Young Substance Abusers and Precarious Employment: Trajectories and Anchoring Dynamics

Pauline Morissette
Université de Montréal
Marie-France Maranda
Université Laval
Danielle Lessard
Université de Montréal

ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to understand the chain of family, school, and employment factors that led a sample of young (18–30) psychoactive substance abusers into precarious employment situations, based on their personal narratives. Substance abuse was measured according to DAST-20 and SMAST scales. Three types of precarious employment trajectories emerged: concentrated precarization in a dynamic of inferiorization, integrated precarization (in either an identification or a parentification dynamic), and unexpected precarization in a dynamic of intensification. A discussion of the results points to the importance of developing an integrated multilevel intervention approach in vocational counselling for this clientele.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude a été entreprise pour comprendre l'enchaînement des éléments familiaux, scolaires, et professionnels qui ont conduit un échantillon de jeunes toxicomanes de 18 à 30 ans usagers de substances psycho-actives dans des situations d'emploi précaires, à partir du récit de leur vie. La consommation a été mesurée selon les échelles DAST-20 et SMAST. Trois trajectoires-types d'emploi précaire se sont dégagées : précarisation concentrée dans une dynamique d'infériorisation, précarisation intégrée (dans une dynamique soit d'identification, soit de parentification), et précarisation inattendue dans une dynamique d'intensification. Une discussion des résultats suggère l'importance, pour les conseillers d'orientation et en emploi, de mettre au point une intervention intégrée de type multi-niveaux pour cette clientèle.

Employment is the mainspring for the successful rehabilitation of substance abusers according to clinical practitioners and governmental organizations in several countries (Platt, 1997; Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Québec [RSSSQ], 1998; Room, 1997; Schottenfeld, Pascale, & Sokolowski, 1992; Uchtenhagen, Schaaf, & Berger, 2000). Both male and female substance abusers emphasize the importance of integration into the work force as a step in the process of weaning themselves off drugs (Castel, 1998; Jamoulle, 2000). Thus, the question of employment is crucial for users of psychoactive substances and for society. This implies a considerable challenge for drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs and for vocational/employment counselling services.

Recent structural transformations in employment have created additional pressures on substance abusers, according to Iversen (1998). Over the last few decades, new currents in world markets have brought about organizational changes that have forced businesses to adopt flexibility policies, which have contributed to higher unemployment and to a greater proportion of jobs that can be qualified as precarious or insecure, that is, non-standard or contingent employment (Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003; Howard, 1995). These jobs are short-term or of indefinite length, are not clearly defined, and do not provide workers with any social benefits or job security. Flexibility policies are associated with macro-shifts in the job market, in industrial relations, and in the nature of the jobs themselves, and these policies affect social organization in general (Pollert, 1988; Purcell & Purcell, 1998). The term employment "precarity" reflects the theoretical links between our study and certain authors who use this term (Appay [2005], Cranford et al., and Volkoff [1997], for example), while the term "precarization" refers to the process resulting in precarious employment.

Some authors view the present economic context and evolution of the job market as strongly influencing the degree of integration of young people into the work force, with the rise in unemployment and the establishment of new forms of work (part-time, temporary, or short-term jobs) affecting them particularly but not exclusively (Jorgensen, 1999; Rose, 2000; Tremblay & Dagenais, 2002).[1] This situation is seen to exist in several countries, although each has its specific differences (Rose, 1998).

Considering the effects of economic globalization on living standards, it is important to recognize this erosion of employment standards as the result of a socially constructed instability produced by employers' demands for worker flexibility: a flexibility that does not benefit the workforce as a whole, much less people who have difficulty integrating into the job market (Appay, 2005). However, these new employment forms now generally characterize the structure of the job market. According to Piore and Sabel (1984), the division of the job market into a stable market of "good" jobs and a flexible market of insecure jobs in the "cheap labour" category is practically an unconditional prerequisite for adapting national economies to globalization and international competition. The precarization process is harsher on vulnerable groups (women, young people, immigrants, the unemployed, and substance abusers), increasing the difficulty of integrating into the job market. Workers beginning a flexible-type job are given less training and less information on the nature of the tasks involved, and, therefore, are at greater risk of suffering work-related accidents and illnesses (Appay & Thébaud-Mony, 1997). In addition, the "desynchronization" implied in nonstandard job situations (irregular shifts, working in the evening, at night, on weekends, or on call) and the resulting negative effects on family and personal life contribute to social suffering that should be taken into account in vocational counselling. When there are multiple individual factors involved (for example, young, unemployed, and substance-abusing), the chances of obtaining a stable good-quality job diminish accordingly, and these persons are increasingly pushed toward marginalization. How do young substance abusers fit into this precarious context?

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND EMPLOYMENT

Data from American, Canadian, and European studies indicate that psychoactive substance abusers are particularly vulnerable with respect to employment (Bray, Zarkin, Dennis, & French, 2000; Landry, Guyon, & Beauvais, 1997; Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies, 2002). Studies carried out in rehabilitation centres in the United States, France, and Quebec have found a noticeably high level of inactivity in the substance abuser clientele (Landry et al.; Lopez, 2002; Platt, 1997) and have revealed a pattern, among young abusers, of alternating between insecure job situations, unemployment, and welfare (Morissette & Boivin, 1999). Clinical, epidemiological, and ethnological studies carried out in the US, France, Belgium, and Quebec have also shown that young substance abusers are socially disadvantaged compared to the majority of their peers, due to their lack of a high school diploma, a criminal record in some cases, and their emotional vulnerability (Facy & Le Huede, 1992; Jamoulle, 2000; Mathis, Navaline, Metzger, & Plat, 1994). This factor in itself could account for their exclusion from the job market, or prevent them from occupying better jobs. Studies also indicate that the lifestyles and consumption habits of young substance abusers make them particularly vulnerable to rejection by employers in the job recruitment process (Roman & Blum, 1999). They are often considered bad employment risks in spite of the skills they may possess (Cook & Schlenger, 2002).

Very few studies have looked into the processes of employment precarity and exclusion among young substance abusers. The aim of the research discussed in this article is precisely to understand the processes and dynamics of job insecurity among substance abusers between 18 and 30 years of age.

METHODOLOGY

Research Procedures

Our research procedure of choice was conducting several interview sessions to acquire the research participants' narratives (Hoshmand, 2005; Legrand, 1993). The young substance abusers' narratives allowed us to situate the objective and subjective dimensions of their work experiences as well as to apprehend the meaning of that experience in the overall context of their individual, family, social, and work histories, and to identify the operating dynamics in the trajectory prototypes. The trajectory is described as the succession of objective and subjective situations (Bertaux, 1997) that led the young substance abusers in our study into precarious employment situations. Each trajectory is characterized by a particular dynamic, that is, by a cluster of elements and forces that come into play as a network, or simultaneously (Mucchielli, 1996).

Several authors have affirmed, in a special edition of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (2005) dedicated to qualitative methods, that the use of narratives is commendable in the field of counselling and vocational development, and should be encouraged in mixed methodology research (Haverkamp, Morrow, &

Ponterotto, 2005). As Ponterotto (2005) stated, "Qualitative findings are generally presented in everyday language and often incorporate participants' own words to describe a psychological event, experience, or phenomenon" (p. 128). Polkinghorne (2005) notes that "qualitative data are gathered primarily in the form of spoken words and transformed into written text for analytic use" (p. 137). It is from these perspectives that we analyzed and interpreted the experiences of the young people to understand their trajectories of substance abuse and work.

The fact that our fields are social work and sociology has naturally led us towards the use of anchored theory (Fassinger, 2005) to better understand, through the subjectivity and life experiences of the young people in our study, the psychosocial elements that influence the working lives of young substance abusers. The thematic analysis of the narratives allowed for the emergence of representations, or social images, that reveal meaning (Hoshmand, 2005).

Sample Population

The participants in the study were between 18 and 30 years of age and were substance abusers (drugs or alcohol), as defined by the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-20) index (drug use) (Skinner, 1982) and the Short Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (SMAST) index (alcohol consumption) applicable to the one-year period preceding the study. The participants' scores on the DAST index were over 11, indicating substantial or severe drug abuse, or over 18 on the SMAST index, indicating alcohol abuse. Four of the participants in our sample scored severe abuse levels on both drug and alcohol tests.

For purposes of diversity, participants were recruited from different milieus including a rehabilitation centre for drug-addicted alcoholics, organizations dedicated to integration or reintegration into the workplace, and several large companies. Geographically, the participants lived in the metropolitan areas of Montreal and Quebec City.

We carried out 30 interviews that lasted an average of 1 hour and 30 minutes, with 15 young substance abusers. Ten of the participants interviewed were male and five female; the majority were between 25 and 30 years of age. Three quarters of the participants earned less than $20,000 per year at the time of the interviews. All of them were in a situation of employment precarity: in unstable jobs, unemployed, or in unionized jobs but in danger of losing their jobs because of their substance abuse.

Data Collection

The interviews were held over a period of three weeks, to allow for an interim analysis by the three researchers. The first interview began with a very general question to induce the young substance abusers to describe their job histories from their first jobs to the time of the interview. The work history of most of the young people in this study began when they were still at school. Thus, the narratives included their school histories and shed light on the particularity and the diversity of reasons that made them enter the labour force.

During this first meeting, they described (a) the jobs they had occupied, (b) the type of company, (c) their status and work relations, and (d) whether the workplace was unionized or not. They also talked about why certain jobs were relatively pleasant or unpleasant, specifying the sources of physical and psychological suffering in certain experiences, and their hopes and plans regarding employment. During the first interview, they narrated elements of their school and family lives. The taped content was transcribed and a summary was done by the researchers in an interanalysis meeting. The summary was then represented graphically to serve as a visual tool that allowed us to follow the evolution of each participant's professional and personal trajectory. Crucial points in the person's story could be identified, helping us formulate pertinent questions for the next interview. In the second meeting, each participant was asked to comment on our understanding (hypotheses) of his or her narrative, and was invited to add details or make changes or corrections if warranted.

Data Analysis and Analytical Model

The model in Figure 1 is intended as an aid to understanding our results and not an explanatory model. We constructed a schema with four poles on x and y axes: contextual and individual determinations on one axis, and meanings and action strategies on the other.

Figure 1
Poles in the Analysis Model of the Study Results
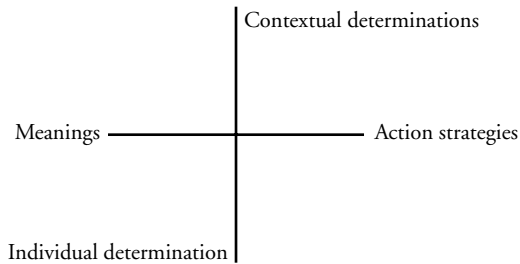
The contextual determinants refer to social, economic, and cultural factors such as types of organizations and related employment practices, transformations in the job market, and the substance use culture in the workplace. The individual determinants refer to the social capital (relational network) and cultural capital (education level) possessed by the individual, as well as his or her personality, values, motivation, state of health, and family relations. The meanings correspond to the meanings attributed by the young substance abusers to the different elements of their personal lives and employment situations (abuse, feelings of failure, rejection, or frustration). The action strategies refer to the choices, responses, solutions, and excuses given or taken by the young people to cope with an unsatisfactory employ-

ment situation including (a) using his or her social network, (b) withdrawing from the job market, or (c) drug use/abuse. Our trajectory prototypes were constructed according to the combined effects of their different poles which are linked in various ways, and reflect the interactive dynamics inherent in employment precarity and the precarization process, which, it should be remembered, occur within a context of deep economic insecurity generated by institutionalized flexibility in the labour market.

CONSTRUCTION OF TRAJECTORY PROTOTYPES OR THEORETICAL MODELS

The basic analytical approach used to construct our typology was inspired by the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), utilizing a constant comparison method of analysis. In the first stage of analysis, a vertical analysis allowed us to visualize each of the young substance abuser's trajectories in a graphic representation that brought out the salient points of each trajectory in relation to the four axes of the analytical model. This allowed us to establish subgroups of similar individual and socio-structural trajectories. In the second stage, intragroup comparative analysis revealed similar experimental clusters or resemblances based on the four axes. In the last stage of analysis, intergroup comparative analysis allowed us to identify the precarization trajectory types based on the differences of the level of contextual and individual determinants, meaning, and action strategies.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

The three trajectory types—concentrated precarization, integrated precarization (rooted either in identification or in parentification), and unexpected precarization—are presented here in relation to the dynamics that produced them. Representative excerpts from the narratives have been included as concrete illustrations of the different elements of the trajectories.

Concentrated Precarization in a Dynamic of Inferiorization

This first precarization trajectory presents young substance abusers who have accumulated, since childhood, multiple experiences of domination and exploitation in the different spheres of their lives. These spheres include family, school, and work.

DEGRADING EMPLOYMENT AND FAMILY HISTORIES

In this concentrated precarization trajectory prototype, the young participants generally held low-paying, unskilled jobs with no social benefits, alternating with periods of inactivity. Often, they were hired for seasonal employment (e.g., farm work) or during rush periods (e.g., pre-Christmas sales), then were quickly fired without notice, as exemplified in the following quotation. "November, December—D (store's name), then during the Christmas holidays, D. and P. (other store's name). They hire for the Christmas period, then after that, they keep the ones they want" (Nathalie, 24, 2nd interview).

This type of job flexibility, which works to the advantage of employers and customers but disposes of a large body of expendable workers, is analyzed by some authors (Rose, 2000) as a call-in/throw-out movement with respect to the work force. The employment histories of the young substance abusers of this trajectory prototype show that this practice of rapid hiring and firing is actually a kind of selection process, revealed at the end of the season or rush period when only the "smartest and best behaved" employees keep their jobs.

Two other important elements in this trajectory prototype should be mentioned. First, the majority of these young people reported that they had occupied "humiliating and degrading" jobs, that is, jobs that they knew were socially scorned because of certain job demands or by the very nature of the work. These jobs included farm labour and dancing/waiting on tables. Second, violence in the workplace (harassment, physical or verbal violence) was common and occurred on an everyday basis. These forms of violence were generally part of the work they had to carry out or part of their relationships with their employers. It is noteworthy that we were able to identify similar forms of degrading relationships in these young abusers' family histories. They reported particularly scarring and painful dramas (family violence, sexual abuse, incest) that, very early, instilled a sense of social inferiority in them—a feeling of not being whole or as good as other people (De Gaulejac, 1999). Subsequent sojourns in group homes or with extended family members led to a further lowering of their self-esteem, and a disconnected vision of their futures. It emerged in our analysis that the work contexts in which they later found themselves nourished and aggravated these feelings of social inferiority. An illustration of this was their view of themselves in their working lives as "good for nothing." The suicide attempts mentioned by several of these young people also indicated the depth of their suffering, associated with the dynamics of exploitation and the continual and repeated domination that ran throughout their life experiences.

A CONFINING EDUCATION

As the interviews progressed, we noted that the integration of some of these young people into the work force was hampered by their low levels of education. However, it should be emphasized that these individuals, compared to those of the integrated precarization subgroup described later, possessed the intellectual capacity for further education in spite of having dropped out of school very early on. They were prevented from continuing school largely because of their family situations. They reported that, beginning from childhood, they never had the family structure that would have enabled them to attend school on a regular basis. In other words, they lacked family support at critical junctures in their personal development. These setbacks constituted an important determinant in the subsequent sequence of negative experiences and behaviours. Although these young people emphasized that they had periodically attempted to obtain their high school diplomas in an effort to escape their precarious employment situations, they had not succeeded in this due to their living conditions and their inability

to control their drug or alcohol consumption. If we agree with the filter theory (Arrow, 1973), the absence of a high school diploma should be added to the other inferiorizing elements in this trajectory prototype. According to that theory, high school graduation is a marker of an individual's intellectual capacity in the eyes of employers evaluating prospective employees.

When asked about their employment prospects or plans, the young people in this subgroup displayed remarkable apathy and complete disillusionment with respect to any possibilities of future success. Their answers revealed feelings of getting nowhere, of being hemmed in, and of being caught in an endless treadmill with respect to employment.

PREMATURELY WORN-OUT BODIES

Yet another significant element in the employment histories of this group is that their bodies—implying either their physical strength or their attractiveness—remained the one and only resource that they could use in the job market. In the interviews, they spoke, as did Dambuyant-Wargny (2000), of over-exploited bodies which were their ultimate resource and capital for the job market, as an instrument of exchange or a work tool. What they must face with respect to their integration into the labour force is that, over time, their disorderly lifestyles combined with numerous job-related health problems (e.g., back problems) and long-term substance abuse will seriously and detrimentally affect the only remaining capital that they can offer to employers.

DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE TO MAKE LIFE BEARABLE

Substance abuse at only 11 or 12 years old was revealed as an initial response that set in motion a chain of behaviours in the histories of the individuals in this trajectory prototype. In the interviews, they said that as soon as they began using drugs, they felt that they could tolerate their lives, in contrast to the other young people in our study who said that they used alcohol and drugs for social reasons. At the onset of their addiction, the reality-altering properties of drugs helped them to bear their experiences, as illustrated by this excerpt: "using (drugs) helped me in a way to get through a lot of bad times, especially the sexual assaults" (Louis, 19, 2nd interview). Later, drugs "helped" them again, this time to bear intolerable social situations in the workplace. Finally, they clearly expressed their awareness that the alleviation of their suffering was the necessary condition for them to stop their substance abuse. Short of that, their drug use would remain constant.

The young people of this trajectory prototype accumulated, starting from childhood, multiple aspects of sources of precarity that constituted elements in an interlinked chain, influencing or reinforcing each other. First, precarity in these individuals' drug consumption is indicated by their early initiatory age, as well as in their dependence on drugs to be able to bear their lives. We also linked precarity in their educational capital (no high school diploma) with low educational levels limiting their possibilities of obtaining jobs other than those entry-level jobs that they had occupied since beginning to work. A further aspect common to this subgroup was the exploitation of their bodies, which had been overly sexually solicited

or exploited in their jobs, and in consequence were prematurely worn out. Precarity in their self-images corresponded to negative or belittling views of themselves, and neutralized their ability to imagine any change for themselves in the future. Finally, we could identify insecurity in these young peoples' relations with others, going back to and reflecting their seriously dysfunctional family and societal relationships. We also see that a dynamic of social inferiorization constitutes the preponderant key to understanding this particular precarization process, by the presence of different forms of domination and exploitation producing identical effects of inferiorization at several points in this trajectory prototype.

Integrated Precarization in a Dynamic of Identification

In this trajectory, the young substance abusers experienced rejection from an early age. Their need to integrate socially contributed to the increase in their substance use and the deterioration of their status as workers.

EXPERIENCING SCHOOL AS FAILURE

The young substance abusers of this trajectory prototype considered themselves as good workers, quick and conscientious on the job**.**

> I'm smart, I stick to the job. I'm not afraid of hard work, of using my arms and my brain. I know I can do the job. It wasn't like that at school. There, I had trouble; I didn't believe I could do it. At work, I know I'm capable. I learn pretty quickly. (Jean-Sebastien, 20, 2nd interview)

Several began their first jobs as unionized workers in large corporations. All of them denied that they had experienced difficulty finding jobs, and said that they knew how to present themselves to employers. According to them, these personal skills allowed them to remain in the work force despite repeated firings. These young substance abusers unanimously claimed to feel more comfortable in the workplace than at school, signifying that in general, they considered their school experience as a failure. They spoke of failing, serious learning and behavioural difficulties, of having been placed in special classes, and how it deeply affected them. For the majority, their negative school experiences caused them to leave school as soon as legally possible. They also said that they knew how to use personal and other networks, for example, friends, relatives, and public agencies such as employment centres, vocational programmes, and youth organizations.

AT THE HEART OF THEIR NARRATIVES: REJECTION

However, the most salient element in the histories of the young people in this subgroup was the rejection that they experienced as children because of personal attributes—having red hair, being obese, wearing glasses, having a physical defect, having to wear obviously "poor" clothing, exhibiting disturbing behaviour (e.g., kleptomania), and so on. Their feelings of being different were internalized when they were at school. It is possible to see that in this trajectory prototype, the internalization of the feeling of being different, associated with the fear of rejection, remained with them in their working experiences. All of these young substance abusers in this subgroup described themselves as being introverted and shy, and as having a complex.

> I don't know, it comes from far in the past, I think, when I was little, I felt guilty that way. And at elementary school, children are cruel. I was obese. My parents didn't have much money. The clothes I wore, well, maybe they'd be in style now, but they weren't then. I wore glasses, my ears stuck out … when things were bad like that, everyone laughed at me. They would point at me, I was a reject; barn door, short and fat. (Renaud, 30, 2nd interview)

SUBSTANCE USE AS A SOCIAL INTEGRATION MECHANISM

Significantly, the use of drugs and alcohol gave the young people of this subgroup the possibility of establishing relationships and of being accepted in certain employment sectors (e.g., restaurants and bars) where illicit substances were readily available and were considered commonplace and "part of the scene" (Paugam, 2000). In other types of workplaces, their substance consumption also constituted an integration strategy, part of the employees' shared ethic of consuming to free themselves from the frustrations of a stifling work environment.

> I didn't want to lose my job, at least not at the beginning, but when you went in, when I was working a day shift, in shipping, we would go drinking in the evening. I'd go drinking with the guys, to relax after the stress of work, after the stress of the week, being yelled at, being told stupid things. You know, you have to put up with a lot of crap at work. (Thomas, 26, 1st interview)

These jobs involved repetitive tasks on assembly lines and the young people in question said their working conditions were barely tolerable. Some of them, in addition, had developed work-related health problems (e.g., respiratory disease) or had suffered work-related accidents that were not recognized as such by their employers. Finally, sharing drug consumption values with their co-workers, combined with their strong need to be "one of the gang," drew them into a long-lasting and persistent consumption pattern that overwhelmed all the areas of their lives. Some were consequently fired because of their substance abuse, while others missed good job opportunities because of criminal activities related to the abuse. In this trajectory prototype, we see that substance abuse contributed to their employment precarization because it led them, little by little, to strictly survival employment including jobs of a few days or a few hours' duration and hired at the mercy of happenstance.

At the time of the interviews, few of these young people had any future employment plans, especially because they had difficulty identifying their interests. Several of them, however, were planning to register in vocational programs.

The illustration of integrated precarization in a dynamic of identification reveals that the fear of rejection, combined with the need to find a place for themselves, are present throughout the trajectory. In this dynamic, the workplace acted as a reinforcement, since that was the environment (where the workers socialized by consuming drugs) in which the young abusers of our study felt that they had found a place for themselves. This context contributed to the negative progression that followed: an increase in their substance abuse and the deterioration of their employment situation.

Integrated Precarization in a Dynamic of Parentification

It is mainly through the family background of the young substance abusers that this trajectory can be related to the difficulties in the workplace.

WORK HISTORIES LEADING TO FAILURE

The work histories of the young people of this subgroup revealed a trajectory that took them from stable jobs to progressively more precarious employment situations. These young substance abusers, like the ones of the previous subgroup, held stable jobs for a certain number of years. The jobs were generally related to their education and training. However, from one interview session to the next, they described jobs where the work was too hard, where there were too many tasks to carry out, and where there were too many people telling them their problems (e.g., in beauty salons, bars, or charitable agencies). Consequently, they suffered from an emotional burnout that obliged them to withdraw from the work force for at least a year. When they returned to the work force, they took the same types of jobs as before. These jobs continued the family situations that they had faced earlier in their lives, as shown below. For them, the gap in their work histories was a way of getting away from that situation, of refusing to get more involved, both in their personal and working lives. They adopted new lifestyles, separated from their spouses or partners, or cut off relations with certain family members, with a view to casting off overly heavy responsibilities and regaining control of their lives. This pause, however, marked the beginning of a professional dead end for them, as shown by this excerpt. "I took advantage of my sick leave to get myself together. But I didn't know what I wanted to do after" (Sonia, 29, 1st interview).

At the time of the interviews, the majority of the participants in this subgroup were 25 years old or more, were unemployed, and had no clear employment plans or prospects. They too hoped to enrol in vocational/orientation programs. Several of them were aware of the integrated role in childhood and wanted to stay away from certain kinds of jobs, "especially not with the public."

DEPRIVED OF CHILDHOOD

These young people found themselves, very early in their lives, in contexts that obliged them to take on important responsibilities or heavy tasks that were inappropriate for their age. They reported that they had been economic providers even before reaching adolescence, or were the confidante of a parent. These responsibilities were related to their position as the oldest or youngest child, in a family context where only the mother assumed a parental role. It was this integrated family capital (that is, the behavioural and value model) that constituted the basis for a chain of job choices and roles that repeatedly placed them in positions in which they had to constantly listen to other people's problems and give of themselves.

> All the rage I had, everything I felt, all the pain I had because I hadn't really had a childhood, came out. I don't mean that I was in the street. For sure, there are people who had it worse than I did, but most people didn't have the childhood I had. It's rare to hear someone say that at age ten … maybe 30 or 40 years ago, it was normal for a 10-year-old to hold a part-time job to help out, because there were 10 people in the family, but (not for) me, at 10 years old, putting the bread and butter on the table—I wasn't supposed to be doing that. (Vincent, 28, 1st interview)

substance consumption to maintain a role

It emerged from our analysis of this trajectory prototype that substance abuse was the solution that these young people used to be able to keep up their roles (with respect to the many demands in their private and professional spheres). Consumption was the response to the social conditions obliging them to become parentified (Chase, 1999).

The dynamic of parentification showed how the integration of the roles and values rooted in these young substance abusers' family histories underlies this trajectory, accompanying their work histories and, it appears, unconsciously influencing their job choices. The trajectory showed also how simultaneously playing professional roles similar to those of their private lives brought the young people in this family dynamic to a point of emotional exhaustion which constituted the trigger for their precarization process.

Unexpected Precarization in a Dynamic of Intensification

The young substance abusers of this trajectory live intensely. In spite of having experienced a successful integration into the workplace, the increase in their use of certain drugs has led to the precarization of their employment situations.

the no-limits experience

The young people of this trajectory prototype start their working lives in jobs that corresponded to their desire to live without limits. In consequence, they found themselves in employment situations "without limits." These were workplaces that encouraged competition and a rise in status, for example, fast food restaurants where they quickly occupied positions of responsibility (managers, staff supervisors, project supervisors, etc.). They clearly liked their jobs and earned praise from their employers, as everything they undertook they did quickly, energetically, and better than the rest of the staff. A very positive synergy was articulated between selective employers and these young people, who were well-disposed to fulfilling the employers' requirements. They adhered in all respects to Ehrenberg's (1991) performance cult in that they wanted to succeed, they had an entrepreneurial spirit and a sense of responsibility on the job, and they had the heritage of a well-anchored family model. The idea of becoming a somebody in the most contemporary sense, of surpassing the requirements, and of action were the elements that made up the core of this trajectory prototype, from their entry into the job market onward. Moreover, these individuals' whole lives were lived at a breakneck pace with no perceptible limits. They juggled long working hours, multiple jobs, and an intense social life.

substance abuse to keep up the energy level

The young people of this trajectory reported that they had been heavy drinkers from the start of their working lives, then had moved to consuming cocaine, which appeared more compatible with the values of productivity and intensity that surrounded and absorbed them on the job. They discovered that cocaine use allowed them to keep up their social image and their performance level better than

alcohol. Maintaining this image implied taking the drugs to keep active longer, go longer without sleep, obtain an enhanced feeling without any obvious signs (unlike the effects of alcohol), and be able to stay competitive.

> It pepped me up. Coke gave me the energy to go on, because the drinking had made me exhausted, tired. I didn't have enough energy—it gave me stomach acidity, headaches. It would take me the whole day to get over it. With coke, I was fine the day after. I liked that. At the beginning, I took coke—not as much as I'm taking now—I could take a quarter of coke, be active the whole evening and wake up the next morning as if nothing had happened. I liked that. (Sebastien, 30, 2nd interview)

However, after a few years of consumption, certain objective setbacks (e.g., defrauding their employers, poor work records, accidents, romantic break-ups) forced them to face up to the fact of their drug abuse. When their employment situations finally fell apart, they found themselves facing a double precarity: financial insecurity because of numerous debts contracted during binges, and precarity in their drug habit, now beyond their control. At the time of the interviews, these young people were trying to resolve their drug problems and wanted to continue their careers.

A DESIRABLE HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

These participants possessed personal assets that, in contrast to those of the young people of the concentrated precarization trajectory, opened up more employment possibilities, as they had high school or other diplomas. Furthermore, their childhood and adolescence had not been particularly stressful for them, and they reported that their family and social networks had given them support in difficult times.

This precarization process was unexpected in that it occurred in a particularly favourable context for successful integration into the work force. It was set in motion by the onset of the participants' dependency on cocaine to maintain their physical vigour and their professional image on the job. We see that these young people began their work histories with a significant social, family and educational capital: (a) they were high school graduates, (b) they had good family support, (c) they knew how to present themselves at job interviews to convince employers to hire them, and (d) they had strong achievement values. However, they were functioning within a rationale of intensification in that the intensity of their lifestyles and their substance abuse was the inherent element of their precarization process. The parallel evolution of their job, their careers, and their substance abuse indicated that, as the working activity became more intense, so did their cocaine consumption, leading to a crisis and a temporary break with the working world while they had treatment to be able to continue their careers.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION

In the study of young substance abusers' life stories, we tried to bring out the principal formative elements and generating dynamics of their socio-professional trajectories. The aim of this article was to present the typical job precarity trajec-

tories of young substance abusers, and the anchoring dynamics in their family and school histories associated with these trajectories.

Although our results may not necessarily fit the criteria for general application from a quantitative point of view, they nonetheless contribute to knowledge about the employment needs and problems of this clientele and give practitioners a framework for improving the outcome of vocational counselling. The analysis of the narratives has allowed us to understand the crucial circumstances influencing this outcome, to distinguish the different degrees of job insecurity among the young substance abusers in our study, and to identify the key moments when the precarization process was set in motion. It has brought out the fact that a wider range of factors need to be considered in interventions concerning substance use and employment by showing how these young people's present situations of employment precarity were anchored in their personal histories and in elements that reinforced aspects of their histories. It shows how their current situations are part of processes in which social and family dynamics (parentification, inferiorization, identification, and compulsion) play an important role, helping or hindering their integration into the work force. From an intervention perspective, it becomes clear that it is essential to take into account family, school, and work histories when assisting young people with substance abuse problems to return to the work force or to maintain their jobs, if simply to avoid, whenever possible, placing them in the same situations that had previously led to failure. Analysis of the results also showed that in certain cases, substance consumption becomes the dominant determinant in the precarization process. Socialization on the job (the in-house culture of certain workplaces) and the meaning of the substance use emerge as important factors when counselling young substance abusers about future job choices to prevent their return to substance abuse.

The analysis by trajectory also suggested the role of certain structural tendencies in the workplace that increase precarity and marginality among substance abusers. These include management styles, selective recruitment procedures, and flexibility practices. These contributed to why some young people felt trapped in this context. This reinforced our conclusion that a systemic and multilevel socio-professional intervention approach is more effective for these young people and more likely to help them fulfill their hopes of finding their places in a labour force in transformation.

We hope that these results will sensitize practitioners to the importance of developing this integrated multilevel intervention strategy to take into account the complexity of the situations of these young people, who may need help for their substance abuse but whose clear needs for vocational counselling and help in the job market should be met in a more satisfactory way (Maranda, Negura, & De Montigny, 2003). Such an integrated multilevel intervention strategy should consider the following dimensions at every stage of counselling and follow-up: (a) the structural dimension (the possibilities, constraints, and practices of the job market); (b) the individual dimension (the person's needs, potential, and limitations); and (c) the institutional dimension (the ability of government departments,

organizations concerned with employment, and partners in the job market to apply labour force insertion measures). Intervention should not only focus on adaptation in work contexts, it should strive to eliminate the obstacles that work against the insertion of these young substance abusers into the labour force. There is much to do on this level, and counsellors will need to work in closer collaboration with other organizations to achieve a contextualized intervention perspective that takes these psycho-social dimensions into account.

To be able to develop a contextualized intervention approach, it is important to (a) understand the structural constraints of the job market; (b) analyze the diverse situations of the clientele; (c) carry out precise intervention actions in concert with other practitioners or actors from the workplace; (d) set up and carry out job insertion support programs based on pro-active measures; (e) prevent situations of rejection and discrimination by promoting awareness in the workplace; and (f) if necessary, take an advocacy position with employers in favour of substance abusers who tried to get out of this problem. In our opinion, if multilevel integrated intervention is practiced by vocational counsellors, considerable progress with this group of clientele will be made.

Acknowledgement

Note

1. It should noted that the jobs of 30% of male workers and 26% of female workers in Canada involve shift work. Shift work is associated with various psychosocial problems such as stress, anxiety, and psychoactive substance abuse (of alcohol, drugs, and medication). Source: Community Health Survey, Statistics Canada, quoted in *Le Soleil* (Quebec City), July 7, 2003, C-7.

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About the Authors

Pauline Morissette holds a Ph.D. in community health and is director of the École de service social (School of Social Service) at Université de Montréal. She is associate researcher with RISQ (Recherche et interventions sur les substances psychoactives-Québec).

Marie-France Maranda holds a Ph.D. in sociology. She teaches the sociology of work at the Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université Laval, Québec City. She is director of CRIEVAT (Centre de recherche et d'intervention sur l'éducation et la vie de travail) in that faculty. Her main research focus is mental health in the workplace, particularly alcoholand drugs.

Danielle Lessard is a researcher at the École de service social at Université de Montréal.

Address correspondence to Dr. Pauline Morissette, Université de Montréal, École de service social, C.P. 6128, succursale Centre-ville, Montréal, QC, H3C 3J7, e-mail <pauline.morissette@umontreal.ca>.