
Associations Between Depression, Employment, and Relationship Status During the Transition into the Workforce: A Gendered Phenomenon?

Associations entre dépression, emploi, et état des relations au cours de la transition vers le marché du travail : un phénomène lié au genre?

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ABSTRACT

This study involved an examination of the associations among self-reported depressive symptoms, two aspects of quality of employment, and romantic relationship status in emerging adults transitioning into the workforce. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted on a sample of 586 men and 518 women drawn from the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. The analyses revealed that employment satisfaction is negatively associated with depressive symptoms, with the strength of association being stronger for women than men. In contrast, no significant associations were found for being employed in a position that was consistent with one's aspirations or romantic relationship status.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude a comporté l'examen des associations entre des symptômes de dépression signalés par les participants, deux aspects de la qualité de l'emploi, et l'état des relations amoureuses chez de jeunes adultes en transition vers le marché du travail. On a mené des analyses de régression multiple hiérarchisées sur un échantillon de 586 hommes et de 518 femmes tirés des participants à l'Enquête longitudinale nationale sur les enfants et les jeunes au Canada. Les analyses ont révélé que la satisfaction à l'égard de l'emploi est associée négativement aux symptômes de dépression, l'intensité de cette association étant plus grande chez les femmes que chez les hommes. Par contre, on n'a observé aucune association significative entre le fait d'occuper un poste compatible avec les aspirations de la personne ou l'état des relations amoureuses.

In the 21st century, many young people struggle in making their transition into the workforce (Cassidy & Wright, 2008; Domene, Landine, & Stewart, 2014; Gangl, 2002; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010). Unfortunately, delays in obtaining secure employment have been associated with negative outcomes in terms of mental health and wellness. Evidence also reveals that young people's mental health is influenced by the quality of any employment that is obtained,

in terms of whether the work is related to a person's aspired career path and how satisfying they find the work to be (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Koivisto, 2002; Virtanen et al., 2008). The present study was designed to expand knowledge on these issues. Specifically, using Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping as our guiding theory, we examined how aspects of employment and relationship status are associated with a key indicator of mental health: depressive symptoms.¹

TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS AND COPING

Within the transactional model of stress and coping, negative life events can be experienced as stressors, which in turn may affect individuals' physical and mental health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Taylor & Stanton, 2007; Thoits, 2011). There is an extensive body of evidence linking stress to negative mental health outcomes, including depression in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Frydenberg, 2008). Furthermore, the transition from school into the workforce is an inherently stressful time for young people, involving uncertainty and significant changes in life, even when the transition proceeds smoothly. The situation can become even more stressful for emerging adults who find themselves taking service industry or other temporary jobs to make ends meet while seeking employment in their aspired career field, or who are completely unemployed for extended periods of time. Not only do unemployment and low-quality employment impede emerging adults' ability to take on the full range of adult roles (Arnett, 2004; Aronson, 2008; Young et al., 2010), these situations also create financial hardship and prevent the achievement of goals that the individual has been working toward, often for many years. Thus, unsatisfactory employment situations can be understood as a source of substantial stress in young people's lives.

Within the transactional model, social support is an important mechanism by which individuals cope with stress. It is theorized to promote mental health and well-being in two ways: (a) a social network can help individuals feel more positively about themselves and their circumstances, and (b) social resources can act as a buffer against the negative consequences of stress. The efficacy of social support in buffering the effects of stress has been extensively documented (Thoits, 2011). Among the various sources of social support that individuals can experience, support from one's romantic partner can become increasingly important in emerging adulthood (Monk, Vennum, Ogolsky, & Fincham, 2014). Furthermore, related research on how adults cope with stressful work situations has revealed that romantic relationships play an important role in mitigating problems associated with this situation (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan, & Schwartz, 2002; Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996). A question that has not been addressed in the existing literature, however, is whether similar associations exist for younger individuals who are transitioning into the workforce, rather than for adults who are already established in their careers.

DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND THE TRANSITION INTO THE WORKFORCE

In the increasingly knowledge-based economy that characterizes the 21st century, higher education has been promoted as a way for emerging adults to achieve a secure financial future. However, completing a postsecondary degree or credential does not guarantee secure, full-time employment in an individual's aspired field of work. Instead, many emerging adults experience an extended period of unemployment or insecure employment (i.e., part-time or contract work, often outside of the career paths that they have attempted to pursue) after completing their education. For example, although there is substantial variation across countries, the average unemployment rate for 20–24 year-olds with a tertiary degree in the European Union has ranged from 14.3% to 20.9% in the past five years (Eurostat, 2015). Similarly, according to Canadian labour force information for July 2015, the unemployment rate among youth aged 20–24 was 8.2%, a rate that was unchanged from one year previous (Statistics Canada, 2015). As well, 18% of male and 35% of female Canadian emerging adults with university degrees were not in full-time employment positions in 2010, a situation that was significantly worse than five years previous (Frank, Frenette, & Morissette, 2015). Furthermore, participants in a recent qualitative study from the United States described experiencing substantial problems in making the transition into the workforce after graduating from university in the preceding three years (Murphy et al., 2010).

The increased difficulty that young people encounter in obtaining secure employment following completion of their education has also been associated with negative mental health outcomes such as elevated depressive symptoms. For example, Galambos, Barker, and Krahn (2006) found extended periods of unemployment led to increased depression in 920 Canadians who were tracked from 18 to 25 years of age, despite the fact that depressive symptoms generally declined during this period. Similar results emerged in Hultman and Hemlin's (2008) study of Swedish youth, where unemployed participants had significantly lower emotional health than employed participants. Additionally, using samples of Australian youth, Creed and colleagues found unemployed individuals to have higher levels of psychological distress than those in full-time work (Creed, 1999) and those who are underemployed (Creed & Moore, 2006). However, no direct comparison was made between individuals in secure versus insecure employment situations in these studies.

In research that explicitly examined young people's mental health as a function of different employment situations, Winefield, Winefield, Tiggemann, and Goldney (1991) revealed that Australian youth with higher employment satisfaction had lower levels of depressive symptomatology than those in the unemployed and employed-but-dissatisfied groups. Similarly, recent university graduates from the United Kingdom who were in insecure employment situations were found to have higher levels of psychological distress symptoms than those with more secure employment (Cassidy & Wright, 2008). Together, these findings suggest that the

specific nature of one's employment situation is important to consider in understanding the occurrence of depression following the transition into the workforce.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS DURING THE TRANSITION TO WORK

Although there is a large body of research on adult dual-career couples and mental health, relatively little research has been conducted on how being in a romantic relationship can influence depressive symptoms in young people transitioning into the workforce. In one exception to this dearth of literature, Braithwaite, Delevi, and Fincham (2010) found in a sample of American college students that being in a romantic relationship predicted significantly lower levels of mood problems. In a similar way, the loss of a romantic relationship has been found to be associated with depressive symptoms in young people in the United States (Simon & Barrett, 2010). Studies examining concepts related to depression provide additional basis for hypothesizing an association between romantic relationships and depressive symptoms during this time. For example, Rivera, Cruz, and Muñoz (2011) found an inverse relationship between relationship satisfaction and anxiety in Chilean youth; that is, individuals who were in a satisfying romantic relationship were less likely to experience anxiety symptoms. Similarly, being in a close romantic relationship predicted happiness and well-being in college students from the United States (Demir, 2010). These results highlight the possibility of important connections between romantic relationship status and the emergence of depressive symptoms in young Canadians transitioning into the workforce. However, this possibility has not been examined empirically.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Given the existing research on the associations between depressive symptoms and employment characteristics during the transition to work, and initial indicators that romantic relationship status may also be connected to depression during this time, an important research question emerges: *How do depressive symptoms in young people vary as a function of the employment they manage to obtain and whether or not they are in a romantic relationship during the period of time after they have completed their postsecondary education?* We addressed this question in the present study, using hierarchical multiple regression to test the following hypotheses, which were derived from the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984):

1. Quality of employment (defined in terms of satisfaction and fit with aspirations) is significantly negatively associated with depressive symptoms.
2. Being in a romantic relationship is significantly negatively associated with depressive symptoms, over and above the associations between quality of employment and depressive symptoms.

In testing these hypotheses, it is also important to consider the extensive body of existing research indicating gender differences in the development of depressive symptoms in young people (Kouros & Garber, 2014; Rohde, Lewinsohn, Klein, Seeley, & Gau, 2013; Simon & Barrett, 2010). There is also literature indicating that career goals and satisfaction develop and unfold in different ways for young men and women across many different cultures (Bakshi, 2011; Domene, Socholoitiuk, & Young, 2011; Farmer, 1997; Shulman et al., 2015). Therefore, it is possible that the associations between the variables in the present study differ according to gender. Consequently, we tested the above hypotheses in two separate samples: one composed of male Canadians transitioning into the workforce, and the other composed of female Canadians transitioning into the workforce.

METHOD

Data Source, Sample, and Ethics Approval

Cross-sectional data were drawn from the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). The NLSCY, jointly conducted by Statistics Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada, is a longitudinal survey that was designed to collect information about factors that influence development from birth through adulthood. The survey began in 1994–1995 with children between the ages of 0 and 11 (Cycle 1), with follow-up surveys administered every 2 years. The sampling of the original cohort in Cycle 1 was based on the National Population Health Survey (NPHS) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) that used probability sampling of households using a stratified, multistage design. In Cycle 7, the response rate was approximately 60% (Statistics Canada, 2009). The samples for this study included respondents aged 18–23 in Cycle 7 (2006–2007) and who were in the workforce in Cycle 7 but not in the previous cycle. This ensured that the final samples consisted of individuals who had recently transitioned from being a student into the workforce. There were 586 respondents in the sample of men and 518 respondents in the sample of women. The study was reviewed by the University of New Brunswick Research Ethics Board. Data were accessed at Statistics Canada's Research Data Centre at the University of New Brunswick.

Measures

Demographic characteristics. Gender, age, and participants' personal income before taxes and deductions from all sources in the past 12 months, as reported in Cycle 7 of the NLSCY, were considered in this study.

Job satisfaction. The NLSCY contains a single-item measure of job satisfaction. Respondents are asked to rate how satisfied they were with their current job on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*very satisfied*) to 4 (*very dissatisfied*). The responses were combined for two categories (*very dissatisfied* and *dissatisfied*) because of small sample size and recoded with higher scores representing greater job satisfaction.

Occupational fit. Two items from the NLSCY were used to indicate whether there was a fit between participants' current employment and their aspired career. Specifically, the National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2001 code for current or most recent job was compared to the NOC code for the type of career or work that participants reported wanting to be doing when they are about 30 years old. The item was coded dichotomously, where a score of 1 indicated the presence of fit with career aspiration and a score of 0 indicated the absence of such a relationship.

Relationship status. The relationship status variable, indicating whether participants had a romantic partner (*yes/no*), was constructed using two items from the NLSCY. All participants who were married, living common-law, or indicated having a boyfriend/girlfriend were considered to be in a romantic relationship.

Depressive symptoms. Self-report depressive symptoms were assessed by the 12-item version of the Centre for Epidemiological Studies for Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) used in the NLSCY. The CES-D measured the occurrence and severity of symptoms associated with depression in the public at large over the preceding week. Each item had four response categories ranging from 1 (*rarely or none of the time*) to 4 (*most or all of the time*), with higher scores indicating the presence of depressive symptoms. The reliability estimates were good in both the female ($\alpha = .81$) and male ($\alpha = .80$) samples.

Data Analysis Procedure

Power analyses, assuming an α level of .05, a β level of .8, and an effect size of $f^2 = .15$, were used to confirm that the sample sizes were adequate for the analyses. These analyses revealed that there was adequate power. Hierarchical multiple regression models were used to test the hypotheses for each sample. The effects of age and personal income were controlled in Block 1 (Model 1). The two employment quality variables were added in Block 2 (Model 2). Finally, the relationship status was included in Block 3 (Model 3). Normalized sample weights were used in all analyses to account for the complex survey design.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of all study variables are presented in Table 1. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there were no gender differences in job satisfaction, $F(1, 1025) = .17, p = .68, \eta^2 = 1.04$. However, there were more men than women who had a fit between current and aspired work, $\chi^2 = 5.35, p < .05$, and fewer men than women were in a romantic relationship, $\chi^2 = 35.85, p < .0001$. Finally, men reported statistically significantly fewer depressive symptoms than women, $t(1095) = 5.60, p < .0001, d = .34$.

Correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2 for both samples. The relationship between fit with aspired occupation and relationship status was not assessed because both these variables were dichotomously coded. Pearson correlation was used to assess the degree of relationship except for the correlations

involving one of the two dichotomously coded variables, which were assessed using point-biserial correlation. Notably, being in a romantic relationship was significantly associated with lower depressive symptoms for the young men, but no equivalent significant association existed for the young women. As expected, higher job satisfaction was significantly associated with lower depressive symptom levels for both genders. In contrast, fit between current and aspired work was not significantly associated with depressive symptoms in either group of participants.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Variables in the Regression Models, by Gender

	Men (<i>n</i> = 586)	Women (<i>n</i> = 518)
Age (<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>))	21.61 (1.29)	21.81 (1.22)
Income (<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>))	27035.24 (19480.93)	18796.35 (12577.69)
Job satisfaction (% in each of the following categories)		
Very satisfied	37.60	37.60
Satisfied	55.20	47.80
Dissatisfied	5.70	9.00
Occupational fit (% in a job that fits their aspiration)*	29.80	23.70
Relationship status (% in a romantic relationship)***	38.00	56.90
Depressive symptoms (<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>))***	3.65 (4.50)	5.29 (5.16)

Note. The presence of a significant gender difference is denoted by * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2
Correlations among the Variables in the Regression Models, by Gender

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	—	.03	.04	-.03	.17***	-.17***
2. Income	.25***	—	.27***	.26***	.09*	-.04
3. Job satisfaction	-.00	.15***	—	.31***	.02	-.30***
4. Occupational fit	.05	.19***	.28***	—		-.02
5. Relationship status	.40***	.17***	.04		—	.04
6. Depressive symptoms	-.19***	-.06	-.16***	-.06	-.10*	—

Note. The significance of the relationship is denoted by * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .001$. The values below the dashes are for men; the values above the dashes are for women.

Finally, there was no significant association between being in a romantic relationship and job satisfaction in either sample. Overall, these results provided partial support for the possibility that the relationships among employment quality, romantic relationships, and depressive symptoms differed according to gender.

Depressive Symptoms in Men

Table 3 represents a summary of the regression analyses. For participants in the men's sample, the covariate model (Model 1) was not statistically significant, $F(2, 407) = 2.49, p = .08, f^2 = .01$. After adding job satisfaction and fit between current and aspired work variables, Model 2 was significant, $F(4, 405) = 3.13, p = .02, f^2 = .01$, with an F-change value that was also statistically significant, $F_{cb}(2, 405) = 3.74, p < .05$. Approximately 3% of the variance ($R^2 = .03$) in depressive symptoms in males was explained by the variables in Model 2. Specifically, older age and higher job satisfaction were significantly associated with fewer depressive symptoms in males. When the romantic relationship variable was entered into the equation, the estimated model (Model 3) remained statistically significantly different from 0, $F(5, 404) = 2.55, p < .05, f^2 = .03$, with $R^2 = .03$, but the F-change value was not statistically significant, $F_{cb}(1, 404) = 2.26, p = .61$. In other words,

Table 3
Summary Results from the Hierarchical Regression Analyses, by Gender

	Men		Women	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.01		.05	
Age		-.11*		-.22***
Personal income		-.01		.02
Step 2	.02*		.10***	
Age		-.11*		-.22***
Income		.02		.10
Job satisfaction		-.13*		-.34***
Occupational fit		-.02		.06
Step 3	.00		.00	
Age		-.12*		-.23***
Income		.01		.09
Job satisfaction		-.13*		-.34***
Occupational fit		-.01		.05
Relationship status		.03		.05
Total R^2	.03*		.15***	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

being in a romantic relationship was not associated with young men's depressive symptoms after accounting for the effects of age, personal income, and employment quality variables.

Depressive Symptoms in Women

For participants in the sample of women, the covariate model (Model 1) for depressive symptoms was statistically significant, $F(2, 370) = 9.60, p < .001, f^2 = .05$; younger age was associated with higher depressive symptom levels. After adding the two employment quality variables, Model 2 remained statistically significant, $F(4, 368) = 15.84, p < .001, f^2 = .18$, and had an F-change value that was also statistically significant, $F_{cb}(2, 367) = 21.03, p < .001$. The variables in Model 2 explained 15% of the variance ($R^2 = .15$) in depressive symptoms. Similar to the results for men, the findings suggested that older age and higher job satisfaction were significantly associated with fewer depressive symptoms scores. After the romantic relationship variable was added to the equation, the estimated model (Model 3) remained statistically significant, $F(5, 367) = 12.84, p < .001, f^2 = .18$, with $R^2 = .15$. However, the F-change value was not statistically significant, $F_{cb}(1, 366) = .87, p = .35$, indicating that being in a romantic relationship was not associated with young women's depressive symptoms after accounting for the effects of age, personal income, and the two employment quality variables.

DISCUSSION

Despite the somewhat unexpected pattern of findings that emerged, the results provide important information on the nature of the associations between employment quality, romantic relationships, and depressive symptoms in Canadian men and women who have recently transitioned into the workforce. In terms of the first hypothesis, it was somewhat surprising that the two aspects of employment did not influence depressive symptoms in the same way. Consistent with Winefield and colleagues' (1991) results, participants' satisfaction with their current employment emerged as a significant predictor of self-reported depressive symptoms for both men and women. However, fit with aspired work was not significant in any of the models, a finding that appears to contradict Cassidy and Wright's (2008) conclusion that being employed in a job that does not fit with one's career aspirations results in greater psychological distress than being employed in a desired occupation. Instead, the present results suggest that, in terms of consequences for depression, it is less important for young people to be employed in the field of work that they aspire to be in at age 30 than for them to be employed in a position where they experience high levels of job satisfaction.

Framing these results within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model, it could be that low job satisfaction is a much greater source of emotional distress in young people than working a job that does not fit with one's long-term aspirations. Given the nature of the current labour market, they may not expect to have found work in their aspired career path soon after transitioning to employment

and, therefore, do not experience excessive distress for failing to do so. Instead, they may expect to find whatever work they do to be satisfying and, when they do not experience job satisfaction, this may have a substantial impact on their mental health. Another possible explanation for conflict between our results and Cassidy and Wright's (2008) findings is that their study assessed general psychological distress rather than depressive symptoms in particular. Furthermore, in the present study, occupational fit was assessed using a single, dichotomously coded variable, which may have been an inadequate assessment of the complexity of this construct, leading to the null results.

At the same time, the final model accounted for only a small amount of the variance in depressive symptoms in the sample of men (3%), suggesting that other factors that were not measured in this study are more strongly related to depressive symptoms in young men transitioning into the workforce. In contrast, the model accounted for a larger amount of variance in depressive symptoms in the sample of women (15%). This pattern of results leads to the conclusion that, although employment satisfaction is meaningfully associated with depressive symptoms, it appears to be a gendered phenomenon. Specifically, it appears to be a more important influence on depression in young women than in young men. Furthermore, consistent with the preponderance of existing empirical evidence on the prevalence of depression in young adults, levels of depressive symptoms in the present study were significantly higher in the sample of women than in the sample of men.

The results provided no support for the second hypothesis. Romantic relationship status did not emerge as a significant predictor of depressive symptoms in any of the hierarchical regression analyses. These results contradict the findings from previous research on the topic conducted with adult populations (e.g., Baruch-Feldman et al., 2002; Vinokur et al., 1996), and appear to suggest that Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory may not be applicable to emerging adults. An alternative interpretation is that merely being in a romantic relationship during the transition into the workforce does not provide the same social support function as it does later in life after individuals have become more established in their careers. Supporting this possibility, there is some evidence in the literature that some romantic partners are a source of stress rather than a resource that assists individuals to effectively cope with stress (Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992). It is possible that, for emerging adults, romantic relationship status is an inadequate indicator of social support, as conceptualized within the transactional model.

Overall, this study expanded knowledge about the interrelationships among employment quality, romantic relationships, and depressive symptoms for men and women in Canada. The results indicate that the patterns of connection between these factors are different during the transition into the workforce from what previous research had revealed to be the case for adults who are better established in their careers. Furthermore, the results suggest the presence of important differences between men's and women's experience of connections between these factors; that is, the associations between depressive symptoms, employment,

and relationship status during the transition into the workforce appears to be a gendered phenomenon. There are, however, several limitations that must be considered, and numerous directions for future research that must be followed up on to fully understand this phenomenon.

Limitations and Future Directions

As explained previously, it is possible that some kinds of romantic relationships are positively associated with depressive symptoms while other kinds of romantic relationships are negatively associated. The NLSCY does not include information on the closeness, supportiveness, degree of conflict within, or duration of respondents' romantic relationship. Therefore, one key limitation of the present study was that it was not possible to conduct a fine-grained analysis of the potential influence of romantic relationships. It remains possible that the nature of the romantic relationship, rather than being in a relationship per se, is what is associated with depressive symptoms during the transition into the workforce. Indeed, related research suggests that factors such as the level of satisfaction (Rivera et al., 2011), closeness (Demir, 2010), pursuit of joint goals (Domene et al., 2012), or relational conflict (Fleming, White, Oesterle, Haggerty, & Catalano, 2010) may all be worthwhile to explore. A clear priority for future research is to extend the present study by examining the potential role that different aspects of emerging adults' romantic relationships may have in mediating the influence of employment-related stress on mental health during the transition to work.

Similarly, it may be useful to replicate the analyses concerning the association between depressive symptoms and occupational fit using more fine-grain operationalizations or alternative ways of conceptualizing career aspirations. For example, this variable could be defined as the degree to which current employment is relevant to individuals' future career, rather than as a dichotomous variable separating employment into the "does fit" and "does not fit" categories. However, if such a study reveals that fit is not associated with depression, then it would become important to examine why job satisfaction is so much more closely linked to this aspect of young people's mental health than fit with career aspirations. Additionally, a majority of the present sample reported being very satisfied or satisfied with their job, perhaps due to the fact that job satisfaction is measured by only a single-item indicator within the NLSCY. Hence, replication of the present study with more variance in job satisfaction and a more comprehensive measure of satisfaction may shed additional light on the phenomenon.

It must also be recognized that this study was designed to examine the associations between depressive symptoms, employment, and relationship status in the general population rather than in a clinical sample. Consequently, the results do not necessarily generalize to emerging adults who have been diagnosed with a mood disorder. Additional research, using samples of diagnosed participants, would be necessary to determine whether the pattern of results that emerged in this study generalizes to clinically depressed young men and women.

The cross-sectional nature of the study must also be acknowledged. This limitation raises questions regarding the direction of causality among the variables. To establish that depressive symptoms are influenced by job satisfaction rather than the other way around, it is necessary to conduct additional research using longitudinal research designs and more sophisticated analytical methods that can examine directionality of influences between depressive symptoms and aspects of employment and romantic relationships.

A range of other future research directions are also possible. For example, it may be useful to conduct qualitative explorations (a) to better understand the ways in which romantic relationships can facilitate and hinder the transition into the workforce; (b) to obtain more in-depth knowledge about how emerging adults experience employment satisfaction, even when employed in positions that are not a fit with their aspirations; or (c) to examine how individuals successfully cope and obtain support when they do not successfully transition into the workforce after graduation. Research should also be conducted to confirm or refute the potential presence of gender differences that were suggested by our results, and to identify how job satisfaction and depressive symptoms may be connected in different ways for young men and young women. It may also be beneficial to conduct formative program evaluation research, focused on developing and assessing the initial implementation of interventions to assist emerging adults who experience elevated levels of depressive symptoms due to under- and unemployment.

Implications

One implication of this study is that it is important to consider the gender of the individual in understanding how career development and mental health are connected to each other during the transition into the workforce. In career development research there is sometimes a tendency to assume that research findings from studies where the sample was predominantly composed of participants from one gender are applicable to both men and women. Similarly, in career counseling, it is sometimes tempting to assume that an intervention that has been successfully implemented with a client of one gender will also be successful for other clients without considering their gender. The results of this study indicate that it is problematic to make such assumptions. Instead, it appears to be important for researchers and practitioners to keep gender in the forefront of our minds as we engage with young people who are transitioning into the workforce.

A second implication emerges from the significant association between job satisfaction and depressive symptoms. Specifically, these results suggest a need to consider mental health issues and career development issues together during the transition into the workforce. This suggestion is particularly salient in light of the fact that many mental health disorders first emerge during the period in life when individuals are making this transition. Therefore, we support Zunker's (2008) proposal that researchers and practitioners should conceptualize human development in a holistic way that integrates thinking about mental health and

career development issues together. Such a proposal also challenges the artificial separation of mental health/personal counselling from career counselling that may still be present in some practice settings and counsellor education programs. An integrative approach to working with the whole person may be more challenging to implement, but it is more consistent with the evidence that emerged from our study.

CONCLUSION

Despite the presence of several limitations, the present study provided useful information for career development researchers. Specifically, the analyses revealed that, for emerging adults transitioning into the workforce, the level of satisfaction that they experience in their work is a predictor of their level of depressive symptoms, regardless of whether they are in an occupation that fits with their aspirations and regardless of their romantic relationship status. This association also appears to be stronger for young women than young men. Ultimately, however, the pattern of results that emerged raises as many questions as it answers, and suggests that it would be worthwhile to pursue the various directions for future research we have identified.

Note

- 1 As with most of the research cited in this article, the present study operationally defined depression in terms of self-report measures of symptoms rather than any formal diagnosis of a depressive disorder. To clarify that this operational definition could encompass both clinical and subclinical levels of depression, we used the term “depressive symptoms.” These symptoms include anhedonia, feelings of sadness or irritability, guilt, lack of energy, loss of appetite, loss of concentration, and sleep disturbance.

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