Professional Advising, Job Search Support and Apprenticeships for University Drop-Outs in France (AFIJ)

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Sector(s): Labor Markets

Location: France

Sample: 2,367 youth in 28 universities

Target group: Job seekers Youth

Outcome of interest: Employment Empowerment Mental health

Intervention type: Coaching and mentoring Commitment devices Job counseling Recruitment and hiring

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0000198

Partner organization(s): Association pour Faciliter l'Insertion professionnelle des Jeunes diplômés (AFIJ), Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse (FEJ)

Between 2008 and 2011 unemployment rates increased steeply in many industrialized countries, disproportionately affecting young people with less education. In 2009, researchers tested the relative effectiveness of different employment services targeted at university dropouts. Overall, intensive counseling increased the number of job interviews youth received and improved their perceptions of their career prospects and their trust in the private sector.

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Between 2008 and 2011 unemployment rates increased steeply in many industrialized countries, disproportionately affecting young people with less education. Across OECD countries, almost 16 percent of youth between 15 and 29 were neither in employment nor in education or training in 2011, and the unemployment rate among youths lacking secondary education was nearly three times the unemployment rate of those having completed a tertiary degree (college or technical education).[1] Evidence suggests that intensive job placement services generally help job seekers find work sooner. However, these services can take on different forms, such as offering job search assistance, mentorships, and job-search contracts stipulating that the job seeker must actively search for work. The relative effectiveness of these strategies remains an open question.

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In France, about 20 percent of university students drop out before graduation,[2] and their unemployment rate is more than twice that of individuals who complete a tertiary degree. In 2007 the French government created the Bureaux d'aide à l'insertion professionnelle (Center to Promote Workforce Integration), an office within each university that helps youth find work. Services provided include information about vacant jobs and internships, career counseling, and trainings.



Participant in job counseling program

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In 2009, researchers partnered with Association pour Faciliter l´Insertion des Jeunes (AFIJ, Association to Promote Youth Employment), to test the relative effectiveness of three components of a job search assistance program: job counseling geared towards sectors facing recruitment difficulties, professional mentorship, and job-search contracts. AFIJ is an association that offers employment services, in partnership with the Bureaux d'aide à l'insertion professionnelle (Center to Promote Workforce Integration).

The program was implemented in 28 French universities and targeted youth with relatively weak academic records. On average, participants were 21 years old. Sixty percent of respondents had repeated at least one school year, and 75 percent had dropped out of university. Randomization was conducted in two stages: from a sample of 2,367 youth, respondents were randomly assigned to the intervention group (intensive counseling) or to the comparison group (no counseling). Those who accepted an offer to participate in the intensive program were then randomly assigned to receive intensive counseling only, or intensive counseling plus a combination of three additional services. Participants who declined to sign up for additional services could still receive intensive counseling.

The three additional services were the following:

- *Job search counseling geared towards sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties*: Caseworkers provided personalized career counseling, and when possible, encouraged participants to consider job vacancies in sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties. They also informed participants about available trainings that could help them acquire the skills necessary to find work in those sectors and helped them find internships and apprenticeships.
- *Mentorship*: Respondents were assigned to mentors who could act as role models and share their professional experiences.
- *Job-search contract*: Respondents signed a contract that explicitly outlined their duties and the different services they were entitled to receive. The contract specified the frequency of meetings with the caseworker and required that the participant actively search for work. If participants did not fulfill these duties, participation in the job search assistance program could be suspended.

	Intensive counseling	**Sector-specific counseling**	**Mentorship**	**Contract**	**Number of participants**
Treatment 1	Yes	No	No	No	186
Treatment 2	Yes	Yes	No	No	206
Treatment 3	Yes	No	Yes	No	206
Treatment 4	Yes	No	No	Yes	210
Treatment 5	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	216
Treatment 6	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	207
Treatment 7	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	222
Treatment 8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	208
Comparison	No	No	No	No	706

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Overall, intensive counseling and services increased the number of job interviews youth received. After nine months, intensive counseling and additional services increased the number of job interviews by 16 percent.

Intensive counseling was more effective when participants were encouraged to look for work in sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties and when they signed a contract. After nine months, the combination of intensive counseling, encouragement to enter sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties and signing a contract increased the number of interviews 32 percent compared to the comparison group. The combination of the three services also increased the likelihood of finding work by 17 percent, from an employment rate of 68 percent in the comparison group. In addition, these participants were more likely to find a full-time job.

The impact of intensive job counseling and services was greater among youth who declared having entered the program to find a job. For these youth, the number of job interviews increased by 60 percent and the combination of intensive counseling, encouragement to enter sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties and signing a contract increased their likelihood of finding employment by 40 percent.

Intensive counseling had a positive psychological impact on participants. Overall, respondents assigned to receive intensive counseling and services were more optimistic about their career prospects. This impact was concentrated among participants who were encouraged to look for work in sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties and who signed a contract. In contrast, mentorships had a negative impact on participants' feelings of wellbeing and on the perceptions of their career prospects.

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1. http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag-2013-sum-en.pdf, p. 1
2. OECD Education at a Glance, 2013, p 64, Chart A.4.1