

# Community Belongingness and Subjective Well-being among Unemployed People in a Finnish Community

## Abstract

**Purpose** - Community belongingness has been found to be positively associated with subjective well-being. Scholars have verified this connection with different social groups. In the present study, we are interested in the group of unemployed people and compare their situation to employed people. Specifically, we examine whether a sense of community belonging prevents negative impacts of unemployment on subjective well-being.

**Design/ Methodology/Approach** - The study is based on a survey conducted in 2016. The data consist of 830 respondents from which 723 had the labor market status of employed people and 107 had the labor market status of unemployed people.

**Findings** - The results of this study show that there are both positive and negative factors which support or weaken community belongingness. Interpersonal trust supports the sense of community belonging of individuals, but loneliness weakens their community belongingness. However, unemployed people have a lower rate of community belongingness and subjective well-being comparing to employed people. Furthermore, community belongingness is positively associated with subjective well-being, but this connection is conditional in order that a high rate of community belongingness buffers the negative impacts of unemployment.

**Originality/Value** - The study emphasizes the significance of community belongingness as a basis of subjective well-being. On the other hand, the negative impacts of unemployment can be mitigated by supporting integration of unemployed people into social communities. From a sociopolitical view, the results underline the fact that governmental measurements promote the social inclusion of unemployed people.

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that the level of subjective well-being is higher among employed people than among unemployed people (e.g. Blank *et al.*, 2015). Employment has a positive influence on the health and well-being of individuals. Employment (the work) has also some latent functions in the everyday life of individuals, such as giving structure to the day (e.g. Christiansen and Townsend, 2010). The previous studies further reveal that employment gives opportunities for social network engagement, which in turn supports the subjective well-being of individuals. On the other hand, there is consistent evidence that unemployment is detrimental to the well-being of the individuals involved (Bartrum and Creed, 2006; Koen *et al.*, 2013; Ferreira, 2015). Unemployment is a social risk, which produces social problems if it is prolonged. Welfare states have tried to find ways to reduce these social risks and social problems by activating unemployed people, but also by trying to integrate them better into society.

In this study, we explore whether community belongingness could be seen as an instrument which reduces social risks and promotes the well-being of unemployed people. In general, well-being has been strongly linked with the quality of social bonds and social interaction of individuals. Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 497) proposed the belongingness hypothesis, which suggests that “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships”. The belongingness hypothesis has been verified in many studies. For instance, Albanesi *et al.* (2007) showed that a sense of belonging predicts well-being among adolescents but similar results are found also among many other social groups such as elderly people (Cramm and Nieboer, 2015), immigrants (Amit and Bar-Lev, 2015), and students (Stebleton *et al.*, 2014). The belongingness hypothesis also covers the significance of wider social entities such as neighbors and communities (e.g. Shields, 2008)

The belongingness hypothesis is widely studied but less so in the group of unemployed people. In this article, we are interested in the association of community belongingness and subjective well-being. We compare the results of our study of employed and unemployed people. We assume that a sense of belonging and subjective well-being are positively associated, but especially so in unemployed people because they have a lower sense of belonging and subjective well-being comparing to employed people. Furthermore, we assume that community belongingness has a buffering effect on well-being so that it mitigates the negative effects of unemployment.

## BACKGROUND

### Sense of belonging

Anant (1966) defines the concept of belongingness as the experience of personal involvement (in a system) to the extent that a person feels that they are an indispensable and integral part of that system. Later, Hagerty *et al.* (1992) expanded the definition of belongingness as proposed by Anant (1966) to include two additional dimensions. The first dimension consists of experience whereby an individual feels that they are valued, needed, and accepted. The second dimension involves the person’s perception that their characteristics articulate with or complement the system. Hagerty *et al.* (1992, p. 173) defined a sense of belonging as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment”. According to the belongingness hypothesis of Baumeister and Leary (1995), the human drive for social relationships is an essential feature of human beings (cf. Baumeister, 2005). Social belongingness may be based on social interaction with our own significant people, but it can

also be focused on relationships which allow us to feel a part of a larger symbolic entity (e.g. community) that expands the capacities and boundaries of their own self (Aron *et al.*, 2001).

The relationship of the self and community may be described in different ways and by using concepts. For instance, individuals' connections to local networks (bonds) and their interactions are seen to be strongly related to community attachment (Kasardan and Janowitz, 1974). On the other hand, community belongingness is said to refer to a situation where people feel a membership with an environment (Mecsh and Manor, 1998). Furthermore, place rootedness is described as a very strong bond to home (Hay 1998). Similarly place familiarity may be defined as pleasant memories, achievement memories and environmental images associated with places. Hence, there is no clear definition for the situation in which people are intensely related to a place (Raymond *et al.*, 2010).

Mahar *et al.* (2013) suggest that the following five elements are central to a multidimensional understanding of a sense of belonging. First, achieving a sense of belonging requires that the individual perceive that they are valued, respected or otherwise subjectively engaged. Second, an appropriate understanding of a sense of belonging requires that a referent group for belonging is provided to anchor the subjective feeling. For example, in education referent groups include schools, peer groups, classrooms or an entire campus community. Third, a sense of belonging is based on reciprocity, which refers to connectedness that is shared by the individual and the external referent. Fourth, both physical and social environments may contribute to or detract from an individual's sense of belonging. Fifth, self-determination respects the right of the individual to choose to interact with referents and their perceived power in the interaction. But, individuals who feel powerless to belong may never successfully achieve a sense of belonging.

### **Community belongingness and subjective well-being**

Lambert *et al.* (2013) found that there is a strong positive correlation between community belongingness and subjective well-being. They suggest that a sense of belonging predicts how meaningful life is perceived to be. Sandstrom and Dunn (2014) found that the correlation is not only based on intensive social interactions but so-called weak ties are also related to social and emotional well-being. They revealed that even social interactions with the more peripheral members of our social networks contribute to our well-being.

Scholars have studied the association of community belongingness and subjective well-being in different types of social groups. Albanesi *et al.* (2007) suggest that a sense of community belonging predicts social well-being among adolescents. Their findings suggest that in order to increase social well-being it is important to provide adolescents with more opportunities to experience a sense of belonging to the peer group and to promote prosocial behaviors in the community context. Similarly, Newman *et al.* (2007) argue that a sense of peer group belonging was negatively related to internalizing and externalizing behavior problems among adolescents. Adolescents who viewed peer group membership as very important to them had a positive sense of peer group belonging and they also had significantly fewer behavior problems than those who viewed peer group membership as very important, but did not have a positive sense of peer group belonging. The association of community belongingness and subjective well-being is found also among students. Stebleton *et al.* (2014) studied the sense of belonging, mental health status, and use of mental health services in first-generation student compared to other students. They found that the first-generation students tended to report lower ratings of belonging, greater levels of depression, and a lower use of services compared to other students. According to Grobecker (2016), a sense of belonging has a positive

influence on the learning, motivation and confidence of students and thus it is associated with their well-being.

Also, the well-being of older people seems to be linked with community belongingness. Young, Russel and Powers (2004) found that a better sense of neighborhood was associated with better physical and mental health, lower stress, better social support and being physically active among older women. Similarly, Cramm and Nieboer (2015) confirmed that the neighborhood has been identified as an important aspect of the well-being of older people. Poor neighborhood conditions can pose difficulties in obtaining support, especially for older people who live alone. Older people living in socially deprived neighborhoods report poorer overall well-being and instrumental goals to achieve well-being. Amit and Bar-Lev (2015) suggest that life satisfaction is associated with community belongingness among immigrants (e.g. Gonzales *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, scholars have reported on a buffering effect of community belongingness against negative factors of well-being. A buffering effect is a process in which a social resource reduces the impact of life stress on subjective well-being, thus in this case persons with a high sense of belonging show less adverse impacts from negative events. For instance, Hombrados-Mendieta *et al.* (2013) confirmed that community belongingness acts as a moderating variable that buffers the effect of the adaptation process experienced by immigrants (cf. Berry and Hou, 2017). On the other hand, the well-being of individuals also seems to protect them from the negative effects of unemployment. Binder and Coad (2015) note that individuals with high well-being suffer less from becoming unemployed.

The buffering effect is based on an individual-level social attachment in interpersonal relationships and also on the social engagement of individuals in broader communities. From a positive point of view, a sense of belonging is based on social connectedness, which supports social attachment among individuals. Satisfaction with social relationships is a strong predictor of community belongingness (Cemalcilar, 2010). The thicker the social network and active social participation, the higher the sense of belonging (Jetten *et al.*, 2014). The larger the social network of friends, family, and club memberships that an individual has, the better the mental and physical health of that individual. From a negative point of view, the lack of friends and thin social network are associated with a low rate of a sense of belonging. Social isolation can adversely affect well-being while social engagement and attachment can lead to positive outcomes and significantly reduce health and social risks (Holt-Lunstad *et al.* 2010). Thus, community belongingness supports well-being in general, but it also prevents the effects of negative features of well-being such as loneliness.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample**

The data are based on a survey provided by the Department of Social Sciences at the University of X in 2016. The survey was focused on an ordinary life in a small town in Finland. The target town had 21 500 inhabitants (the median of Finnish municipalities was 6 178, the population of the whole country was 5 503 297) in 2016. The town is a traditional industrial town but it is located within a rural region. Its economic structure is based on industries having a share of 24.1 percent (average of 2014 and 2015) compared to the average of 14.4 percent for all municipalities. Its demographic dependency ratio was 66.7 (the average for the whole country: 59.1). The measure of educational level was 318 (the average for the whole country: 363) in 2016, which shows that the theoretical

period of education per person was 3.2 years after completing basic education. The percentage of unemployed people (as % of labor force) was 17.2 (the average for the whole country: 13.2) in 2016.

The study was focused on 5000 urban residents aged 18-85 years who were selected randomly from the Population Register Center. In the first wave (October 2016) the questionnaire was sent by post but the respondents were asked to use the internet for responding to the electronic survey. In the second wave, those respondents who did not answer were sent a paper form and they were asked to fill out either an electronic form or a paper form (November 2016). In the third wave, a reminder was sent to those who had not yet responded, and especially to those in age group of 18-36 years because there were fewer respondents in this group than in other age groups. Later, the data on gender, age and education were corrected by using a weighting adjustment. The population distribution of the variables was obtained from the National Statistical Institute. The response rate was 1970 which is 39.4 percent of the whole sample.

## Design

The main aim of the study was to explore how community belongingness (CB) is associated with subjective well-being (SWB) among unemployed people. According to previous studies, we can assume that community belongingness and subjective well-being are positively associated (e.g. Sundstrom and Dunn, 2014). Also, we assume that community belongingness and subjective well-being are lower among unemployed people than among employed people. Thus, we assume that labor market status (LMS) is a significant factor in explaining the association between community belongingness and subjective well-being. We test whether the labor market status moderates the effect of community belongingness on subjective well-being. Furthermore, if there is a significant difference in community belonging between employed and unemployed people, then it is reasonable to also investigate which factors may explain a sense of community belonging in both groups.

The analysis is based on the following hypotheses:

H1: SWB and CB are positively associated

H2: Both CB and SWB are higher among employed people than among unemployed people.

H3: CB has a buffering effect on SWB, so that LMS moderates its effect on SWB.

H4: There is no difference between the predictors of CB among employed and unemployed people.

The hypotheses were tested in the following way. At the start of the analysis, the focus was set on the relationship between community belongingness (CB) and subjective well-being (SWB) by describing the relationship separately among employed and unemployed people. The correlations between the variables were examined by using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC) (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, the mean rates of SWB and CB were calculated in the groups of unemployed and employed people (Hypothesis 2). In the next phase of analysis, the study was focused on whether the labor market status (LMS) effects on the relationship of CB and SWB. That is, whether the effect of CB on SWB is the function of LMS (Hypothesis 3). The moderation models were tested by using a conditional process analysis program (PROCESS), which computes ordinary least square (OLS) regressions to test for moderation models (Hayes, 2013). Because the influence of CB on SWB depended on LMS, it was also reasonable to study whether CB was based on similar predictors among employed and unemployed people. The predictors of CB were analyzed by using linear regression analysis using the stepwise method (Hypothesis 4). Before carrying out the regression analyses, the validity of the conditions was checked. The normality of the residual distributions and the linearity condition were assessed graphically. Multicollinearity between the

independent variables was tested by using variance inflation factor (VIF) coefficients, whose scores are presented in the results section.

## Measures

The measure of subjective well-being (SWB) can be constructed by including various components (Dolan and Metcalfe, 2012; Dolan *et al.*, 2011; see also Cramm and Nieboer, 2012; Adler and Seligman, 2016). Life satisfaction refers to well-being, which is based on the individual's assessment and cognitive reflection of their life situation (Diener *et al.*, 1985). Another way of measuring subjective well-being is based on emotions. Affective well-being is seen to contribute to upward spirals in coping ability, self-esteem, performance, and productivity at work (Watson *et al.*, 1998). Furthermore, subjective well-being may be approached as eudemonic, which includes the individual's assessment of the meaning of their own life. In this study, subjective well-being is a sum variable, which consisted of six variables, which were Likert-type scale items (1= Strongly disagree,..., 5= Strongly agree). The sum variable consisted of three items, which measured an individual's cognitive reflection of their own life situation, and three items of eudemonic type, which were focused on the meaning of life. Thus, the component of affective well-being was not included in the measure. The reliability of the constructed variable was .904 in the entire data and its distribution was nearly normal in both groups.

The original measure of community belongingness (CB) was based on twelve items, which in factor analysis was loaded for three factors: community, family and relatives, and engagement in social groups. In this analysis, we studied a sense of community belonging, which consisted of three Likert-type items (1-5) where respondents were asked to assess how solidly they feel they are belonging in the following communities: neighborhood, town, and society (1= Very loosely,..., 5= Very firmly agree). The reliability of the sum variable was .690 in the entire data.

Labor market status (LMS) was measured by using a categorical variable, which contained eight options. However, only the categories of employed and unemployed were taken into the analysis, thus the data were divided into two groups consisting of 723 employed and 107 unemployed respondents. The variable was treated as a dummy.

The independent variables were used as predictors of CB in the linear regression analysis. The variable of institutional trust consisted of 7 items. The reliability of the sum variable was 0.920. The variable of loneliness was formed from two items. The reliability of the sum variable was 0.823. The sum variable of problems was formed from four items which measured mental health problems, alcohol problems, physical problems, and interpersonal problems. The reliability of the variable was 0.663. Other independent variables were based on single items, for which values and means are described separately in the groups of employed and unemployed people in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The predictors of community belongingness

Variable	Values	Alpha, based on entire data	Employed, mean	Unemployed, mean
Gender	0=male, 1=female	-	0.58, n=719	0.61, n=105
Age	18–67	-	48.87, n=701	50.82, n=101
Spouse	0= no, 1 = yes	-	0.86, n=720	0.66, n=104
Children	0= no, 1 = yes	-	0.75, n=719	0.67, n=104
Education	low to high, 1-5	-	3.52, n=721	3.19, n=104
Income	low to high, 1-5	-	2.92, n=717	2.09, n=105
Adequacy of income	high to low, 1-5	-	1.90, n=716	2.61, n=76

Interpersonal trust	low to high, 0-10	-	7.07, n=714	6.81, n=105
Institutional trust	low to high, 0-10	7 items, 0.920	5.32, n=717	4.77, n=105
Future	good to bad, 1-5	-	2.10, n=720	2.49, n=105
Loneliness	good to bad, 1-5	2 items, 0.823	1.90, n=721	2.26, n=105
Stress	low to high, 1-5	-	2.83, n=721	2.65, n=105
Health	good to bad, 1-5	-	1.84, n=721	2.23, n=105
Problems	good to bad, 1-4	4 items, 0.663	1.47, n=715	1.71, n=105

## RESULTS

The data were analyzed in three phases. The analysis was started by examining the relationship between community belongingness (CB) and subjective well-being (SWB) in the groups of employed and unemployed people. Correlations were calculated for CB and SWB scores. As expected, well-being and community belongingness were positively and moderately correlated in both groups (Table 2), that is, as a sense of belonging increases well-being increases which supports Hypothesis 1. However, the employed group had the higher mean both in CB and SWB compared to the unemployed group as Hypothesis 2 suggests (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Correlations between subjective well-being (SWB) and community belongingness (CB) in the groups of unemployed and employed people

	r	n(N)
Entire sample	.301***	830
Unemployed	.408***	107 (830)
Employed	.247***	723 (830)

\*\*\*<.001

**Table 3.** Mean scores of subjective well-being (SWB) and community belongingness (CB) in groups of unemployed and employed people

	Mean SoB	Mean SWB	n(N)
Entire sample	3,33 (.83)	4,16 (.67)	830
Unemployed	3,09 (.86)	3,80 (.82)	107 (830)
Employed	3,36 (.82)	4,21 (.63)	723 (830)

In the second phase, the relationship between community belongingness (CB) and subjective well-being (SWB) were examined more deeply from the view of the labor market status (LMS). We studied whether the effect of the CB (X) on SWB (Y) was different at different values of the labor market status (M) (employed or unemployed). This can be expressed as in the following equation:  $Y = i_1 + b_1X + b_2M + b_3XM + e_v$ <sup>1</sup>. According to the analysis (Table 4), the coefficients of community belongingness (CB = .208) and the labor market status (.225) estimate conditional effect when the other variable is zero. Furthermore,  $b_3$  (-.356) is statistically different from zero, meaning that the effect of community belongingness (CB) with respect to subjective well-being (SWB) depends on the labor market status (LMS). More specifically, as community belongingness increases by one unit, difference between the groups in subjective well-being decreases by 0.356 units. Hence, the labor market status moderates the effect of community belongingness (CB) on subjective well-being (SWB) as hypothesis 3 suggests. In the moderation model, age, gender and adequacy of income level

<sup>1</sup> Regression coefficient  $b_3$  determines how much the effect of X is contingent on M. Test of significance intervals based on  $b_3$  answers the question as to whether M moderates the effect of Xs. When XM is in a model with X and M, the coefficients for X and M are conditional effects, which means that they are conditioned on the other variable being zero. When XM is not in the model, these are partial effects (cf. main effects in ANOVA).

were used as control variables ( $C_1$ ,  $C_2$ , and  $C_3$ ). However, some reservation is needed regarding the moderation model, because its ability to explain the variance in subjective well-being is 17.6 %.

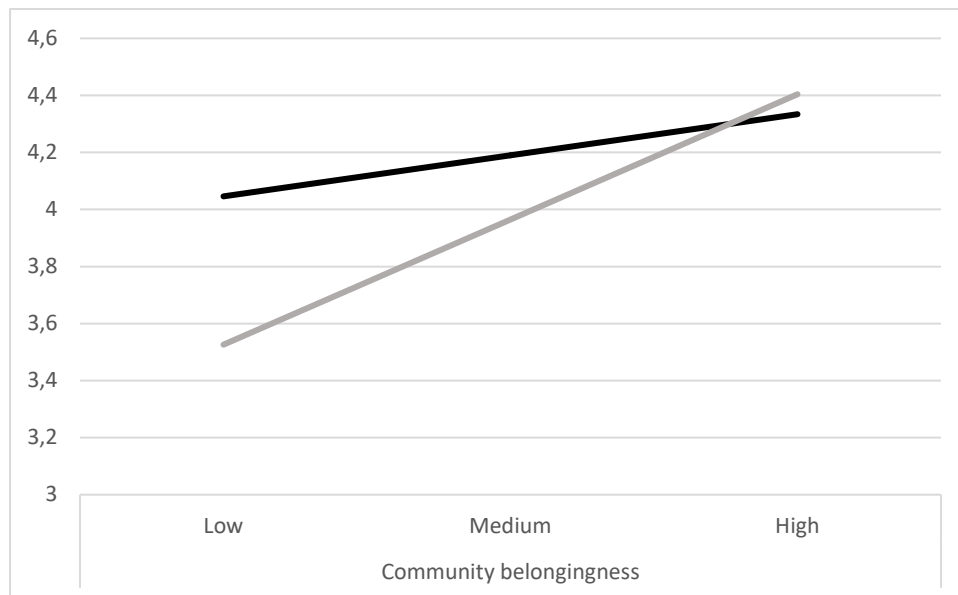
**Table 4.** Results from a regression analysis examining the moderation of the effect of community belongingness (CB) to well-being on labor market status (LMS), controlling for age and gender and adequacy of Income

		Coeff.	SE	t	p
Intercept	$i_1$	4.560	.136	33.601	.000
CB (X)	$b_1$	.208	.027	7.751	.000
LMS (M)	$b_2$	.225	.078	2.860	.004
CBxLMS (XM)	$b_3$	-.356	.089	-3.980	.000
Gender (C1)	$b_4$	-.024	.045	-.538	.591
Age (C2)	$b_5$	.001	.002	.334	.739
Adequacy of income (C3)	$b_6$	-.198	.032	-6.123	.000

$R^2=.175$ ,  $MSE=376$   
 $F(6,767)=26.984$ ,  $p<.001$

The moderation model can also be visualized, which makes it clearer what is happening in the data (Figure 1). In both groups of labor market status (employed and unemployed) community belongingness and subjective well-being are positively associated. However, among the group of unemployed people the association is steeper than among the group of employed people. The labor market status moderates the effect of community belongingness to subjective well-being in different way in both groups.

**Figure 1.** Visual representation of the moderation of the effect of community belongingness (CB) on subjective well-being (SWB) by labor market status (LMS) (employed = black, unemployed = grey)



In the final phase, we were interested to study whether the same predictors are associated with community belongingness in both groups (employed and unemployed). First and second regression models describe the results from the group of employed people, and the models three and four describe the results from the group of unemployed people (Table 5). First and third regression models shown in Table 5 include all of the independent variables, which were examined, but the second and fourth models describe the results of a stepwise method. In the model 1, the highest VIF



value was 1.420, and in the model 2 the highest VIF value was 1.251. In the model 3, the highest VIF value was 2.275. In the model 4, the value for both interpersonal trust and loneliness was 1.087.

**Table 5.** Linear regression analysis. Dependent variable: community belongingness

Independent variable	Employed		Unemployed	
	Model 1 (Stand. beta)	Model 2 (Stand. beta)	Model 3 (Stand. beta)	Model 4 (Stand. beta)
Gender	-.016		-.125	
Age	.019		-.036	
Spouse	-.050		-.072	
Children	-.041		.067	
Education	.031		.107	
Income	-.047		-.001	
Adequacy of income	.009		.148	
Interpersonal trust	.167***	.180***	.267	.293**
Institutional trust	.221***	.229***	-.070	
Future	-.086		-.253	
Loneliness	-.089*	-.117**	-.402**	-.422***
Stress	.016		.209	
Health	.051		.065	
Problems	-.013		-.076	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.143	.143	.280	.314
F	9.122***	38.698***	2.941**	17.038***

\* = p < .05. \*\* = p < .01. \*\*\* = p < .001.

The regression analysis shows that loneliness is significantly and negatively associated with community belongingness in both groups (Table 5). Thus, loneliness is a factor which weakens the sense of community belonging. Furthermore, both interpersonal trust and institutional trust are positively associated with community belongingness in the group of employed people. However, only interpersonal trust is positively associated with community belongingness among unemployed people. Thus, the predictors of community belongingness are mostly similar in the groups of employed and unemployed people as hypothesis 4 suggests, however institutional trust is significant only among employed people. Altogether, these factors explain as much as 31.4% of the total variance in the variable of community belongingness in the group of unemployed people, but the explanation share of variance is only 14.3 % in the group of employed people. Thus, we need to remark that the low R-squared value need to take account in the interpretation of the results, especially among the group of employed people.

## DISCUSSION

According to the classic definition of Anant (1966), belongingness is based on the experience of personal involvement in a group or community. As aforementioned, Baumeister and Leary (1995) also note that humans are driven build and maintain interpersonal relationship. The belongingness hypothesis is widely studied but less within a labor market status. In the present study, we were interested in the association of community belongingness and subjective well-being among unemployed people. The results of the study encouraged us to address the issue from three perspectives.

First, we find that community belongingness is based on social interaction, which is consistent with previous studies in the literature (e.g. Cemalcilar, 2010). Also, we find that there are positive and negative factors which predict the sense of community belonging. Interpersonal trust supports an

individual's sense of community belonging, but loneliness reduces it. In this sense, satisfaction with social relationships is a strong predictor of community belongingness. For instance, Jetten *et al.* (2014) also find that the thicker the social network and the more active the social participation, the higher the rates of belongingness, but the lack of friends and more generally thin social network are associated with the low rates of community belongingness. One's sense of community belonging is strongly based on social relationships and social interaction (Mahar *et al.*, 2012).

Second, we find that the stronger the sense of community belonging, the higher the subjective well-being. The result is consistent with the previous studies in the literature. For instance, Lambert *et al.* (2013) find that a sense of belonging correlates positively with well-being. In this sense, community belongingness predicts how meaningful life is perceived to be. The same positive association has been found among different kinds of social groups. Albanesi *et al.* (2007) find the association of community belongingness among adolescents, Cramm and Nieboer (2015) have also identified the similar association among older people, Amit and Bar-Lev (2015) confirmed the same connection among immigrants (see also Gonzales *et al.*, 2013). According to Grobecker (2016), a sense of belonging has a positive influence on the learning, motivation and confidence of students and thus it is associated with their well-being. Furthermore, Jetten *et al.* (2014) showed that the larger one's social network of friends, family, and club memberships, the better one's mental and physical health. In this sense, it is not a surprise that in the present study, community belongingness is also associated with subjective well-being among unemployed people.

However, there is a difference between employed and unemployed people regarding the rates of community belongingness and subjective well-being. Unemployed people have slightly lower rates of community belongingness and clear lower rates of subjective well-being compared to employed people. We also find that the association between community belongingness and subjective well-being is conditional, hence there is no difference in subjective well-being between employed and unemployed people in the case of thick (high rate) community belongingness, but the difference is significant in the case of thin (low rate) community belongingness. This result allowed us to assume that community belongingness somehow buffers the negative effects of unemployment (cf. Binder and Coad, 2015). A buffering effect is a process in which a social resource reduces the impact of negative factors on subjective well-being, thus in this case, persons with a high sense of belonging show a less adverse impact from negative factors on their subjective well-being. The result is consistent with the previous studies in the literature, which have found that a sense of belonging has a buffering effect. For instance, Shnabel *et al.* (2013) note that social belongingness improves the situation of the members of negatively stereotyped groups. Also, Hombrados-Mendieta *et al.* (2013) confirm that a sense of belonging acts as a moderating variable that buffers the effect of the adaptation process experienced by immigrants (cf. Berry and Hou, 2017). According to Minkkinen *et al.* (2016), the higher level of belongingness to a primary group buffers the negative factors of happiness among a risk group (suicide). From this perspective, it is understandable that community belongingness is a significant factor solely among unemployed people whose social status is questioned in a society.

Third, the belongingness hypothesis is typically seen to be based on interpersonal relationships. For instance, Baumeister and Leary (1995) note that individuals try to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships which are the basis for belongingness. In the present study, we explore community belongingness which is not focused at an interpersonal level but rather has a focus at a community level. We assume that this kind of community level belongingness could not be based on social interactions alone, but it also could have an abstract level background such as, for instance, institutional trust. However, we find that institutional trust does not predict the rate of community belongingness among unemployed people

as it does among employed people. In this sense, there is a difference between unemployed and employed people regarding the basis of community belongingness. We may assume that the societal situation is a factor which explains the difference in institutional trust between the groups. Unemployment is not accepted as a societal situation, thus it is detrimental to the institutional trust of an individual. In this sense, the labor market status is a societal factor which is associated with community belongingness.

There are some limitations in relation to the results of this study. In general, the data were collected from a single town hence the results cannot be generalized in statistical terms. Nevertheless, the results are consistent with the previous studies in the literature which argue that community belongingness plays a significant role in subjective well-being among different kinds of social groups such as adolescents, or even among marginalized groups such as immigrants. Furthermore, the main argument of this study is focused on the buffering effect of community belonging, but the study design did not allow us to analyze the difference between low and high sense of community belonging within the group of unemployed people. It is obvious that the difference is related to the length of unemployment and to the issues such as income or education level, but further research is needed to deepen our knowledge on the issue.

## **CONCLUSION**

The belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) asserts that people have an innate drive to pursue and to maintain a sense of belongingness. Community belongingness is deeply related to subjective well-being, but it also has a buffering effect so that it mitigates the impacts of negative factors on well-being. Social isolation can adversely affect subjective well-being while social engagement and attachment can significantly reduce social risks (Holt-Lunstad *et al.* 2010). According to research in the literature, community belongingness appears to be a factor that promotes subjective well-being (e.g. Lambert *at al.*, 2013; Sandstrom and Dunn, 2014).

The results of the present study confirm the belongingness hypothesis. Community belongingness also promotes subjective well-being among unemployed people. However, this connection is conditional, so that a high rate of community belongingness buffers the negative impacts of unemployment. This means that although in general the well-being of unemployed people is lower than that of employed people, there is no difference between the groups if unemployed individuals have a high sense of community belonging. In this sense, community belongingness is a key factor in studying and promoting the well-being of unemployed people.

Unemployment is a social risk, which undermines the subjective well-being of citizens. However, from a sociopolitical viewpoint, the negative effects of unemployment can be mitigated by supporting unemployed people in their integration into social communities. The integration can be based on social interaction, which is a kind of basis for community belongingness. Social interaction creates thick networks which support community belongingness. On the other hand, especially institutional trust is the key factor in which the groups of employed and unemployed people differ. In this sense, the governmental measurements should be focused on enhancing unemployed people's participation in communities, which supports their trust in institutions. In this sense, we need two level measurements for tackling the social risks, at the level of the civil society and the state.

However, unemployment is a multifaceted phenomenon which is not based only on social interaction and institutional trust. It is also related to economic issues which create inequality, and cultural issues as marginalization and stigmatization. In this sense, the contribution of the study is needed to set into the broader framework. From this viewpoint, the result of the study may be utilized in sociology and social policy education when talking about the risks of exclusion and the welfare state's responsibility for their citizens.

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