Perceived Control Facilitates Adjustment to Unemployment: Findings from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP)

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Perceived control is a general-purpose mechanism for adaptation and a resource people draw upon in the face of obstacles. Little is known, however, about how control itself changes with the experience of critical life events and what the antecedents, correlates, and consequences are. We use data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (\(N = 413\), \(M\text{ Age} = 41\), 48\% women) and examine how perceived control changes with unemployment, explore the role of socio-demographic, well-being, and health factors in moderating such change, and investigate whether levels of control prior to and unemployment-related control change predict re-employment and welfare incidence later on. Results indicate that control remained, on average, relatively stable with unemployment, but there were sizeable between-person differences in such change. Women and participants with fewer years of education experienced stronger declines in control. In addition, steeper unemployment-related declines in control were associated with higher risk of remaining unemployed and low levels of control predicted depending on welfare in the years following unemployment. We discuss possible pathways by which control facilitates adjustment to unemployment and suggest routes for further more mechanism-oriented inquiry.

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