

INTENSITY AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF JOB SEARCH AMONG YOUTHS

Judith M. Tanur, Jung Kyu-Lee, SUNY at Stony Brook,
and Hee-Choon Shin, Pennsylvania State University
Judith M. Tanur, SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY 11794-4356

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This paper is part of a larger project that explores the answers given by and for youths (aged 16 to 24) to the job search questions on the Current Population Survey (CPS). Do differing conceptualizations of job search between youths and adults lead to youths answering differently for themselves than adults do and/or adults answering differently as proxies for youths than youths would self report?

Because a vast majority of young people are answered for by proxies (most often parents--see Tanur and Shin 1990a) and because an individual is recorded as unemployed by CPS rules only if he/she has actively looked for work in the four weeks preceding the survey, differential conceptions of job search could well impact the unemployment rate. This paper explores in Section 2 whether reported intensity of job search (measured by number of strategies reported) changes with age and proxy status, using CPS data from March 1982 and March 1988. In Section 3 it also looks qualitatively at changes over age in reasons offered for looking for a job in response to the CPS Labor Force questions asked on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and in Section 4 explores answers to direct questions about conceptualization of job search in the Bureau of the Census' CPS Debriefing Study.

2. Intensity

Some of our earlier work (Tanur and Shin 1990b) used specially constructed longitudinal files of the CPS and data from NLSY to explore intensity of job search as measured by the number of strategies employed. As we thus followed individuals over time we found that intensity increased with age and experience, and that the difference between intensity at first and last search decreased with age at first search. These differences were damped for those who were reported for by proxies.

In this analysis we explore the same questions cross-sectionally, using data from the March 1982 and March 1988 CPS. The much larger number of job seekers in these files (5429 in 1982 and 3444 in 1988) lends additional power to our comparisons, as shown in Table 1.

From Table 1 we see strong effects of age and sex in both years. Older people use more search strategies than do younger ones, and males more than females. The findings for proxy status are considerably more complicated. For the 1982 data we see a strong effect for proxy status, with self reporters reporting the use of more strategies than those reported for by proxy. For 1988 the results are in the same direction but do not reach statistical significance at conventional levels. The 1988 data do, however, demonstrate a statistically significant interaction between sex and proxy status, with the pattern of more search strategies being reported by self-reporters than for those being reported for by proxy holding for males but not for females. The age-by-proxy status interaction does not reach statistical significance in either year, but there is a suggestion of a pattern of proxy status making more difference in number of strategies reported (self reporters higher than proxies) in the youngest age group than in the others.

But the proxy status results are even more complicated than the discussion so far has indicated--there is the additional issue of how proxy status is measured. In both 1982 and 1988 we are able to measure proxy status by comparing the line number (in the household roster) of the household respondent with the line number of the subject of the interview. A match indicates a self-respondent and a failure to match indicates a subject responded for by a proxy. All results discussed so far are based on proxy status determined by this line-number matching procedure. But by 1988 CPS

had instituted an item in which the interviewer could check whether the data came from self report, a proxy, or both. We collapsed this scale, considering an interview coded as "both" as a self report, and thus derived another measure of proxy status. This interviewer check item method of defining proxy status differed in its classification of individuals from the line number match method. There were changes in both directions, but in particular, more individuals were classified as self-reporting by the interviewer check item method than by the line-number match method. Results at the end of Table 1 use the interviewer check item method. We see that the results parallel those obtained by the line-number match method but are somewhat attenuated. In particular, the proxy-status by sex interaction no longer reaches statistical significance.

3. Verbatim responses to NLSY

NLSY is a panel survey that has interviewed a cohort of youths yearly since 1979 when they ranged in age from 16 to 21. It is currently sponsored by the BLS under a contract with Ohio State University. Field work is carried out by NORC. NLSY is useful for our purposes for several reasons. First, it asks the same questions about labor force participation as does the CPS. Secondly, it allows no proxy response -- each youth must answer for him/herself -- so comparisons between NLSY and CPS entail comparisons between entirely self and mostly proxy reporting. Finally, in NLSY interviewers are required to record respondents' answers verbatim before coding them into categories. This last feature provides material amenable to content analysis, enabling us to dig somewhat deeper behind answers coded either in CPS or NLSY.

NORC provided photocopies of the pages of the 1979 interview that recorded the job search question (and the question on reason for the job search) for a systematic sample of approximately 300 youths. Considerable numbers of these photocopies were illegible, and many others proved impossible to match with in-house BLS files that provided age and sex. We were able successfully to match 252 cases.

A very superficial scan of these pages immediately offered some cautionary information. In our earlier analyses (in this paper and elsewhere) we have been using number of job search categories checked as a measure of the intensity of job search, and we will have to continue to do so, for in CPS that is the only operationalization of the concept available. But the NLSY verbatim material confirms what we could well have suspected -- that a check in a single category can reflect very different intensities. For example, the category "checked with employer" was indicated on forms where the respondent reported merely putting in an application in a neighborhood fast food restaurant as well as on ones where the report was of taking a bus and going from employer to employer practically daily.

Further light is thrown on youths' conceptualization of job search by a content analysis of the reasons they give for looking for a job, and how those reasons change across age groups. Table 2 shows, by age and sex, the percent of respondents offering differing categories of reasons (an individual could be categorized more than once). We see that monetary reasons for looking for a job are important for all ages and both sexes (except for 21 year old females), both reasons that mention needing money for a specific reason (a car, clothes, spending money, for school), and money in a more generic sense. But at older ages (as compared with younger ages) young women were more likely to mention that they had to support or help support themselves or their families (several young women mentioned having babies to support). There seemed little change over the age groups in the mentioning of support for themselves or their families for young men, so that young men's levels on this variable at the older ages were considerably below those of young women. One other category is of interest. For both young men and young women, as the age category increases so too does the likelihood of mentioning that the respondent lost or quit a job as a reason for job search. Of course, older people have simply had more time to enter the labor force, so in a sense this finding is merely to be expected. But we can also speculate that the

older youths are beginning to hold the expectation that they will participate in the labor force, so that the loss of a job is sufficient reason for the search for a new one, a change of thinking from that of younger people.

4. Census CPS Debriefing Study

From July through December 1988 the Bureau of the Census carried out a debriefing study of respondents to the CPS/CATI experimental sample in their fourth (and, for this experimental sample, final) month in sample. Depending upon how the person answered the basic labor force questions in the CPS he/she was asked how he/she arrived at answers, interpreted relevant concepts, etc. What is of particular interest here is that those respondents who reported themselves or another member of their household as looking for work in the past four weeks were presented with three hypothetical vignettes and asked whether they would categorize the activity described as "looking for work". The relevant parts of the survey instrument follow:

Please tell me whether or not you think each of the following activities should be reported as LOOKING FOR WORK.

Q6a-1 During the past 4 weeks, George has occasionally looked at newspaper ads. He hasn't answered any of the ads because he hasn't yet found any jobs in which he's interested.

Q6a-2 Sue has been registered with a public employment agency for several months but has not done anything else to find a job.

Q6a-3 During the past 4 weeks, Sandy talked with friends and relatives about job openings.

Note that merely looking at newspaper ads (Q6a-1) and maintaining (as opposed to establishing) a registration at an employment agency (Q6a-2) do not fall within the CPS definition of looking for work. Talking with friends and relatives about job openings (Q6a-3) does fall within that definition.

We hypothesized that youths would consider less active job searches more legitimate than would adults and would not be sufficiently sophisticated to consider talking with friends and relatives as legitimate job search. Thus we would

expect differential patterns of answering these questions. We would expect affirmative answers to the first two questions more frequently from youths than from adults, and to the last less frequently from youths than from adults.

From that point of view the results are extremely disappointing. As shown in Table 3, youths, as predicted, are marginally more likely to consider just looking at newspaper advertisements as "looking for work" than are adults, but the results for the other two questions run opposite to the hypothesized direction. Youths are marginally less likely to consider maintaining registration at an employment agency as job search and considerably (although not statistically significantly) more likely to consider talking to friends and relatives as job search than are adults.

5. Conclusion

As in our earlier work, the effects we are finding seem to form a consistent but weak pattern, most easily discernible when working with the extremely large sample sizes available from the CPS itself. The NLSY data show only small changes in reasons for looking for work over the age span 16-21 but those seem to be in the direction of young people becoming more "adult". The Census debriefing study was unable to differentiate between the small sample of youths and the somewhat larger sample of adults in conceptualizations of job search. But note that the debriefing sample is one of respondents who actually answered the CPS/CATI experimental questionnaire (for themselves and for their families, if any, as well) and who reported themselves or some other member of their family of residence as looking for work. Hence they are likely to be living on their own and indeed more "adult" than would be a random sample of this age group.

In the CPS data itself we do see evidence of differential numbers of job search strategies used by age, by sex, and (less strongly) by proxy status. While the NLSY verbatim material cautions us strongly against interpreting these differences in a straightforward manner as differences in job search intensity, they nevertheless represent some difference in the way the CPS job search questions are answered by and

for people differing in age, sex, and proxy status. Our future work will

explore the effects of these differences.

Table 1: Mean Number of Job Search Methods by Age, Sex and Proxy Status, CPS 1982 and 1988 (N's in Parentheses)

Age	1982	1988
16-19	1.45** (1245)	1.38** (732)
20-24	1.65** (1248)	1.59** (674)
over 24	1.73** (2936)	1.69** (2038)

Sex	1982	1988
Male	1.70** (3030)	1.65** (1833)
Female	1.59** (2399)	1.56** (1611)

USING LINE NUMBER PROXY STATUS

Proxy Status ¹	1982	1988
Proxy	1.60** (3141)	1.58 (1937)
Self	1.72** (2288)	1.64 (1507)

	1982		1988	
	Proxy	Self	Proxy	Self
16-19	1.43 (1094)	1.63 (151)	1.37 (635)	1.40 (97)
20-24	1.64 (830)	1.67 (418)	1.61 (446)	1.57 (228)
>24	1.73 (1217)	1.74 (1719)	1.71 (856)	1.68 (1182)

	1982		1988	
	Proxy	Self	Proxy	Self
Male	1.65 (2029)	1.79 (1001)	1.59* (1204)	1.75* (629)
Female	1.50 (1112)	1.66 (1287)	1.55* (733)	1.57* (878)

*Table 1 (Continued)

USING INTERVIEWER PROXY ITEM (1988)

Proxy Status²

Proxy	Self
1.57 (1580)	1.65 (1840)

Age x Proxy Status²

	Proxy	Self
16-19	1.37 (544)	1.41 (185)
20-24	1.63 (356)	1.57 (308)
>24	1.70 (680)	1.69 (1347)

Sex x Proxy Status²

	Proxy	Self
Male	1.59 (1019)	1.73 (803)
Female	1.53 (561)	1.58 (1037)

* Means significantly different, $p < .01$.

** Means significantly different, $p < .001$.

1. Proxy Status determined by line number matching.

2. Proxy Status determined by interviewer check item.

Table 2: PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS MENTIONING REASON FOR JOB SEARCH BY AGE AND SEX, NLSY 1979

Age Sex	16		17		18		19		20		21	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
N* (Respondent)	28	27	31	29	32	17	20	14	15	13	16	10
Money for specified purpose**	29	30	16	24	16	35	5	21	20	23	--	20
Money, no specified purpose**	46	52	58	59	44	24	25	21	27	54	--	30
Support/self help/ family**	4	4	3	3	12	12	25	14	27	8	25	10
Lost/quit job**	4	4	9	7	16	24	35	43	27	31	12	40

* Some respondents supplied multiple responses.

**Figures in these rows are percentages.

Table 3: PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS TO DEBRIEFING STUDY CONSIDERING EACH ACTIVITY "LOOKING FOR WORK," BY AGE. (NUMBERS IN PARENTHESES REPRESENT BASE N'S.)

	AGE	
	16-24	>24
Q6a-1 (Newspapers)	38.1% (63)	36.2% (1055)
Q6a-2 (Employment Agency)	33.8% (65)	38.4% (1048)
Q6a-3 (Friends and Relatives)	47.7% (65)	38.0% (1044)

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