

DOES UNEMPLOYMENT AND PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT LEAD TO INCREASING ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE? RESULTS FROM A SURVEY-BASED STUDY IN SPAIN

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The article explores the relationship between unemployment and precarious employment, and young people's entrepreneurial intentions in Spain. We focus on the effects of employment conditions and experience on young people's intentions to start their own business or become self-employed. The role of socio-demographic characteristics and behavioral factors such as perceived self-efficacy and desirability as well as risk taking were also analyzed. The analyses were based on a cross-sectional representative sample, corresponding to the year 2016, of Spanish working young individuals aged 18 to 35 years ($n=1.678$). All analyses were stratified by gender. The results show that besides behavioral attitudinal factors that seem to particularly influence the entrepreneurial intentions of Spanish young people, having a precarious contract or being unemployed for more than six months cannot be regarded as necessity-driven factors for increasing intentions toward entrepreneurship. Instead, well educated, experienced and economically stable women are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activity than men.

Keywords: precarious employment; unemployment; entrepreneurship; entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial intentions; young people; Spain

JEL classification: L26

1. Introduction

The recent economic crisis has hit Spain particularly hard, leading to a significant increase in unemployment rates, mainly among young people. While the youth unemployment rate of the EU-28 countries has increased from 15.5 to 20.3 percent between 2007 and 2015, the youth unemployment rate in Spain raised from 18.1 to 48.3 percent during the same period, for both men and women ages 15 to 24 (Eurostat, 2016). Specific policy measures have been introduced to promote young people's employability and thus reduce unemployment at both European and national levels. Stimulating entrepreneurship among young people has become a suitable instrument of active labor market policies to reduce unemployment and precarious employment in many European countries, including Spain (Carmona, Congregado, & Golpe, 2012; Congregado, Golpe, & Carmona, 2010; Costa, Caetano, & Santos, 2016).

Spanish politicians have portrayed entrepreneurship as a valuable source of employment (new self-employed people as well as further jobs in the newly-founded firms) and a way to reduce unemployment, particularly among young people (Congregado et al.,

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2010). Various education, training and active labor market policies have been implemented such as the inclusion of entrepreneurship in the education system, the promotion of entrepreneurial activity to counteract unemployment, tax deductions and quota bonuses to social security for employers, "first young employment" contracts, actions and measures for the promotion of business initiatives through self-employment and social economy, and finally a new law (14/2013) to support entrepreneurs and their internationalization (Martinez & Larrambeber, 2015).

Nevertheless, the mechanisms proposed by the 14/2013 entrepreneurship law tend to favor self-employment and, fundamentally, individual employment, through certain specific instruments such as the Limited Liability Entrepreneur (ERL), as a new legal subject, and other fiscal instruments to promote self-employment. The figure of the entrepreneur has thus turned into a form of self-employment by necessity. Spain has actually experienced a significant increase in young people's self-employment, particularly since the onset of the economic crisis. Yet, self-employment has led to a displacement of labor rights supporting wage labor (central of European welfare regimes) towards the establishment of liberal employment regimes, where labor closely depends on market mechanisms. The direct effect has been a re-commodification of work with negative effects on Spanish welfare state institutions (Martinez & Larrambeber, 2015).

The present article explores the relationship between unemployment and precarious employment, and young people's entrepreneurial intentions in Spain. We focus on the effects of employment conditions and employment experience on young people's intentions to start their own business or become self-employed. The role of socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, level of education, marital status and caring responsibilities as well as of psychological characteristics such as perceived self-efficacy, perceived desirability and risk taking are also analyzed.

2. Theoretical Background

During the last decades, the concept of entrepreneurship has been deeply studied from different disciplines such as sociology, economics and psychology. Psychological characteristics such as internal locus of control, propensity to take risk, self-confidence, need for achievement, innovation and self-efficacy have been associated with entrepreneurial activity. Socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, formal education also seem to influence entrepreneurship. Institutional and economic circumstances may instead have an impact on individual decisions and serve as push or pull factors for entrepreneurial activity (Mühblöck, Warmth, Holienka, & Kittel, 2016).

Favorable economic conditions, for example, may act as pull factors meaning drawing people to start a business, as prospects for successful business and job creation are better. Economic recessions in turn may act as push factors by forcing people to enter entrepreneurship because of lack of other opportunities. Nevertheless, the actual effect of macroeconomic conditions remains unclear: while economic downturns may promote entrepreneurship because of involuntary job loss and scarcity of vacancies, at the same time, people might be discouraged to involve in any entrepreneurial activity because economic downturns reduce profitability expectations (Thompson, 2011).

Empirical evidence shows that although entrepreneurship has increased during the economic recession, a considerable number of new entrepreneurs have a negative

perception of business opportunities and they lack self-confidence in their own entrepreneurial skills (Kelley, Singer, & Herington, 2016). A new type of entrepreneurs has emerged, the so-called 'no opportunities and no skills entrepreneurs'. This phenomenon may be counterproductive in terms of economic growth and increasing employment as the quality of business ventures performed by these entrepreneurs is questionable. The 'no opportunities and no skills entrepreneurs' normally do not plan market expansion, have quite low job-creation ambitions and are more prone to encounter a failure in their entrepreneurial activity and thus become discouraged (Block & Wagner, 2010; Caliendo, Fossen, & Kritikos, 2009; Mühlböck, Warmuth, Holienka, & Kittel, 2016).

Overall, the entrepreneurial research is based on three main theoretical strands: the first one focuses on psychological and individual characteristics to identify the stereotypical entrepreneur (Simoes, Crespo, & Moreira, 2016); the second one emphasizes the influence of exogenous factors like social, economic and political systems to analyze favorable and unfavorable conditions for the development of entrepreneurial intentions (Bosma & Schutjens, 2011; Khuong & An, 2016); and the third one draws on behavioral approaches in order to better understand why individuals decide to start their own business (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994).

From the vast group of studies analyzing the individual characteristics of entrepreneurs, the following findings emerge: women have a lower propensity to enter into self-employment (Bosma & Schutjens, 2011; Simoes et al., 2016) but, when they do, they are more likely to be necessity-driven entrepreneurs (Kelly et al., 2016); young people show higher preferences to become self-employed than older people (there is an inverted U-shape relationship between age and self-employment) (Kelly et al., 2016; Simoes et al., 2016); and individuals with entrepreneurial families or with close friends who own businesses, are more likely to develop entrepreneurial intention and activity (Bosma & Schutjens, 2011).

The theoretical strand that draws on the importance of macro-level push pull factors for entrepreneurial activity distinguishes between necessity driven (push) and opportunity driven (pull) entrepreneurship (Sheehan & Mc Namara, 2015; Williams, 2008). Opportunity driven entrepreneurs are positively motivated to become self-employed as they hold adequate individual characteristics such as risk-propensity, locus of control and a strong need for personal achievement (Brockhaus, 1980; Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003). Necessity-driven entrepreneurs instead are forced to become self-employed because of unfavorable situational or personal factors such as work dissatisfaction or experiencing an unemployment spell (Sheehan & Mc Namara, 2015).

The most widely used behavioral model to explain entrepreneurial activity (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994) focuses on entrepreneurial intentions. It assumes that individuals become entrepreneurs because they believe that they have the capabilities and skills (perceived self-efficacy) to do this, and that the significant others think that becoming an entrepreneur is desirable (perceived desirability). Beyond that, the propensity to act (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994) or risk tolerance (Mühlböck et al., 2016) and a precipitating event may also influence the final formation of entrepreneurial intentions (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994).

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intentions have received a great attention from both policy actors and scholars during the last decades, mainly due to increasing unemployment among young people in most European countries. Positive perceptions

of entrepreneurship and opportunity-driven factors have been particularly explored to account for higher entrepreneurship rates. Nevertheless, little is known about necessity-driven entrepreneurs, meaning those individuals willing to become self-employed under unfavorable employment or economic circumstances.

Our hypothesis is that being unemployed or having a precarious employment can act as a precipitating or a necessity-driven factor for the formation of entrepreneurial intentions, even if the individual does not have a strong perceived self-efficacy and desirability, or a high-risk tolerance. Although a recent article (Costa et al., 2016) found that entrepreneurship is not considered a clear alternative to precarious working conditions among temporary workers, we aim to further explore this association. To do so, we combine individual psychological characteristics such as risk tolerance with the Krueger-Brazeal model of entrepreneurial intentions (perceived desirability and perceived feasibility) and the necessity/opportunity driven approach to test our hypothesis.

3. Data and Methods

The present study is based on data from a cross-sectional survey that was conducted in 10 European countries. In Spain, the survey was carried out between March 2016 and June 2016 with a representative sample of young adults between 18 and 35 years, living in Spain ($n=1.826$). An online access panel was used for survey implementation. The sample of young adults was randomly stratified and proportional to the general Spanish population in terms of geographical regions (NUTS 2), employment situation (employed, unemployed inactive), gender (male, female) and age groups (18-24; 25-29; 30-35). In this article, we excluded young people working as self-employed. The final sample size was of 1.678 individuals.

Entrepreneurial intentions were measured through the question “How likely it is that you will start your own business or become self-employed within the next three years?” Answers were recoded into a two-category variable: unlikely (0-5); and likely (6-10).

Young adults’ current *employment situation* was assessed by asking participants, “Which of these options best describes your employment situation in the last month?” Answers were grouped in three categories: employed; unemployed; and inactive. Employed young people were classified according to the *type of contract*: permanent contract; and precarious contract (fixed-term contract and no contract). The *employment conditions* were assessed through an index constructed based on the type of contract and the current employment situation: employed with permanent contract; employed with precarious contract; unemployed; and inactive. *Work experience* was measured through a dummy variable indicating if the respondent had ever been six or more months in unemployment, and a dummy variable indicating if the participant has had a paid job for one year or more.

Perceived self-efficacy was estimated through the question “Do you think that you have the skills and competencies to successfully start your own business?” (Yes-strong, No-weak). *Perceived desirability* was assessed through the question “In Spain, those successful at starting a new business have a high level of status and respect”. Answers were recoded into a two-category variable: low (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree); and high (somewhat agree, strongly agree). *Risk tolerance* was measured through the question “Are you a person who tends to avoid taking risks or are you fully prepared to

take risks?” Answers were then recoded into a two-category variable: low (0 to 5); and high (6 to 10).

Education was measured through the seven categories of the International Standard Classification of Education (ES-ISCED). We created a three level category variable: low education (comprising ES-ISCED categories I and II); medium education (comprising ES-ISCED categories IIIa, IIIb, and IV); and high education (comprising ES-ISCED categories V1 and V2). *Social capital* was modelled via participants’ social networks, which was measured through an item asking if participants’ friends were self-employed.

Finally, we included other *socio-demographic variables* such as gender, age, and marital status and caring responsibilities (married with caring responsibilities; married without caring responsibilities; separated/single with caring responsibilities; separated/single without caring responsibilities).

Each variable of interest was described as sample counts and percentages. Crude differences between individuals having or not entrepreneurial intentions were calculated for the overall sample and were described and tested for significance using Pearson χ^2 tests according to employment condition and employment experience variables, as well as perceived self-efficacy, perceived desirability and risk taking. We used multivariate logistic regression models to assess the variables that predicted the entrepreneurial intentions and to test whether unemployment and precarious employment act as push factors towards increased entrepreneurship. All variables achieving significance at $p < 0.01$ in the univariate analysis were introduced in the model. Two models were estimated: model 1, unadjusted; and model 2, adjusted for age (continuous). We present only the second model. All analyses were stratified by gender.

4. Results and Discussion

The study sample included 811 women and 874 men. A third of the total sample had tertiary education (33.5%) and almost a quarter had only primary education (23.6%). The majority were single or separated and with no caring responsibilities (61.1%). The employment conditions were approximately equally distributed: a quarter of respondents were working with a permanent contract; a quarter were working with precarious contracts; a quarter were unemployed; and a quarter were inactive. The majority of participants (67.4%) had experienced previous unemployment and more than half (55.4%) had had a paid job for a year or more. Only 5% of individuals had self-employed friends. The vast majority of young adults had strong perceived self-efficacy and high desirability (more than 70%, in both cases), and more or less half of them were risk-taking (52.2). Only 17.8% of participants presented entrepreneurial intentions. Compared to men, more women had tertiary education, were married and with caring responsibilities, had had a paid job for more than a year, and had fewer self-employed friends. In term of behavioral attitude variables, there were no significant differences. In Table 1, we present the profile of our sample by the variables analyzed.

Table 1 | Sample variables by gender, n (%)

	Women	Men	
Total	811 (48.1)	874 (51.9)	
Demographics			
Age groups			
	18 -24	260 (29.7)	260 (32.1)
	25 - 29	248 (28.4)	249 (30.7)
	30 - 35	366 (41.9)	302 (37.2)
Educational level			
	Low	187 (21.4)	211 (26.0)
	Medium	344 (39.4)	344 (42.4)
	High	343 (39.2)	256 (31.6)
Marital status and caring responsibilities			
	Married with caring responsibilities	128 (17.0)	72 (10.2)
	Married without caring responsibilities	45 (6.0)	37 (5.2)
	Separated/single with caring responsibilities	158 (21.0)	128 (18.1)
	Separated/single without caring responsibilities	423 (56.1)	470 (66.5)
Employment conditions			
	Working permanent contract	191 (22.0)	165 (20.3)
	Working precarious contract	211 (24.3)	222 (27.4)
	Unemployed	275 (31.7)	226 (27.9)
	Inactive	190 (21.9)	198 (24.4)
Work experience			
Had ever had a paid job for a year or more			
	No	366 (41.9)	386 (47.6)
	Yes	508 (58.1)	425 (52.4)
Had ever been unemployed for six months or more			
	No	289 (33.1)	261 (32.2)
	Yes	585 (66.9)	550 (67.8)

Social networks			
How many friends are: Running own business			
	None / a few	840 (96.2)	759 (93.6)
	Some / most /all	33 (3.8)	52 (6.4)
Behavioral attitude variables			
Perceived self-efficacy			
	Strong	366 (72.3)	377 (74.2)
	Weak	140 (27.7)	131 (25.8)
Perceived desirability			
	Low	147 (30.8)	116 (25.5)
	High	331 (69.2)	339 (74.5)
Risk tolerance			
	Low	425 (48.6)	381 (47.0)
	High	449 (51.4)	430 (53.0)
Entrepreneurial intentions			
	Unlikely	702 (82.9)	652 (82.0)
	Likely	145 (17.1)	143 (18.0)

In Table 2, we present the sample variables by entrepreneurial intentions and gender. In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, there were no differences between those having and not having entrepreneurial intentions. Women working with a permanent contract were significantly more likely to become an entrepreneur compared with women working with a precarious contract, unemployed or inactive. Women who had a paid job for a year or more were also more likely to become an entrepreneur. Both women and men who had entrepreneurial friends were more likely to become self-employed, and those who presented strong self-efficacy and had a high tendency to assume risks were more likely to become entrepreneurs.

Table 2 | Sample variables and entrepreneurial intention by gender, n (%). Differences tested for significance using Pearson χ^2 tests.

		Women			Men		
		unlikely	likely	p-value	unlikely	likely	p-value
Total		702 (82.9)	145 (17.1)		652 (82.0)	143 (18.0)	
Demographics							
Age groups							
	18 -24	213 (85.9)	35 (14.1)	0.108	223 (86.8)	34 (13.2)	0.025
	25 - 29	201 (84.5)	37 (15.5)		189 (77.5)	55 (22.5)	
	30 - 35	288 (79.8)	73 (20.2)		240 (81.6)	54 (18.4)	
Educational level							
	Low	163 (88.6)	21 (11.4)	0.012	160 (77.3)	47 (22.7)	0.04
	Medium	279 (84.0)	53 (16.0)		293 (85.7)	49 (14.3)	
	High	260 (78.5)	71 (21.5)		19 (80.9)	47 (19.1)	
Marital status and caring responsibilities							
	Married with caring responsibilities	101 (80.2)	25 (19.8)	0.227	53 (73.6)	19 (26.4)	0.087
	Married without caring responsibilities	34 (75.6)	11 (24.4)		27 (73.0)	10 (27.0)	
	Separated/single with caring responsibilities	130 (87.2)	19 (12.8)		106 (86.2)	17 (13.8)	
	Separated/single without caring responsibilities	337 (82.0)	74 (18.0)		377 (82.0)	83 (18.0)	
Employment conditions							
	Working permanent contract	131 (72.0)	51 (28.0)	0	126 (77.8)	36 (22.2)	0.399
	Working precarious contract	171 (85.5)	29 (14.5)		172 (82.3)	37 (17.7)	
	Unemployed	237 (86.2)	38 (13.8)		191 (84.5)	35 (15.5)	
	Inactive	163 (85.8)	27 (14.2)		163 (82.3)	35 (17.7)	
Work experience							
Had ever had a paid job for a year or more							
	No	311 (87.1)	46 (31.7)	0.006	323 (85.0)	57 (15.0)	0.042
	Yes	391 (79.8)	99 (68.3)		329 (79.3)	86 (20.7)	

Had ever been unemployed for six months or more							
	No	224 (80.0)	56 (20.0)	0.122	203 (79.3)	53 (20.7)	0.199
	Yes	478 (84.3)	89 (15.7)		449 (83.3)	90 (16.7)	
Social networks							
How many friends are: Running own business							
	None / a few	686 (84.2)	129 (15.8)	0	624 (83.9)	120 (16.1)	0
	Some / most /all	16 (51.6)	15 (48.4)		28 (54.9)	23 (45.1)	
Behavioral attitude variables							
Perceived self-efficacy							
	Strong	257 (70.2)	109 (29.8)	0	271 (71.9)	106 (28.1)	0
	Weak	137 (97.9)	3 (2.1)		124 (94.7)	7 (5.3)	
Perceived desirability							
	Low	124 (87.3)	18 (12.7)	0.138	90 (81.8)	20 (18.2)	0.889
	High	260 (81.3)	60 (18.8)		273 (80.83)	65 (19.2)	
Risk tolerance							
	Low	377 (90.6)	39 (9.4)	0	337 (89.2)	41 (10.8)	0
	High	325 (75.4)	106 (24.6)		315 (75.5)	102 (24.2)	

Table 3 presents the results of the logistic regression predicting the entrepreneurial intentions. The results show that for both men and women, perceived self-efficacy and risk tolerance determine entrepreneurial intentions. The higher the self-efficacy and risk tolerance, the higher is the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur. Besides this, the participants' social capital is also significant; having friends running a business increases the likelihood of entrepreneurial intention. For women, working with a permanent contract or having higher educational level increases the probability of becoming an entrepreneur.

Table 3 | Logistic regression models for Entrepreneurial intention, women and men. Robust standard errors.

	Women			Men		
Variables	B	SE	OR	B	SE	OR
Intercept	-1.77***	0.87	0.17	-1.97***	0.56	0.14
Employment conditions						
(Reference category: Unemployed)						
Working permanent contract	0.79*	0.34	2.21	0.19	0.23	1.21
Working precarious contract	0.2	0.35	1.22	0.01	0.21	1.01
Inactive	0.38	0.39	1.46	0.26	0.24	1.3
Had ever had a paid job for a year or more						
(Reference category: No)						
Yes	-0.08	0.34	0.92	0.23	0.22	1.26
How many friends are: Running own business						
(Reference category: None / a few)						
Some / most / all	2.27***	0.6	9.68	1.42***	0.18	4.12
Perceived self-efficacy						
(Reference category: weak)						
Strong	2.72***	0.61	15.14	1.88***	0.19	6.55
Risk tolerance						
(Reference category: Low)						
High	1.05***	0.27	2.86	0.86***	0.37	2.37
Age	-0.01	0.03	0.99	0.01	0.02	1
AIC	466.86			492.56		
Log Likelihood	-214.431			-263.380		
Deviance	428.86			492.56		
Num. Obs	505			508		

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

5. Conclusions

The aim of this article was to explore the impact of unfavorable employment or economic circumstances on individuals' willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activity. We thus focused on the effects of unemployment and precarious employment, in particular, of employment conditions and employment experience, on young people's intentions to start their own business or become self-employed.

In line with a previous study that looked at temporary workers and entrepreneurship (Costa et al. 2016), we found no clear empirical evidence in favor of necessity-driven entrepreneurship. This means that unfavorable situational or personal factors such as unemployment or precarious working conditions do not seem to force young individuals to become self-employed. In spite of the fact that previous empirical evidence suggested that men are generally more likely to become opportunity-driven entrepreneurs than women because of different gender-related attributes such as self-confidence (Holienka et al. 2016), our findings contradict this result. We found instead that well-educated, experienced and economically stable women are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activity than men. Neither working conditions nor working experience seem to influence men's intentions to become entrepreneurs. The increasing incorporation of women in the labor market and their increased economic autonomy have led to a predominant dual-earning family model in Spain (Naldini & Jurado 2013), and this might actually explain the lack of intentionality in men to engage in entrepreneurial activity.

Nevertheless, our findings confirm behavioral theories that assume that psychological characteristics such as risk tolerance, perceived self-efficacy and perceive desirability positively influence young people's intentions to become self-employed. Theoretical assumptions that individuals possessing higher levels of human capital would report higher rates of self-employment are also confirmed as respondents with more self-employed friends were more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activity.

The main limitation of this study is that it relies on young people's intentions when analyzing the relationship between unemployment or precarious employment and entrepreneurial activity. Many authors suggest that action, in this case achieving economic self-sufficiency, requires not only intention, but also active performance by the individual towards achieving success in work-related behavior (Carsrud & Brännback, 2011; Frese 2009). A considerable share of people who have the intention to start a business can be classified as lethargic dreamers, as the declared intentions might never be followed by actions (Parker & Belghitar, 2006).

Nevertheless, the present study has two main strengths. First, it deals with a reasonably large sample, representative of the Spanish young population. Second, it provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding on the relationship between unfavorable employment situations and conditions, and young people's willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Third, it provides a gender-based perspective on entrepreneurial intentions. However, future research should explore this relationship more in-depth to better understand the causal mechanisms behind it. The use of a multi-method approach would be useful to probe some of the findings that emerged in this study (for example, the willingness of well-educated and economically independent women to start a business).

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