Innovative Actions to Improve Student Integration in France (FRATELI)

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Sector(s): Education, Labor Markets

Location: France

Sample: 637 university students

Target group: Job seekers Students Youth

Outcome of interest: Employment

Intervention type: Apprenticeships and on-the-job training Coaching and mentoring Job counseling

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Partner organization(s): Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse (FEJ), FRATELI

In countries with high rates of unemployment and underemployment, even those with advanced degrees may struggle to find work. This may be especially true for youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds, perhaps because they may have fewer social connections to the high-wage labor market. In France, researchers examined the effect of job-related mentoring and support for university students from low socio-economic backgrounds on their chances of finding employment after graduating. The program did not result in improved job search efforts, greater employment prospects, or better jobs.

Policy issue

In countries with high rates of unemployment and underemployment, even those with advanced degrees may struggle to find work. Qualified individuals may be unable to find work for a number of reasons, for example, their skills may not match available jobs or job-seekers may be unaware of suitable opportunities. Research suggests that job market outcomes may be particularly low among youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as children of lower-skilled workers often start out with lower wages than their counterparts from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

One reason for this could be the importance of existing ties to the labor market in finding employment. If people are unfamiliar with the job search process, or if they do not have a social network to tap into, it may be more difficult to find work. If this is the case, then job-related mentoring and support to build connections to the labor market could improve labor market outcomes for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, but there is little empirical evidence on this issue.

Context of the evaluation

France has a high unemployment rate, especially among younger people. In 2010, 23 percent of youth under 25 were unemployed.[1] Even graduates with advanced degrees face difficult labor market prospects: a 2013 survey of French universities

showed that 10 percent of graduates with a bachelor's, masters' or PhD degree were still looking for employment one to four years after graduating. Among the youth targeted in this evaluation, more than half were unemployed just after completing their degree, and 37 percent were still looking for employment one year after graduating.



Details of the intervention

Researchers partnered with Association Frateli to evaluate the impact of mentoring and support services on labor market outcomes for students. Association Frateli is an organization working in French universities to provide job-related mentoring and support services to help students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds find work that matches their qualifications.

The program Frateli Université targeted students in the final year of their master's degree who benefitted from scholarships awarded on the basis of socioeconomic criteria. Over two years, students who signed up to participate in the program at four French universities were randomly assigned to either an intervention group, which received Frateli's program, or a comparison group, which did not. The program provided students in the intervention group with a package of three services:

1. *P*ersonal mentoring from a university alumnus or young professional with experience that matched the student's interests
2. Group workshops with other students in the program
3. Opportunities to interact with other students through an online network.

Results and policy lessons

Take-up: demand for the program was lower than expected. While the target was to enroll 1000 students, only 637 students decided to take part in the program (16 percent of the total number of eligible students). It was also difficult to recruit mentors: only two out of three students were connected to a mentor, whom they contacted on average seven times a year and met only once. Half of the students assigned to the program participated in at least one group workshop, and 26 percent used the online network.

Labor market outcomes: The program did not result in improved job search efforts, greater employment prospects or better jobs. The low-intensity of the intervention and the small sample of students enrolled in the program might explain these weak results.

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1. http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=T12F042