

# An Overview of Alienation among Unemployed Adults: A Literature Survey

Mohammad Ashraf Malik\*

Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, AMU, Aligarh, India

## Abstract

Unemployment is known as the great cause of different psychological problems and physical as well. Due to the prolonged period of unemployment a person lost control on himself and feels weak because of financial crunch and redundancy. It has been also observed by different researchers that an unemployed person lacks the self-identity, becomes isolated from the society and even himself also. So this paper is an extensive effort to find out some relevant literature regarding alienation in unemployed adults by reviewing the previous literature.

**Keywords:** Alienation; Adults; Psychological; Unemployment

## Concept of Alienation

The concept of alienation has been used to connote different meanings some time it has been used to designate all sort of negative attitudes which are present in individual or in society, it has sometimes seen as negation of world in such forms as estrangement, powerlessness, normlessness, and meaninglessness, isolation, and loss of self or so on. It finds a place in all social sciences like Theology, psychology and in philosophy and literature also. Alienation has been used in a variety ways by philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists to refer an extra ordinary variety of psycho-social disorders, including loss of self, anxiety state, anomie, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, loneliness, atomization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism and the loss of beliefs or values.

Alienation is an ambiguous concept and its complexities is not easy to understand. It was sometime synonymed with anomia. However theorists of alienation have generally distinguished between social condition and the response of individuals to these conditions. Alienation usually refers to the later, while the term 'anomie' has been used to describe a social state in which conditions of normlessness or the breakdown of social rules are identifiable. While as Sociologists have distinguished between anomie and alienation. They defined purely anomie as social phenomenon- a condition of society at a particular stage of social change, whereas alienation is purely a subjective phenomenon concentrated within the individual frame work. The phenomenon of alienation is slow and systematic at the affective level. It may have some specific psychological reinforces which might be present in certain type of personalities. But at the social level, when certain situations come into direct confrontation with the confirmed norms of behaviour, it flourishes. Merton viewed alienation in connection with the absence of common frame of fundamental social values. Similarly, The Encyclopaedia Britannica has described alienation, in social sciences, as the state of feeling estranged or separated from one's environment, work, products of work, or self," encompassing such variants as "powerlessness (the feeling that one's destiny is not under one's control but is determined by external agents, fate, luck, or institutional arrangements), meaninglessness (a generalised sense of purposelessness in life), cultural estrangement (the sense of removal from established values in society) and self-estrangement, perhaps the most difficult to define, and in a sense the master theme, the understanding that in one way or another the individual is out of touch with himself.

## Alienation in the Context of Existentialism

Existentialism is considered as the third force of psychology which rounds around the individual's personality. The existentialists held the view that it is a separation of individual from real self, because of preoccupation with abstraction and the necessity for conformity to the wishes of others and the dictates of social institutions. The alienation of existing man from others, from himself is one of the leading subject matters of existentialists. According to Kierkegaard; man's being depends upon a constant tension between existence and essence, the choice between despair and submits to alienation in the form of inauthenticity in being, the loss of freedom, and the reification of idealistic. While as JP Sartre adds to this ontological and existential characterization the aspect of alienation between people. He thought that one way to defend oneself against alienation was in authentic existence wherein the individual makes a radical affirmation of his own freedom [1].

Existentialism imparts that alienation is embedded in the nature of man as an "inscrutable cast" away on this universe. The realization about the meaninglessness of the world causes the individual to make different efforts to overcome that state but cannot find any exit from this situation and from his pre-planned fate. Moreover, from the view point of Sartre and Albert Camus, They inclined to view human being as an isolated existent who is "cast" into an alien universe, conceive universe as having no meaning, inherent truth or value and to represent human life as an existence which is absurd as well as anguished" [1]. Similarly Finkelstein [2] describes that each individual comes from a nothingness and move through his life towards the inevitable nothingness that awaits him at the end; the death. While as Josephson and Josephson [3] considered that alienated man feels as everyman and no man, drifting in a world that has little meaning for him and over which he experience no power".

The main focus of Existentialist psychologists was on mental processes that construe present experiences, enabling individuals to

\*Corresponding author: Mohammad Ashraf Malik, Department of Psychology, AMU, Aligarh, India, Tel: 8755049858; E-mail: [malikashraf43@gmail.com](mailto:malikashraf43@gmail.com)

Received June 03, 2014; Accepted September 24, 2014; Published October 01, 2014

Citation: Malik MA (2014) An Overview of Alienation among Unemployed Adults: A Literature Survey. J Psychol Psychother 4: 156. doi: [10.4172/2161-0487.1000156](https://doi.org/10.4172/2161-0487.1000156)

Copyright: © 2014 Malik MA. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

cope with or be overcome by the challenge of existence. This approach generally falls within the humanistic group of theories such as client-centred therapy of Rogers [4], and Gestalt therapy of Perls [5], as well as the existential perspective of May [6]. Existential psychology therefore provides a fascinating framework for examining the effects of work and organisations on the individual because of its main focuses on the estrangement from one's inner or 'true' self, thus blocking growth, self-actualisation and meaningful interpersonal relationships. The major point about the existential view of alienation and work is the separation between this inner self and the 'created' or artificial self, resulting from choice – insofar as this is possible, given capitalistic organisations, which frustrate self-realisation. Hence we see a range of dysfunctional psychological outcomes emerge as employees attempt to reconcile their inner and artificial selves. Among these are depersonalisation, self-estrangement and loss of personal identity, which in turn can have debilitating consequences for the individual. Marx himself was aware of the denial of inner self when, in the context of the labour process, he remarks that man "must subordinate his will to it" [7].

### **Alienation in Unemployed Adults: A Literature Survey**

Alienation is not a novel concept in this world but from the ages alienation has been studied. By reviewing the various literatures available on alienation it has been seen that alienation has a deep relationship with unemployed adults as is revealed by the different studies. Which showed that Alienation has a great impact on the health of unemployed adults? The unemployed adults are expected to exhibit poorer mental health due to elevated levels of anxiety, frustration, disappointment, alienation and depression. The young people's increased social alienation is a consequence of unemployment, rather than a predisposition towards it, but that high social alienation at school leads to later job dissatisfaction [8]. In some studies it has been suggested that through the process of alienation the unemployed may lose the desire and capacity even to dream of consumption [9] consumption responses to unemployment may involve a temporary increase in consumption behavior as individuals attempt to restore their damaged self-identity through symbolic consumption [10]. So, unemployment leads directly to alienation which results into later health problems. Other studies also showed that alienation is deeply connected with unemployment adults like Fagin and Little [11] regarding the psychological state of the unemployed. Banks and Ullah [12] and Jackson and Hanby [13] have also reported a good deal of apathy and resignation among the unemployed also found in unemployed adults. Some studies take a note of political alienation among unemployed adults like [9,14-16] show that, amongst the unemployed, there is considerable disenchantment with or apathy towards the mainstream political system and that the young unemployed express clear verbal attitudes in favour of direct political action, law-breaking, and violent change. In addition to this Hill's [17], outlook also explained the relatively high level of alienation and its different symptoms among the unemployed youth. Hill [17] believes that the effects of unemployment are conceptually and experimentally similar to those of bereavement. He further reported that joblessness can be followed by reactions similar to those that occur in bereavement. The views advocated by Hill [17] can thus help us understand the reasons why an educated unemployed person exhibits a furious feeling of alienation and its symptoms. Unemployment is a key factor increasing the risk of alienation from the society, and it affects individual's financial, social [18], and psychological well-being [19] and health [20].

Rosas and Rossingnatti study revealed that lack of work is often accompanied by the feeling of uselessness and worthlessness which can

later lead to reduce self-esteem, depression and general unhappiness. They further argued that unemployment results in feeling of economic powerlessness and alienation.

Some recent studies also provide enough evidence regarding the relationship between alienation and health of unemployed adults like one of the study [21] found that social dominance orientation had a significant negative relationship with powerlessness dimension of self-alienation. These researchers concluded that powerlessness feeling can be a main element in person's powerlessness for changing the situation and condition. In a similar fashion Southwell [22] investigated the alienation relationships between powerlessness, meaninglessness, and cynicism among U.S. voters between 1964 and 2000 and found a correlation suggesting powerlessness and meaninglessness as important dimensions in political alienation. Individual perceptions of powerlessness and meaninglessness appeared to be prominent dimensions of social alienation. While as Khaola [23] also suggested that feeling of economic powerlessness impacted negatively on self-employment intentions, and the feeling that the business exploits impacted positively on self-employment intentions in response to unemployment. The result further suggested that young people who have high feeling of economic powerlessness would normally plan to start their own business. Tummers and Dulk [24] studied the effects of work alienation on organisational commitment, work effort and work-to-family enrichment. The findings of the study indicate that work alienation (powerlessness and meaninglessness) influence organisational commitment, work effort and – to a lesser extent – work-to-family enrichment. High work meaninglessness, in particular, has negative effects on these outcomes. However they further concluded that when people feel that they have no influence in their work (hence, when they feel 'powerless') and especially when they feel that their work is not worthwhile (when they feel 'meaningless') this has substantial negative effects [25].

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Thus the above given literature provides enough evidence regarding the problem of alienation among the unemployed adults and its effect on their health. It has been stated above that alienated persons especially unemployed are involved in different psychological as well as the physical disorders or diseases. The alienated individual lacks the willpower; his life becomes hopeless, gets disconsolate from his environment and becomes closer to the different social evils and consumptions. Due to the prolonged feeling of unemployment a person could not make the well-adjusted in society because of financial barriers. It has been also evidenced by the above given literature that due to the unemployment a person loses their self-esteem, feels detached from himself and their society, they lose their self-identity, meaning of life and purpose and always feel that they are worthless, weak, because of their financial insecurity and joblessness. The young people's increased social alienation is a consequence of unemployment, rather than a predisposition towards it, but that high social alienation at school leads to later job dissatisfaction [8]. It has been also shown in above given literature that unemployment person feels economic powerlessness which creates a feeling of inferiority complex in him. It has been also observed by different researchers stated above in literature review that due to the continuous feeling of unemployment most of the adults get involved into the drug addiction like alcohol consumption and other drugs.

## References

1. Sartre JP (1946) *Existentialism is Humanism*, World Publishing Company.
2. Finkelstein SW (1967) *Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature*. International Publishers, New York.
3. Josephson E, Josepson M (1968) *Man Alone*. 8th (Edn.), New York.
4. Rogers C (1961) *On Becoming a Person*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
5. Perls F (1969) *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*. Real People Press, Lafayette.
6. May R (1961) *Existential Psychology*. Random House, New York.
7. Marx K (1976) *Capital*. New Left Books, Harmondsworth.
8. Winefield AH, Triggerman, Winefield HR (1991) Social Alienation and Employment Status in Young Adults. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 12: 145-154.
9. Jackson MP (1985) *Youth Unemployment*. Croom Helm, London.
10. Wicklund R, Gollwitzer P (1982) *Symbolic Self Completion*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale.
11. Fagin L, Little M (1984) *The forsaken families*. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
12. Banks MH, Ullah P (1987) *Youth unemployment: social and psychological perspectives*. Department of Employment, London.
13. Jakson MP, Hanby V (1982) *The British work creation programmes*. Gower, Aldershor.
14. Breakwell G (1986) Political and Attributional Responses of the Young Short-term Unemployed. *Political Psychology* 7: 265-278.
15. Clark AW (1985) The Effects of Unemployment on Political Attitudes. *Journal of Sociology* 21: 100-108.
16. Gaskell G, Smith P (1985) An investigation of youths' attributions of unemployment and the political attitudes. *Journal of Economic Psychology* 6: 65-80.
17. Hill JM (1977) *The social and psychological impact of unemployment: A pilot study*. Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, London.
18. Rantakeisu U, Starrin B, Hagquist C (1999) Financial hardship and shame: a tentative model to understand the social and health effects of unemployment. *British Journal of Social Work* 29: 877-901.
19. Breslin FC, Mustard C (2003) Factors influencing the impact of unemployment on mental health among young and older adults in a longitudinal, population-based survey. *Scand J Work Environ Health* 29: 5-14.
20. Cooper D, McCausland WD, Theodossiou I (2006) The health hazards of unemployment and poor education: the socioeconomic determinants of health duration in the European Union. *Econ Hum Biol* 4: 273-297.
21. Nicol AM (2007) Social Dominance Orientation, Right-Wing Authoritarianism, and Their Relation with Alienation and Spheres of Control. *Personality Individual Differences* 43: 891-899.
22. Southwell PL (2008) The effect of political alienation on voter turnout, 1964-2000. *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 36: 131-145.
23. Khaola PP (2010) The Impact of the Feelings of Economic Powerlessness and Alienation on Self Employment Intentions. *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Afarica*. 2: 134-145.
24. Tummers LG, Den Dulk L (2013) The effects of work alienation on organisational commitment, work effort and work-to-family enrichment. *J Nurs Manag* 21: 850-859.
25. Linn MW, Sandifer R, Stein S (1985) Effects of unemployment on mental and physical health. *Am J Public Health* 75: 502-506.