanc et al., 2003):

1. Temporary or permanent limitation of work abilities: people from vulnerable categories often have problems (drug or alcohol abuse, homelessness,...) which must first be resolved in order to increase their chances of finding employment.
2. Low level of education and functional literacy problems: the majority of respondents (82%) have at most completed two to three year vocational secondary education programmes. Additionally, individuals from certain categories (the homeless, people with alcohol problems, people with mental health problems) often have problems with functional literacy (for instance: reading newspapers, instructions, writing applications...). The low level of education of people from vulnerable categories gives them a poor starting position in the job market and only marginal employment options (unattractive, poorly paid, physically difficult jobs).
3. Long periods of absence from the employment sphere: due to problems and their consequences (longer periods of dependency, periods of rehabilitation...), individuals from vulnerable categories are often absent from employment for longer periods of time.

Absence leads to a decrease in work abilities and a fall in vocational knowledge. Employers are often reluctant to employ people with gaps in their employment records.

4. Apathy and a lack of motivation for a job search and employment: professionals believe that individuals from the vulnerable categories are often not motivated to look for work because of their lifestyles and because they do not favour regular employment, since social benefits and jobs on the black market are more profitable. On the other hand, respondents from the vulnerable categories claim that they do want jobs (appropriate employment, good employment) and speak about negative experiences related to work and a lack of opportunities. Evidence shows a selective motivation for employment, that is "... the gap between the jobs they would be motivated to take and their actual job options" (Trbanc et al., 2003:68).
5. Stigmatization and distrust of employers: employers are hesitant to employ people with problems (in this case, victims of stigmatisation), since they assume this could influence the work process.

Our findings confirm Bollerot's view (2002:26) that "...among the traps keeping people inactive, the most important are financial...", yet they also show that other psychological and social factors influence employability, especially in cases of long-term unemployment (people reject the idea of returning to the labour market). Family status and types of employment that involve working hours and travelling distances incompatible with the wishes of unemployed persons can also have a negative effect on employability. The results of our analysis clearly show that respondents (especially people with drug addiction problems and people in post-penal treatment) will not accept low paying jobs if they know that they

will lose other social benefits and won't be able to work in the black market, which would reduce their financial resources. Only a few have no intention of returning to the labour market and the majority feel that only low paying jobs are available to them.

These findings are a good springboard for rethinking the measures for improving the labour market and employment situation of the most vulnerable categories and proposing new (more appropriate) ones. When establishing new employment programmes, politicians and professionals should be very careful, as demonstrated by the findings of a research project from Finland, where a shift in labour market policies toward enforcing unemployed workers' participation in labour market programmes has occurred. This shift, however, has not led to an increase in employment rates (Malmberg-Heimonen and Vouri, 2005).

Over a decade ago, Jordan (1996) argued that compulsory employment or training rarely meet efficiency criteria for several reasons: coercion is demotivating, and people are unlikely to perform well under such circumstances and therefore develop a culture of resistance.

The complexity of problems faced by people from vulnerable categories indicates that a complex approach is needed. Some general recommendations have been given (Trbanc et al., 2003): longer and more complex programmes for social reintegration carried out by non-governmental organizations, which seem to be more sensitive to the problems of persons from vulnerable categories; employment in a 'normal environment' should be encouraged for individuals who have solved their acute problems; individuals with limited work abilities should be provided with more flexible forms of employment, such as part-time work, flexible hours, and work at home; finally, sheltered forms of employment should be developed

for individuals who cannot be employed in a normal work environment.

If we only considered the professionals' point of view, we could miss important information provided by people from vulnerable categories themselves. Their input shows that, since they would be prepared to take a (appropriate) job, the situation is perhaps not so grim. Research approaches aimed at assessing the needs of the unemployed and describing their situation are of great importance for the development of effective employment programmes.

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Sažetak

**»NI NA ŠTO NE LIČIM... JESAM LI POTREBAN U TRŽIŠNO
ORIJENTIRANOM DRUŠTVU?«**

**POLOŽAJ NA TRŽIŠTU RADA I ZAPOSŁJIVOST NEKIH
RANJIVIH KATEGORIJA NEZAPOSLENIH I NEAKTIVNIH
OSOBA U SLOVENIJI**

Liljana Rihter

*Fakultet socijalnog rada, Sveučilište u Ljubljani
Ljubljana, Slovenija*

Barbara Kopal

*Institut za socijalnu zaštitu Republike Slovenije
Ljubljana, Slovenija*

U Sloveniji je malo informacija dostupno o tržištu rada i situaciji u zapošljavanju u kojoj se nalaze neke od najuskraćenijih kategorija nezaposlenih osoba. Ovaj članak prikazuje razvijenu metodologiju istraživanja i najznačajnije rezultate u pogledu tržišta rada i situacije u zapošljavanju u kojoj se nalaze neke od najranjivijih kategorija dobivene unutar istraživačkog projekta pod pokroviteljstvom Ministarstva rada, obitelji i socijalne skrbi. Usredotočili smo se na sedam ranjivih kategorija: beskućnike, osobe s duševnim bolestima, osobe ovisne o drogama, osobe ovisne o alkoholu, osobe s poviješću nasilja, osobe uključene u programe nakon izdržavanja zatvorske kazne i osobe bez dozvole za rad. Usprkos uvriježenom mišljenju stručnjaka da pojedinci iz ranjivih kategorija nisu motivirane za traženje posla i radnog odnosa, osobe iz ranjivih kategorija tvrde da žele posao, ali pod razumnim okolnostima. Stoga bi se mnoge prepreke prvo trebale ukloniti kako bi se poboljšala situacija na tržištu rada i u zapošljavanju.

Ključne riječi: traženje posla, zaposlenost, ranjivost.