NEGATIVITY TOWARD THE RICH AMONG UNEMPLOYED YOUTH IN HONG KONG: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

[1]DARIUS K.-S. CHAN, [2]GRAND H.-L. CHENG

[1]The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
[2]Duke-NUS Medical School, Singapore

Abstract - The current study was designed to examine the potential associations between sense of employability and negative attitudes toward the rich among Hong Kong unemployed youth over time. Given the prevalence of youth employment worldwide, we were interested in exploring the often documented conjecture that unemployed youth's frustration and anger may lead to different forms of negative consequences, including heightened tensions toward the rich and the Government. Specifically, we collected data from 359 unemployed youth in Hong Kong, across two waves of data collection with 9 months apart,and explored their negative attitudes toward the rich and its associations with sense of employability, changes in employment status, and various psychosocial correlates such as measures in psychological well-being and anti-establishment sentiments. Key findings from our preliminary analyses revealed that: 1) these unemployed youths were generally negative toward the rich as reflected in their mean ratings; 2) negativity toward the rich was positively associated with sense of employability, implying that those who perceived themselves as employable but failed to secure a job were particularly negative the rich; 3) negativity toward the rich was negatively associated with psychological health and support for government, and positively associated with measures such as cynicism and participations in various collective actions. Very little research has been conducted to examine the potential linkage between youth unemployment and negativity toward the rich, and its psychosocial correlates. Our findings bear significant conceptual and applied implications.

Keywords - Unemployed youth, negativity toward the rich, psychosocial correlates, Hong Kong
This study was funded by General Research Fund (No. 440713) from Hong Kong Research Grants Council.

I. INTRODUCTION

- Youth unemployment has become increasingly prominent on social agendas across the world, and Hong Kong is no exception. Despite the relatively strong economic conditions in Greater China, youth unemployment rate in Hong Kong remains 2 to 3 times higher than the overall unemployment (aged between 15-19: 15%; between 20-24: 8%; Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2016) . Because unemployment has often been reported to adversely impact both the individual and the community, research on unemployed youth in Hong Kong is required (Ngai & Ngai, 2007; Shek& Lee, 2004).
- According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), if people in low-status groups think it is impossible to change group affiliation, they may engage in social competition or social activities against high-status groups, aiming at upgrading ingroup status (Mummendey, Klink, Mielke, Wenzel, & Blanz, 1999). Supporting this argument, Stott and Drury (2004) reported that low-status people perceive the high-status outgroup negatively when the group boundary is impermeable. Based on this reasoning, we thus posit that if unemployed youth think they are unemployable and cannot move up the social hierarchy, they may exhibit heightened negativity toward people with high SES, perceiving them as, for example, hypocritical. A linkage between employabilityand social stability (manifested as negativity toward people with high SES) is an intriguing and meaningful question to be explored.
- This potential linkage between youth unemployment and social stability has been mentioned in the media. However, support for such a claim is mostly anecdotal. Very little systematic research has been conducted to examine the strength of this association. In fact, not much research has been conducted to examine the concept and phenomenon of negativity toward the rich. The current study thus aimed to explore Hong Kong unemployed youth's levels of negativity toward the rich over time, as well as important psychosocial correlates of their levels of negativity toward the rich.
- Specifically, we hypothesized that, among unemployed youth in Hong Kong:
- Sense of employability would be negatively associated with negativity toward the rich(Hypothesis 1).
- Negativity toward the rich would be positively associated with various anti-Government and anti-establishment measures (Hypothesis 2).
- We were also interested in examining other important psychosocial correlates of negativity toward the rich among unemployed youth, including their psychological well-being and financial conditions.

II. METHODS

- **Sample and procedure**: We successfully collected data from 359 unemployed youth in Hong Kong, across two waves of data collection

with 9 months apart (out of 533 participants at Wave 1; a retention rate of 67.4%). Participants were recruited from diverse channels, ranging from employment service, community service, and youth service centers, to a couple non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the community. We also approached young people in job fairs, and made announcements about our study in online forums. Further, we asked our participants to invite their acquaintances who were eligible for our study to participate. Among the 359 valid cases, 104 individuals had decided to go back to school at Wave 2, 139 remained unemployed, while the rest were able to secure a job eventually.

- **Measures**: The following scales were used to measure the focal variables mentioned above, namely, negativity toward the rich, employability scale, social cynicism, system justification, support for government, class permeability in Hong Kong, support for Occupy Central, participation in collective action for constitutional development in Hong Kong, psychological health, and financial hardship.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- First, we note that the negativity measure remained quite stable as the correlations between the two waves of measure were highly significant across the three groups of participants (see Table 1), an evidence for reliability. This provides support to our use of the newly developed negativity toward the rich scale.

	N	r	p
Overall	359	.61	<.001
FT student at Wave 2	104	.53	<.001
FT job at Wave 2	116	.63	<.001
Remained unemployed	139	.65	<.001

Table 1: Correlation between Wave 1 negativity and Wave 2 negativity (autoregressive effect)

- Moreover, this group of unemployed youth was generally negative toward the rich, as their mean scores were all over 4.0 (the midpoint of the 7-point scale; see Table 2). Interestingly, their negative attitudes generally decreased over time, except for the unemployed individuals who decided to go back to school.

	N	Wave 1	Wave 2	p
Overall	359	4.61	4.48	.002
FT student at Wave 2	104	4.46	4.37	.259
FT job at Wave 2	114	4.66	4.52	.032
Remained unemployed	139	4.67	4.53	.028

Table 2: Change in negativity from Wave 1 (all jobless at T1) to Wave 2

- However, contrary to Hypothesis 1, we have no evidence for the proposed negative association between employability and negativity toward the rich. Instead, the association for the entire sample was positive ($r = .08$, $p < .05$). More interestingly, this positive association was rather strong for those who remained unemployed throughout the entire survey period ($r = .17$, $p < .05$, at the Wave 1 measures; $r = .14$, $p < .05$ for Wave 1 employability and Wave 2 negativity). Such results seem to suggest that individuals who perceived themselves as employable but failed to secure a job were particularly negative the rich.
- Supporting our Hypothesis 2, more negative individuals were indeed found to be more negative toward our society and our government in general, as significant correlations were found between negativity toward the rich and social cynicism ($r = .55$, $p < .001$; the more negative they were, the more cynical they perceived our society), system justification ($r = -.34$, $p < .001$; the more negative they were, the more unjust they perceived our society), and class permeability in Hong Kong ($r = -.37$, $p < .001$; the more they negative they were, the less mobile they perceived that individuals can move across social class).
- More importantly, such sense of negativity toward the rich would be translated into actions that bear significant social implications, as significant correlations were found between negativity and support for government ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$; the more negative they were, the less support they had for the government), support for Occupy Central ($r = .31$, $p < .001$; the more negative they were, the more support they showed for Occupy Central), and their participation in collective action for constitutional development in Hong Kong ($r = .22$, $p < .001$; the negative they were, the more they had participated in such collective actions).
- In terms of psychosocial correlates, such negative attitudes toward the rich seem to also carry negative effects on the individuals

themselves, as a significant correlation was found between negativity and psychological health ($r = -.11$, $p < .05$; the more negative they were, the worse their psychological health was). Moreover, negativity was also found to be positively correlated with their own financial hardship ($r = .22$, $p < .001$).

CONCLUSION

- Very little research has been conducted to examine the potential linkage between youth unemployment and negativity toward the rich, and the psychosocial correlates of the concept of negativity toward the rich. The current study yielded some interesting findings that bear practical significance.
- First, unemployed youth in Hong Kong were generally negative attitudes toward the rich over time, regardless of their employment status. That is, they were negative even for those who secured a job at Wave 2. Whereas this finding counters our expectation, it deserves particularly attention because it may imply that such negative attitudes are robust and difficult to change.
- More interestingly, individuals who perceived themselves as more employable but still failed to secure a job over time were particularly negative the rich. Such findings bear both conceptual and practical implications. Intervention programs may target on helping such individuals realistically assess their own credentials during job search, as well as properly channeling their negative social attitudes (in our findings, negativity toward the rich).
- Second, such negative attitudes bear significant social implications as they were found to be associated with various anti-government and anti-establishment measures. More importantly, they may also be translated into collective actions against the government. To our best knowledge, very little systematic, quantitative research has been conducted to investigate the strengths of such associations.
- Third, such negative attitudes also seem to bear negative implications for the more negative individuals also reported worse psychological well-being. Again, a finding that deserves attention, particularly from an applied perspective, as such individuals may be directed to channel their dissatisfaction in a more positive way.

REFERENCE

[1] Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. (2016). Quarterly report on general household survey. Retrieved from http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=B1050001

[2] Mummendey, A., Klink, A., Mielke, R., Wenzel, M., & Blanz, M. (1999). Socio-structural characteristics of intergroup relations and identity management strategies: Results from a field study in East Germany. European Journal of Social Psychology, 29, 259–285.

[3] Ngai, S. S. Y., & Ngai, N. P. (2007). Empowerment or disempowerment? A review of youth training schemes for non-engaged young people in Hong Kong. Adolescence, 42, 137-149.

[4] Shek, D. T. L., & Lee, B. M. (2004). "Non-engaged" young people in Hong Kong: Key statistics and observations. International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, 16(2), 145-163. doi: 10.1515/IJAMH.2004.16.2.145

[5] Stott, C., & Drury, J. (2004). The importance of social structure and social interaction in stereotype consensus and content: Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts? . European Journal of Social Psychology, 34, 11-23. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.183

[6] Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), The social psychology of intergroup relations (pp. 33-47): Monterey, CA: Brooks/ Cole.

★★★