

THE STUDY OF MOTIVATION TO WORK IN THE YOUTH OF ITALY

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LITERATURE REVIEW

“Belief in personal control is highly adaptive, for its presence or absence can have a significant impact on the regulation of cognition, emotion, and even physical health”
— L. A. Leotti (2012) on “The Inherent Reward of Choice”

According to *Financial Times* (2019)¹, unemployment among Italian youth aged 15-24 was at a high of 33%. This grim statistic is even more pronounced in the context of the country’s overall high unemployment rate of around 10%.² Compared to the other 36 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Italy has one of the highest youth unemployment rates, only after Greece. As a whole, unemployment among 15-24-year-olds in the OECD area is around 12%,³ Considering these statistics and other relevant political factors, it is evident that Italy is in the midst of a labor crisis and could lead to serious social and economic harm to the country.

Ronald McQuaid, a researcher at the University of Stirling, explains how high youth unemployment can lead to a host of problems for a country.⁴ Well-being and mental health are often affected when unemployed. This kind of scarring also diminishes one’s motivation and drive to become employed and may lead to people settling for low paying season work or no work at all. Additionally, gaps in work experience on a CV will be seen negatively from the perspective of a prospective employer, thus increasing the chances of that job applicant not being hired or offered only an entry, low paying job that does not correlate to their skills. At the very least, unemployed young adults means the government is paying for many welfare services and not receiving enough of the taxes necessary to keep these programs in place.

¹Romei, Valentina. “Subscribe to the FT to Read: Financial Times Youth Unemployment in Italy Rises to Second Highest in Eurozone.” *Financial Times*, Financial Times, 1 Mar. 2019, www.ft.com/content/49ebe172-3c0e-11e9-b72b-2c7f526ca5d0.

²Eurostat. “Your Key to European Statistics.” *Unemployment by Sex and Age - Monthly Average - Eurostat*, Eurostat, 13 Aug. 2019, ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/UNE_RT_M.

³la Repubblica. “Ocse, L'Italia è Il Terzo Posto Peggior per i Giovani Che Cercano Lavoro.” *Repubblica.it*, La Repubblica, 10 Oct. 2017, www.repubblica.it/economia/miojob/lavoro/2017/10/10/news/ocse_l_italia_e_il_terzo_posto_peggiore_per_i_giovani_che_cercano_lavoro-177863595/?refresh_ce.

⁴McQuaid, Ronald. “Youth Unemployment Produces Multiple Scarring Effects.” *British Politics and Policy at LSE*, 1 Aug. 2014, blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/multiple-scarring-effects-of-youth-unemployment/.

If the youth unemployment of a country remains unchecked, the problems faced by the youth will soon affect the whole country's labor force. It is no surprise that Italy has one of the highest youth unemployment rates and one of the highest overall unemployment rates. Due to these challenges of finding work, young Italians are even leaving Italy to find work elsewhere in the European Union.⁵ If Italy's youth unemployment problem remains unchecked, Italy may be looking at a declining workforce population and declining youth population among other problems associated with youth unemployment.

According to Transparency International, Italy has a corruption perception index of 52 and is consistently ranked as among the most corrupt countries in the European Union. This indicates fairly high levels of corruption in Italy.⁶ Corruption is also another reason why finding work at a young age can be hard in Italy. Nicola Gratteri, a prominent Italian anti-mafia prosecutor, says "twenty years ago it was local mafia bosses who went to politicians asking for favors, but now it's the politicians who go to the houses of the mafia bosses asking for votes in exchange for public contracts."⁷ This means that the assignment of work is not based on merit but placed corruptly into the hands of the mafia or other corrupt groups. This can leave little motivation for young Italians to focus and hone their skills to earn important contracts, usually from the government.

Motivation to work is another important lens in which to view youth unemployment in Italy. The corruption and bribery that is commonplace in Italy make it very hard for anyone not participating in the corruption to become employed. This leaves the majority of the country with little motivation to work for higher-paying jobs since it is likely it will never be awarded to them due to corruption. Since there are a limited amount of jobs that an Italian can land without bribes, the market for those jobs becomes very saturated. It becomes very difficult to obtain a job even with a college degree. Those without a college degree have an even harder time. This means that young Italians are looking for ways to get an edge on their fellow competitors. One common path is going back to school for a secondary degree. This can be very expensive and takes a very long time. Otherwise, people will take very low paying and entry-level jobs for which they are overqualified. Both paths can be very damaging to the Italian worker's motivation to work. If one is expected to pay for school until around age 30, that means that they start their independence from their parents very late and have to put off decisions like buying a house and starting a family until even later as well. Additionally, people who work jobs for which they are overqualified tend to show low levels of motivation.

There are many facets to research in order to understand the youth unemployment problem in Italy. One gap in the current research is studying how motivation can be related to

⁵Adler, Lucy. "Voting with Their Feet: Young Italians Are Leaving Italy in Huge Numbers." *The Local*, The Local, 2 Mar. 2018, www.thelocal.it/20180302/voting-with-their-feet-young-italians-leaving-italy.

⁶ Transparency International. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2018." *Wwww.transparency.org*, 2018, www.transparency.org/cpi2018.

⁷ Jones, Gavin. "Italy Judge's Warning on Political Corruption Triggers Furor." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 23 Apr. 2016, www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-politics-justice-idUSKCN0XK0ER.

youth unemployment. This means studying the motivation for young Italians to work/study and what goals do Italians aged 15-24 have for their working life. The three hypotheses this study will attempt to test will be focused on the motivation for work of Italians in the youth unemployment age range. (1) On the whole, Italians aim for a “posto fisso” or a fixed place and are not willing to change work. (2) If the family has a family business, the children will take over and not have to look for other work. (3) If money is not a problem, the Italian youth will prefer to not work.

METHOD

Overview

In order to test the three hypotheses of this study, ten interviews were conducted. This was done in order to gain insight into the work motivations Italians held and how it could be related to the high youth unemployment in Italy. The interviews were conducted in three Italian cities, Livorno, Siena, and Castiglione della Pescaia. The interview consisted of background questions, questions on motivation to work, and questions on challenges in the Italian workplace.

Subjects (Interviewees)

The “subjects” in this study were Italian citizens ages 15-24 living in the Tuscany region of Italy. The selection of students was based on personal connections and on the basis of being available at the time the researcher was in Italy. Data collection at the three locations was conducted by the researcher. Although this method of subject selection and the number of interviews could not possibly encompass all the types of subjects in Italy, the data collected should represent a broad cross-section of Italy’s subject population.

Experimenter

The sole experimenter for this research project was the researcher. The researcher compiled the interview questions based on previous research done on this topic (Sini, 2017).

Several steps were taken to ensure standardization and to minimize differences among each interview. First, all interviewees received the same exact interview. Second, interviews were unobtrusive and at a time when the subject would not be hurried or rushed to finish the interview. The subject was instructed to take his or her time in answering and to be as thorough as possible. Third, the interviews were conducted in a location with few to no distractions so the subject could focus fully on the interview. Finally, the researcher administered all the interviews to ensure that everything ran smoothly and with as few differences as possible. Given these precautions, it is unlikely that experimental differences were a dominant factor in the overall results.

Procedure

The procedure of this research project was conducted in the form of an interview. The interview was conducted in Italian and the responses were translated into English.

Interview

Background Questions

1. Name
2. Age
3. Where were you raised for most of your life?
4. What work do your parents do?
5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
6. Are you currently employed? If so, what do you do? Is your work seasonal, part-time, or full-time?

Motivation Questions

7. (If in school) Which of the following do you most identify with?
 - a. "I study because I am curious and I like to discover new things."
 - b. "I study because I don't want to get in trouble with my parents or the school."
 - c. "I study because it is my duty to my family and community."
 - d. "I study because I want to improve my skills."
 - e. "I don't study because I don't want to."
 - f. Other
8. (If currently employed) Which of the following do you most identify with?
 - a. "I work because I am curious and I like to discover new things."
 - b. "I work because I need to support myself and my family."
 - c. "I work because it is expected of me."
 - d. "I work because I want to improve my skills"
 - e. "I don't work because I don't want to."
 - f. Other
9. What motivates you to work, is anything at all?
10. If money was not a concern, would you still work given your age?
11. What are your educational plans, if any at all?
12. What are your vocational goals?
13. How many jobs do you think you will hold in your lifetime?
14. What is your ideal job, if anything at all?

Challenge Questions

15. What challenges do you see yourself encountering in the workforce?
16. Are there any life decisions that have been put on hold due to not finding work?
17. When will you stop looking for new work?
18. How do you see your work life? Climbing up the ranks or looking for a fixed place?

RESULTS

Below are the summarized accounts of the interviews.

Alessandro

Alessandro is a 15-year-old male from Siena, Italy. He will be a freshman in high school at the beginning of the 2019 academic year. His parents own a restaurant in Siena. Alessandro helps his parents with the restaurant by sweeping the floor, bussing tables, and taking inventory. He is motivated to work by money and the need to help his family. That being said, if money was not a problem, he would have no issue never working ever. He is hoping to attend university in Italy and become a digital cartoon artist. He understands that the job market is very small for his passion and that there will likely be a lot of competition. He hopes to have one job and stick with that for the rest of his life. His *posto fisso* is very important to him.

Anais

Anais is an 18-year-old female from Livorno, Italy. Her father works as a technician for a business that makes subterranean weapons. She has completed her high school education. She is motivated to learn because she is curious and wants to learn new things. She is motivated to work to hone her skills and make her community and city better with her work. If money were not a problem, she would still work due to becoming bored otherwise. She hopes to continue her education and complete a university level degree. Her long-term professional goal is to own a company that makes materials for students studying a new language. She anticipates having “a lot” of jobs in her lifetime, indicating the exact number to be around 3-4 jobs. She anticipates challenges in working with people who are different than her. It is important for her to find a steady job before considering major life decisions like buying a home or starting a family. She would like to have a fixed place in a job, but it is not necessary. She hopes to leave Italy to find work.

Claudia

Claudia is an 18-year-old female from Livorno, Italy. Both of her parents are District Attorneys for the government of Italy. She has completed her high school education. She is motivated to learn because she is curious and wants to learn new things, but she also simply does

not study because she does not want to. She is motivated to work because she takes pride in her work and wants to do the things she can do well very well. If money were not a problem, she would still work due to becoming bored otherwise, but she also wants to be able to help others with her work. She hopes to continue her education and complete a university level degree, and then get a law degree to practice law. Her long-term professional goal is to have her own law firm and help people. She wants to have a maximum of two jobs in her life. Entering the job market as a lawyer in Italy is very difficult. She will have to pass the bar exam and then enter the market in order to become a lawyer in Italy. She anticipates depending on her parents until around the age of 30, when she will complete all of her law training. She wants to have a fixed place in a job. She is not particularly looking to leave Italy, but would happily do so if work took her abroad.

Costanza

Costanza is a 29-year-old female from Siena, Italy. Her mother is a French teacher at a local middle school. She has completed college. She also works at a vineyard for tourists in the hospitality industry. She is motivated to work because she likes to learn new things, she must work for herself and her family, and so she can hone her skills. She would still work if money was not an issue, but she would work less. She hopes to stay in her current job and has no plans of changing. She recognizes that things change and she may not be able to stay at her current company, but she hopes to be able to stay. The most important thing for her is job security. Without job security, important life decisions are difficult to make. It is important for her to stay in her job as long as possible.

Diletta

Diletta is a 24-year-old female from Milan, Italy. Her mother owns the family vineyard where they make and bottle their wine. Diletta's college degree is a Masters in Food and Wine Management. She currently works on the promotional aspect of her family's vineyard and wine company. She sells the wine to clients in Italy and abroad. She is motivated to work because she is curious and wants to learn new things. She always wants to make her family vineyard better. She would still work if money was not an issue as she believes it good to have something that drives you and motivates you throughout your life. She hopes to travel abroad and promote her wine brand. She notices that having a college degree in Italy is not very helpful because everyone has them. It is hard to differentiate yourself. She hopes to own the family company in the future.

Elisa

Elisa is an 18-year-old female from Livorno, Italy. Her father is the head of a construction group. She has completed high school. She is motivated to study because she wants to hone her skills. She is motivated to work so she can provide for her future. She hopes to

complete a university degree and then become a judge or diplomat. She plans on having two or three jobs in her life. The selection process for becoming a judge or diplomat is very difficult and she anticipates challenges in attaining these positions. She prefers a fixed job that is constant even if it was boring or lower-paying. She would be happy to move out of Italy for work.

Emanuele

Emanuele is a 15-year-old male from Siena, Italy. His parents are both graphic designers. He has finished his first year in high school. He does not study because he does not want to. His motivation to work is to show his parents that he works. If money was not a problem, he would work but very little. He hopes to complete a specialized university level degree. He plans on having 10 jobs throughout his life, ideally eventually becoming a violin teacher. He is discouraged to find work knowing that pay initially is likely to be very minimal. He believes it important to work in the same place for a long time in order to gain employee benefits. It is important for him to stay in the same region in Italy for work.

Federico

Federico is an 18-year-old male from Livorno, Italy. His parents own a gelato shop in Livorno. He has finished his third year of high school. As of right now, he works in his parent's gelateria as a cashier. He is motivated to get better in school because he believes this will make him more successful in life. He is motivated to work because working makes him happy and he likes what he does. He plans to move to Japan with the skills he learns in university to start his own gelato chain. His challenges will be adapting to the Japanese language and culture. He does not believe that work should determine when to make life choices such as buying a house and starting a family. Starting a family will slow his goal initially, but he thinks it is worth it. He only wants to make gelato and is not planning on having any other job.

Francesco

Francesco is a 16-year-old male from Siena, Italy. Both of his parents work in the Monte dei Paschi Bank. He has completed his second year of high school. He is motivated to study so he does not get in trouble with the school and his parents. He also hopes it will help his future. If he did not have to work for money, he would not work at all. He hopes to complete university and have enough money to sustain himself. His ideal job is to be a lawyer. He recognizes that there may be people who have better connections than he has which will make becoming a lawyer very difficult. He would prefer to have one job his whole life, but he will change jobs if need be. He would move to another city if the benefits were good enough.

DISCUSSION

Analyzing results from this study was conducted by reviewing the responses from the interviewees and consolidating the responses. Through the analysis, it was found that Italian youth (age 15-24) have a low locus of control which in turn binds them to not being as motivated to work in Italy. It was interesting to note that Italy itself – the country, culture, family – was seen by the interviewees as the limiting factor to their sense of control. Out of interviewees who had high achieving plans for their future, many expressed an interest in leaving Italy to fulfill their goals.

On the other hand, some respondents were simply quite content with their lifestyle and saw no reason to work to change it. To them, the cost-benefit of working and finding their own way to economic success was not worth it. This is also in part due to the fact that parents in Italy are likely to support their children financially after college, either with providing free room and board or with stipends.

The interviewees with the most positive outlook on work are the ones who work in the family business. These people have most likely been working at their parent's company for some time and see no reason to leave. This is good for those who can easily find work within the family business, but not for everyone. Most small private companies in Italy are family-run, which limits the amount of entry-level jobs available. This means that Italian youth have a hard time finding jobs that can give them more experience for upper-level jobs.

One of the most interesting findings, however, was the lack of work mobility the Italian youth had in mind. The interviewees hoped to have one job in their lifetime, with a maximum of three. Since the job search is so difficult in Italy, the first job they land will most likely be the one they stick with. The youth are looking very hard for their "*posto fisso*" or "fixed place". That being said, several interviewees responded positively to working within the same company for promotions.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, this study supports at least two of the three hypotheses. It was found that Italians highly appreciate a "fixed place" in work and are typically unwilling to change their jobs even if there is another attractive offer. One main reason for this was the importance Italians placed on employee contracts and the rewards an employee receives after being at the same firm or job for a long period of time. Additionally, the Italian youth who had a family company or business to run had a much more positive outlook on work as they already had a job and source of income lined up. It is also possible that working in the family business makes it easier for Italians to stay with their family, which is also a value that was expressed as important. It was not evident, however, that all Italian youth would not work, given the option. Many interviewees expressed interest in working to hone their skills, even if a financial reward was not a motivation.

The most apparent issue in this research arose with the way data was collected. As previously mentioned, the questions had to be asked in a specific way but could indicate a bias

towards one extreme. This means that the data collected is a close representation, but understanding and discovering the margin of error is not easily done. During the planning phase of the research, this limitation was deemed to be necessary to complete the research. Additionally, the research was conducted in three weeks with interviewees from two parts of Italy. It is extremely likely that certain types of people were not measured and thus not entirely representing the motivations to work of the youth of Italy. The sample size taken in the research is not statistically significant either. Due to time constraints and the pursuit of efficiency, this limitation was necessary to conduct the research.

There is also the potential for interviewee bias in answering the questions. Most of the interviewees were personal friends or family friends, which could have altered some of the responses. Some of the interviews were conducted with other people around and changing environments. These factors were controlled for as much as possible, but the nature of the time permitted with each interviewee was limited, therefore exceptions had to be made. When the interview was taking place, some people in the “peanut gallery” could have made comments that influenced the response of the interviewee. This being said, it is highly unlikely that any interviewee substantially changed their response based on external comments. The interviewees were instructed to answer the questions as best as they saw fit, but it is possible that peer pressure influenced the participants in some way.

Ultimately, this study can serve as a jumping board for future studies about motivation in the workplace, whether it be the youth in Italy or a different demographic. Important information was learned about how to collect and analyze data. This will aid future researchers who plan on researching in the area of this study. This study can also aid governments in solving issues with their workforce. As discussed in the Literature Review, low youth unemployment rates have been correlated to higher rates of psychological damage and corruption. Governments may consider understanding the qualms the youth have in finding work to solve this problem.

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