

# **EXPERIENCES, COPING AND WELL-BEING OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

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## COMMENTS

The reader should keep the following in mind:

- The editorial style as well as the references in this mini-dissertation follow the format described by the Publication Manual (4<sup>th</sup> edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA). This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom) to apply the APA style in all scientific documents.
- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements	ii
List of Tables	iv
Summary	v
Opsomming	vii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Problem statement	1
1.1.1 Overview of the problem	1
1.1.2 Literature Review	3
1.2 Research objectives	6
1.2.1 General objective	7
1.2.2 Specific objectives	7
1.3 Research method	7
1.3.1 Literature Review	7
1.3.2 Empirical study	7
1.3.2.1 Research design	8
1.3.2.2 Participants	8
1.3.2.3 Measuring Instrument	8
1.3.2.4 Data analysis	8
1.4 Chapter layout	8
1.5 Chapter summary	9
References	10
<b>Chapter 2: Research Article</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations</b>	<b>55</b>
3.1 Conclusions	55
3.2 Limitations to this research	60
3.3 Recommendations for future research	61
References	63

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	Characteristics of Participants ( <i>N</i> =381)	28
2	Period Employed	29
3	Overall Affective Experiences of Unemployed people	32
4	Specific Affective Experiences of Unemployed people	33
5	Importance of Work (i)	35
6	Importance of Work (ii)	35
7	Reasons for the Importance of Work	36
8	Time and Job Application Behaviour	37
9	Efforts and Job Application Behaviour	38
10	Job Application Behaviour: Job Search Behaviour	39
11	Job Application Behaviour: Difficulty in Finding a Job	40
12	Job Application Behaviour: Expectancy Job Behaviour	42

## SUMMARY

**Subject:** Experiences, coping and well-being of unemployed people in the North West Province.

**Key terms:** Unemployment, experience, coping, application behaviour, well-being.

Unemployment and the economic and psychological consequences thereof are important research topics. Although unemployment is a world-wide problem, it is particularly a problem in South Africa with its high unemployment rate. Not only is unemployment associated with various individual problems (e.g. physical ill health, hostility, depression, social isolation, and a decrease in self-esteem, life satisfaction, aspiration level), family problems (spousal abuse, marital friction, depression in the spouse, family conflict, and child abuse), and community problems (e.g. crime), but it is also stressful for job seekers, because it complicates job search, and it diminishes the likelihood of finding reemployment. People need to work in order to fulfil their basic needs and to be part of society, which in turn leads to satisfaction and motivation. Work also provides meaning in a person's life. Therefore, research regarding experiences, coping mechanisms and job application behaviour of unemployed people is needed to plan and implement policies and programmes to assist them.

The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences, coping mechanisms and job application behaviour and well-being of unemployed people in the North West Province. A cross-sectional survey design was used. Stratified, random samples ( $N = 381$ ) were taken from the White, Black, and Coloured communities in the Potchefstroom area. The Experiences of Unemployment Questionnaire (EUQ), which was developed for the purposes of this study, was administered. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The results showed that participants experienced unemployment as very unpleasant. These experiences indicate how these people feel when unemployed hence on the study unemployed people feel bored, lonely and empty. Participants reported that they cannot survive financially and this impacts on their well-being. Well-being in this instance is defined as a state of being happy and healthy and if people cannot survive financially, then they are not happy and it results in decreased self-worth. Work is regarded as important, people felt badly at the thought of being unemployed and they argued that it was important to be employed. The results also showed that work held meaning for unemployed people. Most of the respondents reported that they would like to find a job within a month in order to survive. The difficulty

people experience in finding work was attributed to too little available work, to employers' not hiring the ethnic groups of the respondents and to being unemployed for too long. In the study, job search behaviour and job application behaviour are both related to coping with unemployment because according to the current study unemployed people applied job search behaviour by enquiring if work is available, by searching for advertisements as well as by presenting themselves to the employers.

Recommendations for future research were made.

## OPSOMMING

**Onderwerp:** Ervarings, coping en welstand van werklose mense in die Noordwes-Provinsie.

**Sleutelterm:** Werkloosheid, ervaring, coping, toepassingsgedrag, welstand.

Werkloosheid en die ekonomiese en psigologiese gevolge daarvan is belangrike navorsings- onderwerpe. Alhoewel werkloosheid 'n wêreldwye probleem is, is dit veral 'n probleem in Suid-Afrika met sy hoë werkloosheidskoers. Werkloosheid word nie slegs geassosieer met verskeie individuele probleme (bv. fisieke ongesondheid, vyandigheid, depressie, sosiale isolasie, en 'n afname in selfagting, lewensvrede en aspirasievlak), familieprobleme (mishandeling van eggenoot/eggenote, huwelikspanning, depressie van die eggenoot/ eggenote, familiekonflik, en kindermishandeling), en gemeenskapsprobleme nie, maar is ook spanningsvol vir werksoekers omdat dit die soeke na werk kompliseer en die moontlikheid om weer werk te kry, verminder. Mense moet werk ten einde hul basiese behoeftes te vervul en deel van die gemeenskap te wees, op sy beurt tot tevredenheid en motivering lei. Daarom is navorsing rakende ervarings, coping-gedrag, en werkaansoekgedrag van werklose persone noodsaaklik sodat beleid en programme om hulle te ondersteun beplan en geïmplementeer kan word.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om ervarings, coping-meganismes en toepassingsgedrag en welstand van werklose persone in die Noordwes-Provinsie te ondersoek. 'n Dwarsdeursneeopname-ontwerp is gebruik om inligting te bekom, asook as 'n data-insamelingsinstrument. Gestratifiseerde ewekansige steekproewe ( $N = 381$ ) is uit die bevolking van die Potchefstroomgebied geneem. Die Ervaring van Werkloosheid-vraelys wat vir die doel van hierdie studie ontwikkel is, is afgeneem. Beskrywende statistiek is gebruik om inligting te ontleed. Die resultate het getoon dat werkloosheid vir die deelnemers 'n baie onaangename ervaring is. Die ervarings het om aan te dui om mense voel van werkloos. Werklose mense voel verveeld, eensaam en leeg. Deelnemers het gerapporteer dat hulle sukkel om finansieel te oorleef en dit maak impak om hul welstand. Welstand is die staat van tevrede en gesondheid en as hulle nie finansiële te bly, dan hulle is nie tevrede nie. Werk word as belangrik beskou en mense voel sleg by die gedagte aan werkloosheid. Die resultate het ook bevestig dat werk vir hulle betekenis inhou en 'n doel in hul lewens dien. Die meeste respondente sou graag binne 'n maand 'n aanstelling wou kry ten einde te oorleef. Die probleem wat mense ervaar om werk te vind is toegeskryf aan te min beskikbare werk, aan

werknemers wat nie die etniese groepe van die respondente aanstel nie en aan die feit dat hulle reeds te lank werkloos is. 'n Ander rede was dat mense nie seker was waar om werk te soek nie. In die studie, werksoekgedrag en toepassingsgedrag is die sulle as coping van werkloos want dis wat hulle het gebruik om te vra waar hulle kan werk, en die mense het gebruik die advertiese en vra die werknemers van werk.

Aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing is aan die hand gedoen.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation focuses on the experiences, coping and well-being of unemployed people in the North West Province.

This chapter contains the problem statement and a discussion of the research objectives, which include the general and specific objectives. The research method is explained and the chapter layout is given.

#### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Unemployment is a world-wide problem because every country has an unemployment rate as not everyone of the potential working population is employed. As early as 1933, the Marienthal study showed that work seemed to be the basis of social integration, and the main reference for men and women in their everyday organisation of life (Julkunen, 2001). According to Creed and Watson (2003), unemployment remains a serious social problem internationally. Descriptive accounts of the unemployment experience present a composite picture of the unemployed as bored, lonely and depressed and, over time, as displaying a diminishing motivation to do anything. Perhaps the most consistently noted effect is that of a loss of morale or self-esteem, the individual losing his or her self-respect and sense of personal worth (Tiggermann & Winefield, 1984).

Unemployment in South Africa is also a significant problem, because the unemployment rate is remarkably high (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). In 1998 it was officially measured at 39% on the broad definition and 26% on the narrow definition (StatsSA, 2000). Moreover, it had risen steadily in the preceding years. Unemployment is potentially a matter of serious concern – for its effects on economic welfare, production, erosion of human capital, social exclusion, crime and social instability. However, its potential costs depend on the nature of the unemployment (Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) recently revised its definition of the *official unemployment rate* in line with the main International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition, which is used

by more than 80 percent of both developed and less developed countries, as well as by South Africa's major trading partners. According to this new definition, the *unemployed* are those people within the economically active population who: (a) did not work during the seven days prior to the interview; (b) want to work and are available to start working within a week of the interview; and (c) have taken active steps to look for work or to start some form of self-employment in the four weeks prior to the interview.

The economically active population consists of both those who are employed and those who are unemployed (StatsSA, 1998). The extent of unemployment varies according to the definition of unemployment used. The official unemployment rate is calculated as the percentage of the economically active population that is unemployed, according to the above definition (StatsSA, 2000).

Unemployment has been linked to race and it has replaced race as a factor of inequality because it is indeed a factor of inequality. Race, geographic location, gender and levels of skills influence the likelihood of being employed (De Witte, 2006). South Africa has a population of 47 million people. A total of 38,5% was living in poverty in 2002 (R354 per month per adult equivalent). Furthermore, 23,8% of the population was living on less than two US dollars a day, and 10,5% on less than one US dollar a day (De Witte, 2006).

In the early 1980s there was a heated debate over whether unemployment in rural areas was voluntary or involuntary. According to one view, much of it was voluntary: at least part of the labour market and in particular rural area dwellers chose to be unemployed because of the income available from household agriculture. This view was challenged by others (Knight, 1982; Simkins, 1982), who pointed to the lack of productive activities available at the margin to rural area dwellers. The issue was by no means settled and the debate has continued in recent times. For example, an ILO report on the South African labour market (ILO, 1996) puts forward the notion that people with access to income not earned by conventional employment may be voluntarily unemployed.

The issue has also arisen in the debate about the appropriate definition of unemployment – whether to use the narrow measure (excluding the unemployed who wanted work but did not search actively in the reference period) or the broad measure (including this group) (Kingdon, & Knight, 2004). In 1998 it made a difference between an unemployment rate of 26% and

one of 39%. The ILO report (ILO, 1996) suggests that including the non-searching unemployed may exaggerate the level of unemployment, implying that the broad measure includes people who are out of the labour force. Similarly, the South African statistical agency's recent decision (StatsSA, 1998) to omit the non-searching unemployed from the official definition of unemployment and from the denominator in calculating the unemployment rate implicitly assumes that such people have voluntarily withdrawn from the labour force (Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

Unemployment in the North West Province is problematic. The North West Province is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa with a provincial gross geographic product (GGP) of R3,964 per person, which is well below the national average of R6,498 (WEFA Regional Economic Focus, 2001). The Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, is above 0,6 in the Province, placing it amongst the most unequal regions in the world. Rural poverty and rural-urban income differences exacerbate social problems such as violence, crime and HIV infection (PPT Pilots Project in Southern Africa, 2004). The estimated unemployment rate is 38%, slightly higher than the average in South Africa. The female unemployment rate is above 50%. Some 30% of the adult population is illiterate, the highest figure among all provinces in South Africa, (WEFA, 2001).

Unemployment has become a major social issue during the past 20 years (Dollard & Winefield, 2002). Even countries where unemployment remained low during the 1983 recession have experienced increased unemployment since 1990, although by the end of the decade official rates in many countries had declined. Globalisation has led to restructuring and downsizing in many industrialised societies, and a shift, for many workers, from the prospect of secure, long-term employment, to unemployment or inadequate or insecure employment. There is growing evidence that the negative consequences of this shift are not merely economic, but also psychological (Dollard & Winefield, 2002).

Unemployment and the economic and psychological consequences of it are important focus areas of research. In industrialised research regarding unemployment, unemployment has been driven by globalisation and the resulting restructuring and downsizing that took place in organisations (see Winefield, 2002). Winefield (2002) stressed the need for psychological research on unemployment. It has been showed that unemployment has substantial costs for individuals and their families which cannot be attributed solely to economic deprivation.

Well-being and unemployment in South Africa have been linked together. Unemployment can have both positive and negative outcomes. Negative outcomes of unemployment include (De Witte, 2006):

- Boredom (unemployed people find it difficult to survive financially and they have to reduce their personal expenditure);
- Uncertainty about the future (unemployed people feel lonely and empty, and experience low self-esteem).

A high unemployment rate could be stressful for job seekers, because it makes job search complicated, and it diminishes the likelihood of finding reemployment (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). The impact of unemployment also seems to be lower when there is unemployment protection available (e.g. social security).

The negative well-being consequences of unemployment have been well documented. For example, research comparing unemployed with employed samples has consistently found higher levels of psychological distress and depression and lower levels of self-esteem in the unemployed (Waters & Moore, 2001). The evidence is similar for adults loosely connected to the labour market (e.g. with part-time, casual or intermittent work) in that they also have poorer levels of well-being than the full-time employed people. Poor well-being in the unemployed has also been demonstrated to be largely a concern and consequential to unemployment, and not the result of those with poorer health "drifting" into unemployment (Waters & Moore, 2001). This deprivation hypothesis, which illuminates the problems of not having a job, has been the basis of an abundance of unemployment research. However, research from the 1990s suggests that there are few signs of withdrawal into passivity and social isolation among the unemployed (Gallie, Gershuny, & Vogler, 1994). Therefore in the study, well-being refers to the affective experiences of unemployed people.

Kingdon and Knight (2002) argued that there are three major reasons why there might be a lack of active job searching among persons claiming to want to work. Each affects the perceived benefit-cost ratio of actively searching: discouragement about the prospects of finding work owing to the high prevailing local unemployment rate or the long duration of one's own unemployment; recruitment methods of employers; and the cost of job searching

(Kingdon & Knight, 2002). The people would normally argue that they experience this feeling when there are no jobs available at home, not even temporary jobs. It could be understandable that after being away from the work too long, these are the other reasons why there are no jobs for these people, i.e., no vacancies available to them. Most of the people who experience these unpleasant feelings of being unemployed are males, not females, because males are the ones who have to take care of their families, while women most of the time nurture the kids and are expected to stay at home. But males can take a wrong turn that could lead them to alcohol or even drug abuse, which can place a financial strain on them because they have dependants, yet they have a lower or even no income because of being unemployed (Kingdon & Knight, 2002).

Not much is known about the experience of unemployment in non-European countries. There is a lack of research about the experiences, coping behaviour and well-being of unemployed people in South Africa. It seems that individuals remain unemployed because of the lack of formal jobs (low labour demand) and because they come up against barriers to entering informal employment (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). There are various possible reasons why the *informal* sector has been unfriendly to newcomers. Among the barriers are licensing controls and restrictive by-laws in urban centres (Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

Whilst it is crucial to understand and document the psychological experiences of unemployed people in South Africa, whether they are negative or positive, very limited research has been found on the topic. A further research problem is that the unemployment (and experiences thereof) in South Africa might be different from Europe. This is because of the following reasons: a) Social security systems exist in Europe, while no such system currently exists in South Africa. Unemployed people in Europe still receive a reasonably good income, while unemployed people in South Africa will not. b) The culture in South Africa is more collective than in other countries and work might be less important for individuals in this country, which might make it less problematic to be unemployed (Masango, 2005). Kingdon and Knight (2006) recently published some results based on the South African household survey data collected by the South African Labour and Development Research Unit in 1993. In a nationally representative cross-sectional sample of about 9000 households, people were asked '*how satisfied is this household with the way it lives these days*'? The results indicated unemployment to have a highly significant negative impact on perceived life satisfaction, after controlling for a variety of household characteristics. However, information is lacking

about the individual experiences of unemployment (which is more specific than life satisfaction on household level).

De Witte and Hooge (1997) developed a model which focuses on their cognitive functioning (i.e. experiences of the importance of work), emotional functioning (affective well-being), and behavioural functioning (coping). The model of De Witte and Hooge (1997) was applied in Europe to understand the experiences, coping, and well-being of unemployed people, but it has not yet been used in South Africa.

Based on the abovementioned description of the problem it is clear that unemployment is a serious problem in South Africa. Unemployment affects the lives of a large proportion of the potential employees in the country. However, currently there is a lack of information about the experiences, coping strategies and well-being of unemployed individuals in South Africa. This is also the case in the North-West Province, and specifically the Potchefstroom area. The following research questions emerge from the problem statement:

- What is unemployment and what are the effects thereof on people?
- How are experiences, coping strategies and well-being of unemployed people conceptualised in the literature?
- How do unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province experience the importance of work?
- What are the affective experiences of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province?
- What is the application behaviour (coping behaviour) of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province?

## **1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives can be divided into general and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The general objective of this research is to investigate the experiences, coping behaviour and well-being of unemployed people living in the North West Province.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

The study has the following specific objectives:

- To study unemployment and the effects thereof on people from the literature.
- To conceptualise the experiences, coping strategies and well-being of unemployed people from the literature.
- To determine how unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province experience the importance of work.
- To investigate the affective experiences of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province.
- To study the application behaviour (coping behaviour) of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province.

## **1.3 RESEARCH METHOD**

### **1.3.1 Literature review**

The literature review will focus on the definition of unemployment and the experiences, coping behaviour and well-being of unemployed people.

### **1.3.2 Empirical study**

The empirical study involved a number of steps, namely the selection of a research design, selection of participants, development of a measuring instrument, administration of the measuring instrument and preparation of data for statistical analysis and, finally, interpretation of the results.

### **1.3.2.1 Research design**

The research design is exploratory and descriptive. A cross-sectional design is used to obtain information regarding the participants' experiences of unemployment (Howell, 2008).

### **1.3.2.2 Participants**

The total population is a stratified sample of ( $N = 381$ ). The participants were from Potchefstroom (white = 21%), Promosa (Coloured = 54%) and Ikageng (African = 24%). The population included both females and males.

### **1.3.2.3 Measuring instrument**

The Experiences of Unemployment Questionnaire (EUQ) will be developed to measure the participants' experiences, coping behaviour and well-being. The EUQ was developed by the authors, based on the work of De Witte (2006) in Belgium. The *Experiences of Unemployment Questionnaire* was developed to gather information about how unemployed people experience unemployment and their well-being in regard to it, and also to study the mechanisms they use in order to cope with being unemployed. General information of biographical data is collected with the biographical information sheet, such as gender, marital status, home language, qualifications, municipal area and years of being unemployed.

### **1.3.2.4 Data analysis**

The statistical analysis is carried out with the help of the SPSS program (SPSS Inc., 2006). Descriptive statistics (frequency tables) are used to analyse the data. A frequency table list items together according to the number of times, or frequency, that the items occur.

## **1.4 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Research article.
- Chapter 3: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations.

## **1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the background and motivation of the research were discussed, followed by a description of the problem statement, while general and specific objectives were formulated. The research designs as well as the method of the study were discussed, followed by the chapter division.

Chapter 2 consists of the research article.

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## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH ARTICLE

# EXPERIENCES, COPING AND WELL-BEING OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE IN THE NORTH-WEST PROVINCE

## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences, coping mechanisms and the well-being of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province. A survey design was used and samples ( $N = 381$ ) were taken from unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area. The Experiences of Unemployment Questionnaire was developed and administered. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The results showed that most participants experienced unemployment negatively. Being unemployed was described as very unpleasant, and it was associated with boredom and loneliness. Work seemed to be the most important factor, and it was experienced as meaningful. The participants also indicated that they had asked somebody else for a job because they were unemployed.

## OPSOMMING

Die doel van die studie was om die ervarings, coping en welstand van werklose persone in die Potchefstroom-area van die Noordwes Provinsie te ondersoek. 'n Dwarsdeursnee opname-ontwerp is gebruik en steekproewe ( $N = 381$ ) van werklose mense in die Potchefstroom-area is geneem. Die Vraelys oor die Ervaring van Werkloosheid is gebruik. Beskrywende statistiek is gebruik om die data te ontleed. Die resultate het bevestig dat werkloosheid baie negatief deur die meeste van die deelnemers ervaar word. Hulle het werkloosheid as uiters onaangenaam ervaar, en dit het hulle verveeld en eensaam laat voel. Werk het geblyk die belangrikste faktor te wees en is as sinvol ervaar. Die deelnemers het ook aangedui dat hulle iemand anders vir werk gevra het omdat hulle werkloos was.

Unemployment is a world-wide problem; every country has an unemployment rate, and not everyone of the population is employed. As early as 1933, the Marienthal study showed that work seemed to be the basis of social integration and the main reference for men and women in their everyday organisation of life (Julkunen, 2001). This deprivation hypothesis, which illuminates the problems of not having a job, has been the basis of an abundance of unemployment research. However, research from the 1990s suggests that there are few signs of withdrawal into passivity and social isolation among the unemployed (Gallie, Gershuny, & Vogler, 1994).

According to Creed and Watson (2003), unemployment remains a serious social problem internationally. Descriptive accounts of the unemployment experience present a composite picture of the unemployed as bored, lonely and depressed and, over time, as displaying a diminishing motivation to do anything. Perhaps the most consistently noted effect is that of a loss of morale or self-esteem, the individual losing his or her self-respect and sense of personal worth (Tiggermann & Winefield, 1984). The negative consequences of unemployment for well-being have been well documented. For example, research comparing unemployed with employed samples has consistently found higher levels of psychological distress and depression, and lower levels of self-esteem in the unemployed (Waters & Moore, 2001). The evidence is similar for adults loosely connected to the labour market (e.g. with part-time, casual or intermittent work) in that they also have poorer levels of well-being than people employed full-time. Poor well-being in the unemployed has also been demonstrated to be largely a concern and a consequence of unemployment, and not the result of those with poorer health "drifting" into unemployment (Waters & Moore, 2001).

Unemployment in South Africa is remarkably high and is regarded as a significant problem (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). In 1998 it was officially measured at 39% on the broad definition and 26% on the narrow definition (StatsSA, 2000). Moreover, it had risen steadily in the preceding years. Unemployment is potentially a matter of serious concern – for its effects on economic welfare, production, erosion of human capital, social exclusion, crime and social instability. However, its potential costs depend on the nature of the unemployment (Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

High and persistent unemployment since the 1970s has been a dominant feature of most economies (Flatau, Galea, & Petridis, 1998). Unemployment experiences have led to the

growth of a substantial amount of economics literature on the causes and costs of unemployment. Despite this interest, it has been psychologists, sociologists and epidemiologists, not economists, who have been at the forefront of research into the potential adverse effects of unemployment on the lives of the unemployed, and particularly into its impact on mental health and well-being (Flatau et al., 1998).

Unemployment has become a major social issue during the past 20 years (Dollard & Winefield, 2002). Even countries where unemployment remained low during the 1983 recession have experienced increased unemployment since 1990, although by the end of the decade official rates in many countries had declined. Globalisation has led to restructuring and downsizing in many industrialised societies, and a shift, for many workers, from the prospect of secure, long-term employment, to unemployment or inadequate or insecure employment. There is growing evidence that the negative consequences of this shift are not merely economic, but also psychological (Dollard & Winefield, 2002). Winefield (2002) stressed the need for psychological research on unemployment. It has been showed that unemployment has substantial costs for individuals and their families which cannot be attributed solely to economic deprivation.

Unemployment in the North West Province is problematic. The North West Province is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa with a provincial gross geographic product (GGP) of R3 964 per person, which is well below the national average of R6,498 (WEFA Regional Economic Focus, 2001). The Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, is above 0, 6 in the Province, placing it amongst the most unequal regions in the world. Rural poverty and rural-urban income differences exacerbate social problems such as violence, crime and HIV infection (PPT Pilots Project in Southern Africa, 2004). The estimated unemployment rate is 38%, slightly higher than the average in South Africa. The female unemployment rate is above 50%. Some 30% of the adult population is illiterate, the highest figure among all the provinces in South Africa, (WEFA, Regional Economic Focus, 2001).

Work often generates ambivalent feelings (Rothmann, 2003). On the one hand, work requires effort and is associated with the lack of freedom and negative feelings. On the other hand, work gives energy, enables development and generates positive feelings (Rothmann, 2003). Carr (2004), states that employment status is related to happiness, with those being employed

and in professional and skilled jobs being happier than those in unskilled jobs or who are unemployed.

Unemployment could have negative and positive effects on individuals' well-being (De Witte, 2006). Hanisch (1999) divide the negative effects of unemployment into individual and family effects. Individual effects include physical and psychological effects. Physical effects include an increase in the incidence of headaches, stomach aches, sleeping problems, lack of energy, hypertension, heart disease, and kidney disease. Psychological effects include an increase in hostility, depression, anxiety, stress, anger, fear, despair, loneliness, and social isolation, and a decrease in self-esteem, positive affect, life satisfaction, aspiration level, concentration, and personal identity. Family effects include an increase in spousal abuse, marital friction, depression in the spouse, family conflict, and child abuse and a decrease in family cohesion, and the well-being of children. Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2004) showed that although life satisfaction is moderately stable over time, unemployment had a long-term effect on it. Although unemployment seems to have predominantly negative effects, it could also have positive effects, such as creating an opportunity for individuals to change careers and life directions.

Unemployed people often experience boredom (because they find it difficult to survive financially and they have to reduce their personal expenditure), and uncertainty about the future (because they feel lonely, empty and experience low self-esteem) (De Witte, 2006). Research comparing unemployed with employed samples has consistently found higher levels of psychological distress and depression and lower levels of self-esteem in the unemployed (Waters & Moore, 2001). As stated above, poor well-being in the unemployed has also been demonstrated to be largely a concern and a consequence of unemployment, and not the result of those with poorer health "drifting" into unemployment (Waters & Moore, 2001). This deprivation hypothesis, which illuminates the problems of not having a job, has been the basis of an abundance of unemployment research. Yet research from the 1990s suggests the unemployed do not really withdraw into passivity and social isolation (Gallie et al., 1994).

Studies showed that unemployment led to mental disorders in individuals who did not have mental illnesses previously, problems to structure time, or used alcohol (Hanisch, 1999). Hanisch (1999) point out that availability of income may be an important determinant of the

psychological and health symptoms of unemployment. According to this argument, financial vulnerable individuals may experience more severe reactions to unemployment. In an international review of the health consequences of youth unemployment, Sanford and Mullen (1985) found that youth unemployment is associated with an increased vulnerability to psychiatric disorders and that unemployment negatively influences the suffering of those with pre-existing psychiatric disorders, which can reduce employability. Despierre and Sorel (1979) found that preadolescents attached greater importance to the consequences of unemployment, such as lowered self-esteem or self-worth and boredom.

Whilst it is crucial to understand and document the psychological experiences of unemployed people in South Africa, whether they are negative or positive, very limited research has been found on the topic. One study which has been conducted by Van der Merwe and Greef (2003) investigated the coping mechanisms of 82 unemployed African men. Furthermore, Ribton-Turner and De Bruin (2006) studied stressors and support in a group of eight unemployed adults in their mid-career.

A further research problem is that the unemployment (and experiences thereof) in South Africa might be different from Europe. This is because of the following reasons: a) Social security systems exist in Europe, while no such system currently exists in South Africa. Unemployed people in Europe still receive a reasonably good income, while unemployed people in South Africa do not. b) The culture in South Africa is more collective than in other countries and work might be less important for individuals in this country, which might make it less problematic to be unemployed (Masango, 2005). c) Kingdon and Knight (2006) recently published some results based on the South African household survey data collected by the South African Labour and Development Research Unit in 1993. In a nationally representative cross-sectional sample of about 9000 households, people were asked *'how satisfied is this household with the way it lives these days'*? The results indicated unemployment to have a highly significant negative impact on perceived life satisfaction, after controlling for a variety of household characteristics. However, information is lacking about the individual experiences of unemployment (which is more specific than life satisfaction on household level).

Based on the abovementioned description of the problem it is clear that unemployment is a serious problem in South Africa. Unemployment also affects the lives of a large proportion of

the potential employees in the country. However, currently there is a lack of information about the experiences, coping strategies and well-being of unemployed individuals in South Africa. This is also the case in the North-West Province, and specifically the Potchefstroom area. The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences, coping mechanisms and the well-being of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province.

### **Approaches to explaining the psychological consequences of unemployment**

Three approaches to explaining the psychological consequences of unemployment have been identified in the literature, namely the expectancy value, latent function deprivation, and agency restriction approaches.

The *expectancy value approach* was developed by Feather (1990). Feather (1990, p. 63) explains the expectancy value approach as follows: "Whether or not a person has a tendency to act in a particular direction will depend on that person's expectation about whether he or she can perform the action to the required standard, thereby achieving a successful outcome, on a further set of expectations about the possible consequences of the outcome, and on the valence (or subjective value) associated with the action outcome."

The *latent function deprivation approach* was developed by Jahoda (1982) who claims that employment is a social institution which has manifest, intended, consequences; and latent, unintended, consequences. Social contact, activity, status, purposefulness, time structure and being controlled, each of which are said to be imposed or enforced by employment, are the latent consequences of employment. Unemployment is regarded to be psychologically destructive because of the absence of these latent consequences of employment which normally function as psychological supports.

Warr (1987) has developed the *vitamin model* which is in many respects similar to Jahoda's model. According to Warr (1987), insufficiency or excess of nine environmental features are responsible for psychological well-being. The nine features, which largely mirror Jahoda's six consequences, are: opportunity for control; skill use; interpersonal contact; external goal and task demands; variety; environmental clarity; availability of money; physical security; and valued social position (Warr, 1987). Based on the approach of Warr (1987), it would be inappropriate to suggest that unemployment is inevitably destructive nor employment

inevitable constructive: "... the impact of the transition from paid work to unemployment will be a function of changes which occur in the nine primary environmental features. In most cases these shifts will impair mental health, but the transition can sometimes be neutral or even beneficial in its effect (Warr, 1987, p. 355).

Fryer (1988) proposes an *agency restriction approach* which rests on assumptions that unemployed persons are active, initiating, future-oriented agents, striving to make sense of and influence events. The social institution of unemployment is, it is maintained, generally experienced as impoverishing, restricting, baffling, discouraging and disabling (Fryer, 1988). These assumptions have been used to focus research attention on three particular aspects of the experience of unemployed people: future orientation, (Fryer & McKenna, 1987), pro-activity (Fryer & Payne, 1984) and the restriction of agency by poverty (Fryer, 1990).

Singer, Stacey, and Ritchie (2001) studied the experiences of unemployed individuals in terms of four dimensions, namely economic, social, psychological and family consequences. Regarding the economic dimension, unemployed individuals typically have little money, and therefore they cannot afford to do certain things, nor can they provide financial help to others (Singer et al., 2001). The social dimension of unemployment entails that people look down on the unemployed, they become a burden to society and their social status is low (Singer et al., 2001). As far as the psychological dimension is concerned, unemployed individuals do not like themselves very much, they are bored and they are afraid of the future. Finally, concerning the family dimension, it seems that life is difficult in the families of the unemployed; they have many family worries and family morale is low (Singer et al., 2001).

Based on various approaches to the study of psychological experiences of unemployed people, De Witte and Hooge (1997) developed a model which focuses on their cognitive functioning (i.e. experiences of the importance of work), emotional functioning (affective well-being), and behavioural functioning (coping). The model of De Witte and Hooge (1997) was applied in Europe to understand the experiences, coping, and well-being of unemployed people, but it has not yet been used in South Africa. Consequently, no measuring instrument is available that can be used to investigate the cognitive, affective, and emotional experiences of unemployed people in South Africa. The model of De Witte and Hooge (1997) can be used to analyse experiences of unemployed people in terms of importance of work (what they

want), coping behaviour (what they do they go about to try to get what they want), and well-being (how they experience unemployment).

### **Importance of work**

Employment commitment is a relevant factor in describing the experience of unemployment, because it could mitigate or buffer the negative consequences of unemployment (Fryer & Fagin, 1993; Fryer & Payne, 1984). However, individuals who are strongly committed to work will experience detrimental consequences if their job search is unsuccessful, because they will experience some sort of frustration or deprivation. It seems also relevant to focus on the importance of work, because Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT, Feather, 1990) highlight the importance of the value attributed to employment as an important factor in motivating people to look for jobs.

Two different types of expectancies are involved in the concept of expectations as used within EVT (Feather, 1992), namely efficacy expectations and outcome expectancies. Efficacy expectations refer to a person's conviction that he or she can successfully execute the required behaviour needed to obtain a certain outcome. Outcome expectancies refer to a person's estimate that a given behaviour will lead to certain outcomes. Unemployed people with higher expectations of finding a job might also experience better psychological well-being. A person's needs and values are considered to be determinants of motivated action through their effects on valences in EVT (Feather, 1992). EVT predicts that the intensity of job search will be positively related to how much finding a job is valued.

Work-role centrality (also referred to as employment commitment) indicates the importance of work to an individual's sense of self (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). Work-role centrality may stem from Protestant work ethic socialisation or from a belief that work is central to one's life and satisfaction. Individuals with high work-role centrality find meaning and fulfilment through work. Studies have shown that unemployed people who strongly value employment feel more depressed about being unemployed (Feather & Davenport, 1981), experience their use of time as less structured and purposeful (Feather & Bond, 1983), and report higher levels of psychological distress (Stafford, Jackson, & Banks, 1980).

For most individuals, basic life requirements are met through employment (Linn, Sandifer, & Stein, 1985). However, work does more than supply the means for meeting physical needs; it can also satisfy creative urges, promote self-esteem, and provide an avenue for achievement and self-realisation. Conversely, unemployment might be expected to increase anxiety and depression, lead to lower self-esteem, and produce adverse physical health consequences for people who experience it, particularly when efforts to locate work are met with failure over a long period of time (Linn et al., 1985).

Some studies have argued that in contexts of highly generalised insecurity, the unemployed show lower levels of dissatisfaction, altering the way in which unemployment is viewed because of reliance on the informal economy as a means of coping with poverty and providing protection against cumulative disadvantage (Gallie, Jacobs, & Paugam, 2000). Thus, one could easily conclude that precisely where the “problem” of unemployment and insecurity is more extensive, it is not perceived and experienced as a problem. The underlying assumption is, then, that in these contexts people are habituated to insecurity because it is their “normal” situation (Bayón, 2002).

Descriptive accounts of the unemployment experience present a composite picture of the unemployed as bored, lonely and depressed, and over time, as displaying diminishing motivation to do anything (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984). Perhaps the most consistently noted effect is that of a loss of morale or self-esteem, the individual losing his or her self-respect and sense of personal worth (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984).

### **Job application behaviour (coping) of the unemployed**

In unemployment research, coping is frequently confounded with outcome, implying that certain strategies are better than others, and that coping is more or less a problem-solving strategy (Julkunen, 2001). Lazarus and Folkman (1984), on the other hand, argue that emphasising coping as merely problem solving devalues its other functions that concern managing emotions and maintaining self-esteem and a positive outlook. The context is evidently important in that coping is not only about the circumstances of the individuals, but about what resources are available to them (Julkunen, 2001). Furthermore, the societal context moulds individual experiences (Julkunen, 2001).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping serves two overriding functions: managing or altering the problem, and regulating the emotional response to it. Coping has a number of definitions. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguish between four different meanings of coping. The first involves the use of different strategies, and the other three concern more or less different reactions to the problem. This division might also represent the common distinction between problem-focused coping, where efforts are directed at doing something constructive about the conditions of the threat/harm, and emotion-focused coping, which is concerned with regulating the emotions arising from the situation. Examples of problem-focused behaviour might include active coping and planning, or seeking instrumental support. In contrast, emotion-focused behaviour employs strategies such as acceptance, denial, disengagement and searching for emotional support (Lazarus et al., 1984).

The psychological impact of unemployment thus appears to be related to how unemployed people use their time (Warr & Jackson, 1983). Specifically, those who cope best are engaged in purposeful activity and maintain regular contact with people outside the nuclear family (Julkunen, 2001). Compared with the employed, unemployed people have been shown to make less structured and purposeful use of time (Wanberg, Griffiths, & Gavin, 1997), show lower levels of activity (Waters & Moore, 2001), are involved in fewer social activities (Underlid, 1996), feel less involved in a collective purpose, report lower status, and experience more financial strain (Jackson, 1999). De Witte and Wets's (1996) study of unemployed women showed that the availability of an alternative role, such as being at home with the children, made the experience less distressing, especially among women with low levels of education. Fryer and Fagin (1993) suggested that maintaining a high level of commitment to employment and active job search/application behaviour can be an effective way of coping with unemployment.

Social support, as a potential mediator of stress, has been examined for its impact in moderating the consequences of unemployment (Linn et al., 1985). In general, results have shown that unemployment stress is exacerbated by a low sense of social support. Gore (1978) found that the rural unemployed evidenced a significantly higher level of social support than did the urban unemployed. Kasl and Cobb (1979) pointed out that the role of social support depends on the person's stage of adaptation to the unemployment experience. For persons

whose unemployment status remained uncertain over more prolonged periods of time, high levels of social support did have a buffering influence (Kasl & Kobb, 1979).

Amundson and Borgen (1987) examined factors identified as being helpful or hindering during unemployment. Hindering factors included: job rejection, financial pressures, unproductive contacts with the government employment agency, an unknown or negative future, ineffective job search activities, negative thinking (negative self-messages) and spouse or family problems. Conversely, the helping factors included: support from family, support from friends, positive thinking (positive self-messages), job search support groups, and career guidance (Amundson & Borgen, 1987). They have also suggested that by providing themselves with positive self-messages and reframing concepts of self-worth, and rethinking career paths, many participants were able most effectively to manage stress associated with unemployment (Amundson & Borgen, 1987).

Previous research has examined job search behaviour and its predictors in an unemployment sample because of its positive relationship with reemployment (Van Hooft, Born, Teris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004). Studies of the predictors of job search among unemployed people have often used an attitude-behaviour model. The theory of reasoned action that applies to job search behaviour states that the immediate antecedent of job search behaviour is the intention to look for a job (Van Hooft et al., 2004). Job search intention in turn is predicted by a person having a positive or negative evaluation of job search behaviour and the perception of social pressure to look for a job. Furthermore, in the context of job seeking, the person's perceived control over his or her actions affects the perceptions of control over job seeking behaviour, for example, where people are not sure how to apply for a job or even how to write a letter of application (Van Hooft et al., 2004).

There are benefits to working and costs associated with being unemployed that are likely to influence an individual's decision to engage in certain activities and behave otherwise (Hebert, Drebing, Mueller, & Van Ormer, 2006). Benefits of work include income benefits, having structured time, contact with other people, and a sense of identity, both individual and collective (Jahoda, 1982). Potential costs associated with working include loss of leisure time and increased stress. Alternatively, some benefits of unemployment include increased leisure time or time for other life activities. Costs of unemployment include financial stress, isolation and low self-esteem (Feather, 1990; Price, Choi, & Vinokur, 2002).

The incidence of direct entry into unemployment (without an intervening period of work) varies by several factors (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). For example, it differs substantially by race. African unemployed persons are more than twice as likely as whites never to have had work. While this could be partly due to the inferior employment-enhancing characteristics of Africans *vis-à-vis* whites, it could also be partly due to racial discrimination in employers' hiring practices. Rural dwellers are more likely than urban dwellers never to have worked, possibly because there are fewer job opportunities in rural than urban areas and because the intensity of job-search is lower in the countryside owing to remoteness from centres of employment (Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

Age is an obvious important factor since the young are more likely to search rather than get "locked-in" in an undesirable job (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). The young are also more able to afford unemployed job-search because they have fewer financial commitments than do older persons. Moreover, they may be more ignorant about what their skills can command in the labour market; i.e., they may have higher reservation wages (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). It is more difficult to explain this phenomenon among the older age groups. For example, about 50% of all unemployed persons (61% of unemployed women and 37% of unemployed men) aged 36–64 had never worked before. This is either due to late entry into the labour force (a possible explanation for women who might delay entry until after childbearing/-rearing years) or to extraordinarily long duration of unemployment, which can be explained only by the lack of adequate jobs in the economy or by too narrow a concept of "employment" (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). In summary, unemployment seems to be a dynamic situation, which is coped with in different ways, depending on the resources, social capital and orientation of the individual. It is not determined by constraints that mitigate the use of resources (Julkunen, 2001).

Feather and Bond (1983) found a positive association between levels of self-esteem and the structured purposeful use of time. Furthermore, unemployed respondents (compared with employed respondents) showed less engagement, less direction, and less routine in their use of time. Winefield, Tiggeman, and Winefield (1992) also found that engaging in purposeful activities relieves the stress associated with both unemployment and unsatisfactory employment.

## **Affective experiences of unemployed people**

The detrimental effects of unemployment on the psychological well-being of the unemployed have been firmly established in the literature (Hoare & Machin, 2006). The latent deprivation theory (Jahoda, 1982) is relevant for understanding the affective experiences (well-being) of unemployed people. She argued that unemployment is psychologically destructive, because it deprives individuals of the latent functions provided by employment. These latent functions, which are associated with the satisfaction of basic human needs, include the establishment of a daily time structure, provision of regular shared experience and contacts outside of the nuclear family, information about personal identity and status, a link with the collective purpose, and enforcement of regular activity. Jahoda (1982) maintained that time structure was the most important of the latent benefits. Some of the other important variables associated with well-being include self-perceptions of worth (e.g., self-esteem), various affective dispositions, social support, financial resources and time structure (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

As Jahoda (1984) asserted human beings have “deep seated needs for structuring their time use and perspective, for enlarging their social horizon, for participating in collective enterprises where they can feel useful, for knowing they have a recognized place in society, and for being active” (p. 298). Deprivation of these latent functions, supposedly, has a negative impact on psychological well-being. In spite of being criticized as too general, oversimplified, and irrefutable (e.g., Fryer & Payne, 1984), Jahoda’s deprivation approach has stimulated investigation. Studies have shown that unemployed people tend to report less access to the latent functions than employed, and that those with less access generally have lowered mental health (Creed & Macintyre, 2001; Creed, Muller, & Machin, 2001; Evans & Haworth, 1991; Haworth & Ducker, 1991; Wanberg et al., 1997). It seems that the latent functions might be partially provided through activities other than employment, such as meaningful leisure activities or through attending work-related training (Creed, Hicks, & Machin, 1998).

Job loss is a life event in which paid employment is involuntarily taken away from an individual (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Research conducted at both aggregate and individual levels suggests that unemployment, on average, has a negative impact on individuals’ psychological and physical well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Cross-sectional studies

have shown that unemployed groups tend to have lower levels of psychological and physical well-being than employed groups. Longitudinal studies have also followed individuals over time from unemployment back into employment, showing increases in psychological and physical well-being among those who become reemployed (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Again, studies have also followed individuals over time from employment into unemployment (showing decreases in psychological and physical well-being among workers who have become unemployed) (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

According to Lens, De Witte, and Feather (2005), studies conducted over the past two decades have mapped out the negative consequences of being unemployed. These studies revealed that unemployed people display lower self-esteem (Winefield, Winefield, Tiggeman, & Goldney, 1991) and lower well-being (Warr, Jackson, & Banks, 1988), and that unemployment is even associated with higher rates of child abuse (Justice & Duncan, 1977) and suicide (Argyle, 1989). Comparative analyses indicate that the type of job search motivation people experience is an important predictor of people's unemployment experience and well-being (Lens et al., 2005).

Cross-sectional comparisons of unemployed and employed individuals provide highly useful information regarding the association between unemployment and individual well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Unemployed individuals with lower mental health than the employed comparison group do not necessarily have lower mental health as a consequence of the unemployment. Instead, it may be the case that individuals with lower levels of mental health are more likely to lose their jobs or that individuals with higher levels of mental health are more likely to find new jobs (Mastekaasa, 1996; Warr et al., 1988).

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

A cross-sectional survey design was used to investigate the psychological experiences of unemployed people (Howell, 2008). The research is exploratory and descriptive because very limited research has been done on the experiences of unemployed people in South Africa. The aim of the research design is not to test hypotheses or causal relationships, but rather to record the experiences of unemployed people.

## Participants

The total population is a stratified sample of ( $N = 381$ ). The participants include Potchefstroom (mainly white = 21%), Promosa (Coloured = 54%) and Ikageng (African = 24%). The population consisted of both females and males, whether married, single, divorced, widow or widower. The majority of the respondents fell between the ages of 17 and 30 years (54,4%) with the minority (7,0%) of respondents older than 50 years.

The characteristics of the participants are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Participants (N=381)*

Variable	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	204	53,5
	Female	174	45,7
Language	Afrikaans	249	65,4
	African	124	33,8
	English	7	1,8
Marital status	Single	269	70,6
	Married	69	18,1
	Engaged	18	4,7
	Divorced	9	2,4
	Widow	7	1,8
Qualification	Widower	4	1,0
	Grade 12	352	92,4
	Lower than Grade 12	87	22,9
	3-year degree/diploma	17	4,5
	4-year degree/diploma	7	1,8
Age	5- to 7-year degree	4	1,0
	17-30 years	208	54,3
	31-40 years	92	24,1
	41-50 years	53	13,9
Employment History	50 years and older	26	7,0
	Occasionally employed	95	24,9
	Almost always employed	92	24,1
	Almost always unemployed	78	20,5
	Unemployed most of the time	77	20,2
Time unemployed	As much employed as unemployed	30	7,9
	4-11 years	146	38,3
	12-17 years	22	5,8
	20 or more years	11	2,9
	18-19 years	1	0,3

The majority of the participants (53,5%) were males. The majority of them (65,4%) preferred Afrikaans as the language they were going to use for participation. The majority of the participants (70,6%) were single. A total of 54,3% was between 17 and 30 of age. Furthermore, 24,9% of the participants were occasionally employed and 20,5% of them were almost always unemployed. A total of 38,3% was unemployed for between 4 and 11 years.

The time employed and the type of work that participants were employed in is reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Period Employed (N=381)*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Odd jobs	1 time in a week to 2 months	56	15,0
	2-6 months	43	11,2
	1-10 years	21	5,0
	7-10 months	4	1,1
	All the time	1	0,3
Seasonal jobs	1 day-4 months	13	3,2
	1-4 years	5	1,4
	5-8 months	4	1,0
	5-19 years	4	1,1
Occasional jobs	1 day-5 months	49	19,4
	5-9 months	24	5,3
	1-4 years	18	4,8
	5-18 years	4	1,2
Casual jobs	1-8 years	18	4,2
	3-9 months	9	2,5
	A day-2 months	5	1,5
Informal jobs	1-8 years	20	4,8
	1 day-4 months	9	2,4
	5-9 months	8	2,2

Regarding the results of the participants regarding the period they were unemployed, 15% of the participants were employed for odd jobs once in a period of between one week and 2 months, whereas 0,3% of them were employed all the time. Merely 3,2% of the participants were seasonally employed for a period of between one day and four months, while 1,1% of them were seasonally employed for a period of 5-19 years. A sum of 19,4% of participants were occasionally employed for between one day and five months, while 4,8% were employed for about 1-4 years. Conversely, 2,5% of the participants were employed casually for just 3-9 months, while only 1,5% of them were employed for a period of one day to two

months. It can also be seen that 4,8% of participants were employed informally for 1–8 years and 2,2% just for 5–9 months.

### Measuring instrument

The Experiences of Unemployment Questionnaire (EUQ) was developed to measure the participants' experiences, coping behaviour and well-being for the purposes of this study. The EUQ was developed based on the model and questionnaire of De Witte and Hooge (1997). In line with the conceptualisation in this study, the EUQ included questions about unemployed people's cognitive functioning (i.e. experiences of the importance of work), emotional functioning (affective well-being), and behavioural functioning (coping).

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section 1 gathered demographic information, including gender, home language, marital status and highest qualification. The three psychological experiences (i.e. importance of work, affective experiences, and application behaviour) were measured in the next three sections by a short-cut to the variable (i.e. a brief question summarising the issue), a list of items, and a question on the evolution of the specific concept, in order to find out whether it remained stable over time or not.

Section 2 focused on *affective experiences* (i.e. the affective well-being) of the unemployed person. The items were developed on the basis of Jahoda's (1982) model, and adapted based on research in the Netherlands and Belgium (De Witte & Hooge, 1997). The questions tap into Jahoda's (1982) "categories of experience." The participants were asked to indicate the degree to which their typical day was filled with content or activity (regular activity), their life was temporally organized and structured (time structure), they were meeting people and socialising (shared experience), they felt they were useful members of society (collective purpose), they were appreciated by other people (status), they felt confident and self-respected (personal identity). An example of a question is: "How does it feel to be unemployed?" which should be answered on a scale ranging from 1 (*very pleasant*) to 5 (*very unpleasant*). Another question was: "How often do you experience the following?: feelings of boredom, difficulty surviving financially, uncertainty about the future, save on personal expenditure, feeling lonelier and empty, experiencing conflict, decreased self-confidence and self-esteem, use of time, social support, not feeling part of society and feeling relaxed. A three-point scale was used varying from 1 (*often*) to 3 (*never*). Also included was a question

that taps into the temporal dimension of unemployment (“How do you feel to be unemployed?”), on a scale ranging from 1 (*feel better than before*) to 4 (*never felt bad*).

Section 3 focuses on the *importance of work*. Participants’ desire to be in paid employment was assessed through the Employment Commitment Scale of Warr, Cook, and Wall (1979). Typical questions are “How important is it to have a job?” with a scale ranging from 1 (*very important*) to 5 (*very unimportant*) and “How do you feel about not having a job at this moment?”, with a scale ranging from 1 (*job became more important*) to 2 (*job was never important*).

Section 4 focuses on *job application behaviour* (coping). Questions include “When would you like to find a job?” with a scale ranging from 1 (within a month) to 7 (never) and “When do you expect to find a job?” with a scale ranging from 1 (*within a month*) to 7 (*never*), were asked.

## **Procedure**

The study, which formed part of a larger project on experiences of unemployment in the North West Province, was initiated during 2005 after discussions with the executive mayors of various towns in the North West Province. During 2006, the project was planned and funding for the project was obtained from the National Research Foundation. During June 2006 North West University implemented the project. The project proposal was presented to the various executive mayors of towns to obtain the support and collaboration of the city councils. Literature searches were done and interviews as well as focus groups were conducted to develop the measuring instrument.

The English questionnaire was developed and translated into Afrikaans and Tswana by professional translators. A process of back-translation was followed to ensure that the meaning of the words in the different languages was the same. Thereafter, they were presented to experts to check for face validity and final changes were made to them. Three field workers (who were able to speak Afrikaans, English and/or Tswana) were used to administer the questionnaires. The researchers, assisted by language practitioners, trained the field workers prior to the start of fieldwork.

Fieldwork took place during July 2006. Unemployed people were randomly selected at via door-to-door selection in different areas of the town and neighbourhoods. Given the unique South African situation characterised by poor educational qualifications of most unemployed people, structured interviews were conducted with all participants by fieldworkers and their responses were recorded on the questionnaires. The data were captured on a computer programme and checked for mistakes. Finally, the data set was prepared for statistical analysis.

### Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out with the help of the SPSS program (SPSS Inc., 2006). Descriptive statistics (frequency tables) were used to analyse the data. A frequency table list items together according to the number of times, or frequency, that the items occur.

## RESULTS

### Affective experiences (well-being) of unemployed people

Table 3 shows the responses to the overall question which was used to measure the affective experience (well-being) of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province.

Table 3

#### *Overall Affective Experience of Unemployed People*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
How they feel when unemployed	Very unpleasant	227	59,6
	Unpleasant	91	23,9
	Neither pleasant nor unpleasant	28	7,3
	Pleasant	27	7,1
	Very pleasant	6	1,6

Table 3 shows that the participants experienced unemployment in the following way:

- Most of the participants (59,6%) reported that it felt very unpleasant to be unemployed. Furthermore, 23,9% of the participants reported that it felt unpleasant to be unemployed.
- Only 7,1% of the participants reported that it felt pleasant or very pleasant (1,6 %) to be unemployed.

Table 4 shows the specific experiences of unemployed people in more detail.

Table 4

*Specific Experiences of Unemployed People*

Item	Category					
	Often		Sometimes		Never	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Feelings of boredom	269	70,6	82	21,5	16	4,2
Difficulty in surviving financially	262	68,8	84	22,0	28	7,3
Save on personal expenditure	247	64,8	80	21,0	48	12,6
Uncertain about the future	236	61,9	101	26,5	34	8,9
Feel life is empty	207	54,3	116	30,4	49	12,9
Feel lonelier since unemployed	203	53,3	108	28,3	53	13,9
Have conflict at home	200	52,5	109	24,6	66	17,3
Know how to spend time	197	51,7	110	28,9	68	17,8
Decreased self-worth/self-esteem	187	49,1	120	31,5	64	16,8
Lost self-confidence	175	45,9	94	24,7	104	27,3
Is no part of society	171	44,9	120	31,5	62	16,3
Can finally do things	148	38,8	143	37,5	80	21,0
Feel relaxed	113	29,7	120	31,5	139	36,5
Social support	87	22,8	94	24,7	192	50,4

Table 4 shows that the participants had the following experiences of unemployment:

- Boredom. A total of 70,6% of the participants indicated that they often experience boredom, while an additional 21,5% experienced boredom sometimes.

- Difficulty in surviving financially. A total of 68,8% of the participants reported that they often find it difficult to survive financially, whereas only 7,3% never find it difficult to survive financially.
- Saving on personal expenditure. A total of 64,8% of the participants reported that they have to save on personal expenditure.
- Uncertainty about the future. Overall 61,9% of people often felt uncertain about their future.
- Feelings of emptiness and loneliness. A total of 54,3% of the participants often feel empty, with 30,4% feeling that way sometimes and 12,9% never feeling that way. Furthermore, 53,3% of the participants often feel lonely, while 28,3% sometimes feel lonely.
- Conflict at home. A total of 52,5% of the participants experience conflict at home often, while an additional 24,6% sometimes felt that conflict.
- Self-esteem and self-confidence. Most of the people (49,1%) often felt low self-esteem, with 31,5% experiencing it sometimes. A total of 45,9% often feel decreased self-confidence, with 24,7% sometimes feeling that.
- Not feeling part of society. A total of 44,9% felt that they were no longer part of the society, with 31,5% sometimes feeling that way.
- Use of time. A total of 51,9% of the participants often know how to spend their time on their own since being unemployed, while only 17,8% never knew. A total of 38,8% of them could often finally do things they wanted to do and only 21% felt they could never do things they wished to do.
- Feeling relaxed. A total of 36,5% of the participants never felt relaxed when unemployed, while 31,5 % sometimes felt relaxed. Furthermore, 29,7% of the participants often felt relaxed when not working.
- Social support. A total number of 50,4% indicated that they did not receive support from their family and friends, while 22,8% of the participants reported that they had the support of family and friends.

### **Importance of work for unemployed people**

Table 5 shows participants' experiences of the importance of work.

Table 5

*Importance of Work*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Feelings of not having a job	Job became more important than before	285	74,8
	Less important than before	34	8,9
	Not more or less important	32	8,4
	Never important	9	2,4

Table 5 shows the following perceptions:

- A total of 74,8% of the participants reported that having a job became more important than before.
- Only 8,9% of the participants reported that having a job became less important than before.

Table 6 provides more information about the importance of work for participants.

Table 6

*Importance of Work*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Feelings of not having a job at the moment	Feel worse than before	277	72,7
	Better nor worse than before	41	10,8
	Better than before	37	9,7
	Never felt bad at being unemployed	20	5,2

\* Some values are missing

The following elaborates more on the table above:

- A total of 72,7% of the participants reported that they felt worse than before because of not having a job. Furthermore, 10,8% of the participants felt neither better nor worse because of being unemployed.
- A total of 5,2% of the participants reported that they never felt bad being unemployed, while 9,7% reported that they felt better than before when they were unemployed.

Table 7 shows the reasons for the importance of work for participants

Table 7

*Reasons for the Importance of Work*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Meaningful	Agree	334	87,7
	Partly agree	29	7,6
	Disagree	15	3,9
Find importance in job	Agree	325	85,3
	Partly agree	38	10,0
	Disagree	12	3,1
Work is important	Agree	271	71,1
	Partly agree	82	21,5
	Disagree	21	5,5
Better to accept any job	Agree	269	70,6
	Partly agree	83	21,8
	Disagree	23	6,0
Enjoy leisure time	Agree	262	68,8
	Partly agree	60	15,7
	Disagree	52	13,6
Really be part of society	Agree	238	62,5
	Partly agree	91	23,9
	Disagree	43	11,3
Do not work to be occupied	Agree	126	33,1
	Partly agree	140	36,7
	Disagree	106	27,8

Table 7 shows the following regarding the reasons for the importance of work:

- A total of 87,7% of the participants reported that reason for work is to find meaning.
- Find importance in job. A sum of 85,3% of participants agreed that they found importance in being employed, while 10% partly agreed, and 3,1% disagreed.
- Work is important. A total of 71,1% of the participants reported that work is important to them, while 5,5% indicated that work is not important to them.

- Better to accept any job. A total of 70,6% of the participants agreed that they felt better to accept just any job than being unemployed, with 21,8% partly agreeing.
- Enjoy leisure time. A total amount of 68,8% of people agreed that they enjoy their leisure time, with only 15,7% partly agreeing and 13,6% disagreeing.
- Really be part of society. A total of 62,5% of the participants agreed that to be employed means that you will be part of society.
- Do not work to be occupied. A total of 33,1% of the participants agreed that they did not work to be occupied, while 36,7% partly agreed.

### **Job application behaviour (coping) of unemployed people**

The job application behaviours of unemployed individuals (which indicate their coping behaviour) are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

#### *Time and Job Application Behaviour*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Can finally spend time with family	Often	150	36,4
	Sometimes	160	42,0
	Never	59	15,5
Like the leisure time	Often	83	21,8
	Sometimes	143	37,5
	Never	147	38,6

The above table can be explained in the following way:

- Can finally spend time with family. A total of 36,4% of the participants reported that they often felt they could finally do things with their family, while an additional 42% sometimes feel that way.
- Like the leisure time. A total number of 38,6% of the participants never like the leisure time as indicated above, while 37,5% sometimes liked the leisure time, and only 21,8% often liked the leisure time.

Table 9 shows the responses of participants to a question directed at the temporal aspect of job application behaviour (i.e. whether they are making more or less efforts to find a job). 0

Table 9

*Efforts and Job Application Behaviour*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Making more or less efforts finding job	More often than before	229	60,1
	As often as before	71	18,6
	Less often than before	58	15,2
	Never gone looking for a job	14	3,7

Table 9 shows that 60% of the participants made more efforts than before to find jobs, while 18,6% made efforts as often as before to look for jobs, but 15,2% made fewer efforts than before and 3,7% had never gone looking for a job at all.

The job application behaviours of unemployed individuals (which indicate their coping behaviour) are reported in Table 10.

Table 10

*Job Application Behaviour: Job Search Behaviour*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Asked anyone if work available	10 times or more	181	47,5
	3-5 times	78	20,5
	Once or twice	47	12,3
	6-9 times	43	11,5
	Never	24	16,3
Searched for advertisements	10 times or more	175	45,9
	Once or twice	51	13,4
	Never	51	13,4
	6-9 times	49	12,9
	3-5 times	48	12,6
Submitted applications	10 times or more	160	42,0
	3-5 times	65	17,1
	Once or twice	63	16,5
	6-9 times	50	13,1
	Never	34	8,9
Enquired if work available	10 times or more	152	39,9
	3-5 times	83	21,8
	Once or twice	63	16,5
	6-9 times	56	14,7
	Never	16	4,2
Spontaneously presented themselves to employer	10 times or more	126	33,1
	Once or twice	107	28,9
	3-5 times	71	18,6
	6-9 times	35	9,5
	Never	35	9,2

Table 10 shows the following regarding the job application behaviour of unemployed individuals in this study:

- Enquired if work available. A total of 47,5% had asked anyone if work was available 10 times or more, and 39,9% had enquired if work was available, with 20,5% asking 3–5 times and 16,3% never asked if work was available.

- Searched for advertisements. A total of 45,9% of participants had searched for advertisements 10 times or more, while 13,4% had only searched once or twice.
- Submitting applications. Only 42,0% of the participants had submitted applications 10 times or more, with only 17,1% submitting 3–5 times, while 8,9% had never submitted applications

Table 11 shows the reasons why participants find it difficult to find a job.

Table 11

*Job Application Behaviour: Difficulty in Finding a Job*

Item	Category			
	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Too little work available	265	69,6	109	28,6
Unemployed for too long	257	67,5	118	31,0
Not sure where to look for a job	211	56,2	146	40,9
Employers don't hire my ethnic group	202	53,0	165	43,3
Employer's demands are too high	200	52,5	172	45,1
Too little work experience	195	51,2	178	46,7
Still take care of family	194	50,9	178	46,7
No proper training	173	45,4	194	50,9
Not sure how to apply	164	43,0	205	53,8
Cannot do job as before	125	32,8	246	64,6
Cannot find day care for children	115	30,2	256	67,2
Demand of job too much	113	29,7	253	66,4
Not in good health	90	23,6	280	73,5
Too old	51	13,4	320	84,0

Table 11 is explained in more detail in the following way:

- Too little work available, and little experience. A total of 69,6% of the participants agreed that little work is available. Furthermore, 51,2% indicated that they have little work experience.

- Not sure where to look. A total of 56,2% of the participants reported that they did not know where to look when searching for a job.
- No hiring for ethnic group. A total of 53% of the participants indicated they were not hired because of their ethnic group.
- Employer's demands high. A total of 52,5% of the participants reported that the employer's demands are too high.
- Take care of family. A total of 50,9% of the participants have to take care of the family.
- No proper training. A total of 45,4% of the participants reported that a lack of training was a reason for their unemployment.
- Not sure how to apply. A total of 43% of the participants reported that they were not sure how to apply for a job.
- Cannot do job as before. A total of 32,8% of the participants stated that they could not do their job as well as before.
- Not found day care for children. A total of 30,2% of the participants had not found day care for their children and stated this as a reason why they were unemployed.
- Demands of job too much. A total of 29,7% of the participants reported that job demands were high, which was why they were unemployed.
- Not in good health. A total of 23,6% of the participants reported that they were not in good health, which led to unemployment.
- Too old. A total of 13,4% of the participants reported they were too old to be employed.

Table 12 represents expectancy job behaviour.

Table 12

*Job Application Behaviour (Expectancy job behaviour)*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Time preferred working	Within a month	332	87,1
	Within 3 months	27	7,1
	Never	8	2,1
	Within 6 months	5	1,3
	Within 6 months to 1 year	4	1,0
	Within 1 year to 2 years	3	0,8
	After 2 years	2	0,5
	Expecting to work	Within a month	288
Within 3 months		44	11,5
Never		15	3,9
Within 6 months		12	3,1
6 months to 1 year		9	2,4
After 2 years		6	1,6
Within 1 year to 2 years		3	0,8
Anything to find during the last month	Every day, go out ask for a job	161	42,3
	Once, twice or three times ask for a job	132	34,6
	Once or twice a month ask for a job	59	15,5
	Not looking for a job	24	6,3

\* Some values are missing

The above table is explained in the following way:

- Time preferred before finding work. A total of 87,1% of the participants indicated that they preferred finding a job within a month, with 7,1% in three months' time.
- Expecting to work. A total of 75,6% of the participants indicated that they expected to find work within a month, while 11,5% expected to find work in three months' time.
- Anything to find during the last month. Only 42,3% of participants asked for a job every day, with 34,6% asking once, twice or three times, 15,5% asking once or twice and 6,3% of the participants not looking for a job at the moment.

## DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences, coping mechanisms and the well-being of unemployed people in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province. Regarding the affective experiences (well-being) of participants, the results showed that unemployment is experienced as unpleasant by more than 80 percent of the participants. Boredom, uncertainty about the future, concerns about financial matters, emptiness, and conflict seem to contribute to the unpleasantness. Concerning the cognitive experiences of participants (importance of work), the results showed that almost 96 percent of the participants regarded work as important, especially because work provides meaning. The results clearly indicated that participants would like to find jobs within a month.

The results showed that unemployment is clearly experienced as unpleasant by almost all of the participants, and only a few experience it as pleasant. Negative affective experiences include boredom, finding it difficult to survive financially, uncertainty, loneliness and emptiness. Positive experiences include time with family and doing things that are valued (but only 40% of the participants). These findings are in line with international findings about the topic (e.g. De Witte & Hooge, 1997). The profile regarding the affective experiences of unemployment in South-Africa is thus not really different from that found internationally.

The findings regarding affective experiences associated with unemployment are in line with the latent deprivation theory (Jahoda, 1982), which argues that unemployment is psychologically destructive, because it deprives individuals of the latent functions provided by employment. These latent functions, which are associated with the satisfaction of basic human needs, include the establishment of a daily time structure, provision of regular shared experience and contacts outside of the nuclear family, information about personal identity and status, a link with the collective purpose, and enforcement of regular activity. The results regarding affective experiences of unemployed people are in line with findings of other international studies. These studies showed that deprivation of the latent functions is associated with low self-esteem, poor psychological health, and reduced life satisfaction (see Creed & Macintyre, 2001; Creed, Muller, & Machin, 2001; Evans & Haworth, 1991; Haworth & Ducker, 1991; Wanberg et al., 1997).

Jahoda (1982) maintained that time structure was the most important of the latent benefits. Indeed boredom proved to be the experience with the highest frequency in this study. A study done by Møller (1993) also concluded that some respondents often or sometimes “just sit around”, while most of them admitted that they were bored. Boredom and despair were often associated with the descriptions of respondents’ own activity schedule (Møller, 1993).

The financial implication of unemployment was also a very important theme. A large percentage of participants reported that they find it difficult to survive financially and that they have to save on personal expenditure. This is due to the fact that they have no money to fulfil their basic needs. The example is illustrated by Møller (1993), who argues that the respondents described how unemployed people borrowed, begged and stole to make ends meet, where reference was made to “borrowing” from family with the intention of returning the loan. However, it appeared that loans would effectively become gifts when the unemployed were not in a position to repay the amounts borrowed (Møller, 1993). Singer et al. (2001) have argued that if a person is unemployed, they have little money, they cannot afford to do things and they cannot provide financial help to others.

The loss of self-esteem was another issue that was experienced by the participants in this study. The loss of self-esteem among the unemployed is thought to be a reflection of both society and the individual, and the loss of it may be felt more intensely when one’s self-definition is derived mainly from one’s occupation (Møller, 1993). The study confirmed that people need to work in order to save on personal expenditure and according to Møller (1993), some people had a regular source of income from either employed relatives or self-employment. And they stated that their household expenditure was limited to basic necessities (Møller, 1993). That is why it was indicated in the current study that people argued that they have to save on personal expenditure.

The study also established that social support was one of the factors people experienced, and most of them experienced it negatively. In the study done by Kelvin and Jarrett (1985), the family see the unemployed as ‘having a problem’; to that extent he is a problem to them and they may see him as ‘less-than-the-man-he-was’, sympathetically or disdainfully, depending on earlier issues. However, other people who are unemployed receive support from friends and seek help from them because studies also concluded that in general, unemployment stress is exacerbated by a low sense of social support (Linn et al., 1985). Gore (1978) found that the

rural unemployed evidenced a significantly higher level of social support than did the urban unemployed. Where domestic circumstances were positive, the family may continue to provide loving supports for its members regardless of the bad times (Møller, 1993).

A total of 70 percent of the participants reported that they would do any job rather than to be unemployed. It is seen as important to work in order to enjoy leisure time and to be part of society. Jobs have become more important than before, according to the participants. Almost all the participants regarded work as important, and most regarded work as meaningful. It means for them that they have to work in order to find purpose in life and are motivated by a will to find meaning. Frankl (1985) stated that finding meaning in life is important for individuals' well-being. Work is regarded as an important factor in finding meaning in life.

Participants in the current study showed that they felt worse than before when unemployed, and only a few never felt bad at being unemployed. In her study, Møller (1993) argued that the euphoria and short-lived feeling of freedom after losing one's job may be perceived as independence and liberation from the many constraints of working life. However, where work is a central value and gives meaning to all other aspects of life, job loss may have devastating effects (Møller, 1993). That is why most of the participants felt worse at being unemployed.

Regarding job application behavior, the results showed that most participants would like to find a job within the next month and they also expect to find a job. It is alarming that almost 78 percent of the participants asked for a job once a week or more. Most of them asked friends and acquaintances for employment information, but unemployed people also reported that they looked for advertisements.

There are four possible interpretations for this puzzling finding. First, it is possible that participants answered the question in a social desirable way. Second, it might be possible that they experienced unrealistic optimism. Third, it is possible that unemployed people feel that others and the society expect of them to find a job soon. Fourth, time might be used in a different perspective, with a different meaning.

In the findings above, most of the participants have made more efforts than before to find work, which means that people desperately search for a job, regardless of what kind of a job it is. Some of the participants had asked any person they could if work was available. Other

studies also confirmed that people in search of a job had stated that their search would become as important as they wanted it to be (Van Hooft et al., 2004). In addition, there is the 'contact' in the shape of a third person, a relative or mutual acquaintance, who becomes an intermediary between the job-seeker and employer (Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985). This is true because in the current study, people go to their friends and simultaneously present themselves to employers to find jobs.

It seems that people are concerned if their applications will be replied to. Van Hooft et al. (2004) give the example that people were worried if they would be able to write letters of application or if they would be able to find jobs. In the current study, people also have searched advertisements for jobs. According to Kelvin and Jarrett (1985), sources of information about jobs are either formal or informal. Formal sources include advertisements, and public and private job-placement agencies. Thus, people search for these in order to find suitable jobs that will satisfy them at the end of the day.

The reasons why people found it difficult to find a job was also studied. Unemployed people reported various reasons for the difficulty to find a job. First, a lack of opportunities and a long unemployment period were mentioned as reasons. In addition, 53 percent of the participants reported that the demands of employers are too high. Second, it seems that participants are unsure where to look for jobs and how to apply. Third, a lack of skills and work experience made it difficult to apply for a job. About 24 percent of the participants reported that poor health makes it difficult to apply for a job. Family problems (e.g. taking care of family members and children) were reported as reasons why participants experience difficulty to find a job. It is a concern that both the efficacy expectations and outcome expectancies (Feather, 1992) seem to be negative in the case of most participants. This might impact negatively on the well-being of unemployed people.

People who were unemployed argued that in spite of the fact that they have been unemployed for too long, employers do not hire people of their ethnic group. A total of 53 percent of the participants reported that employers do not hire individuals from their ethnic group. This study included white, black, and Coloured people. Discussions between unemployed people and fieldworkers showed that each of these groups had concerns about ethnicity and employment. Whites are often not appointed in jobs (especially on local, provincial, and national government levels) because of employment equity legislation and practices.

Furthermore, it seems that many Coloured people are unsure whether they qualify for employment equity appointments. On the other hand, blacks experience that organisations owned by whites withhold jobs from them by introducing unreasonably high criteria for appointment. Kingdon and Knight (2004) reported that unemployed African persons are more than twice as likely as whites never to have had work. While this could be partly due to the inferior employment-enhancing characteristics of Africans *vis-à-vis* whites, it could also be partly due to racial discrimination in employers' hiring practices (Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

This study had various limitations. First, the study was done in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province. Therefore findings cannot be generalised to other towns in the province or South Africa. Future studies should make use of more representative samples. Second, this study made use of a cross-sectional design to study the effects of unemployment on people. Longitudinal studies are needed to study the causal effects of unemployment on unemployed individuals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, three recommendations are made. First, there is an urgent need to expand the cover of social security in South Africa. The injection of cash into poor households is probably one of the most empowering ways of assisting poor people to strengthen their own coping mechanisms. Second, programmes should be implemented to stimulate economic growth and skills development. Investment in infrastructure has a huge potential to redress the high unemployment and poverty levels in South Africa and also to correct the skill shortages (Thwala, 2008). Third, programmes should be implemented to assist unemployed people to cope with unemployment and to improve application behaviour. The government can also provide training to people who really want to be employed in order to enhance the skills that they will need to implement in the work situation, and this will assist them in order to better cope with unemployment. This will be due to the fact that productive activities lack in the lives of the people and when training is given, people will know how to put their skills to work in the working environment. Therefore skills training programmes should be provided and people can also start to establish the idea of small business by probably receiving funds from the government.

Unemployment is everyone's problem because it also affects many people who are themselves employed because they have to take care of other family members who are unemployed, which is a burden to those people who have to assist the unemployed. Møller (1993) argues that the jobless cannot be left to deal with unemployment on their own, and that the most obvious solution to unemployment is job creation. But unfortunately this is the solution that is also most difficult to achieve (Møller, 1993).

It is recommended that future research include further investigation regarding the experiences of unemployed people, their job application behaviour and coping, as well as their subjective well-being in other contexts and with larger samples, or even by using longitudinal studies to better establish experiences of unemployment and the causal relations related to these experiences. More research is needed to determine the reliability and the validity of the Experiences of Unemployment Questionnaire in samples in South Africa.

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## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter conclusions drawn regarding the results of the empirical study are given, limitations are pointed out and recommendations for future research are made.

#### 3.1 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn with regard to the specific objectives that were outlined in the beginning:

##### *Conceptualisation of experiences, coping and well-being of unemployment*

Unemployment is a major and serious issue that is bad in every part of the world and it remains a major problem in industrialised societies (Lange, 1998). Such a subject is so important that it needs no apology. Unemployment is also remarkably complicated (Lange, 1998). The concept of experiences of unemployment contributes to our understanding of why a certain amount of people experience this unemployment so badly, which this is due to the fact that we live in a globalised world where everyone need to work and to become part of economic growth. This is why they feel so emotionally depressed and bored – they feel that they are not part of that growth and society.

De Witte (2006) argues in the literature that unemployment has negative consequences for the health and well-being of people. There are psychological, physical and social consequences for health and well-being. The psychological consequences are mental health and life satisfaction, as well as anxiety, hostility, irritation and depression. These are the experiences of unemployed people. The physical consequences include health and illness, psychosomatic complaints (headaches, sleeping and appetite), risky health behaviours (smoking, alcohol, even not brushing one's teeth), suicide (direct and indirect paths) and elevated use of medication. The social consequences include social isolation, fragmentation, aggression, violence, less social support and negative impact on children and a partner (De Witte, 2006).

Estimates of the extent of current unemployment problem in South Africa vary widely (Cawker & Whiteford, 1993). These variances are mainly attributable to differences of opinion about what actually constitutes the state of unemployment and the difficulties in measuring it (Cawker & Whiteford, 1993).

A simple definition of unemployment would be that it exists whenever the demand of labour (DL) in the economy is unable to match the supply of labour (SL) in that same economy (Cawker & Whiteford, 1993). Many of the difficulties arise from the fact that the concept of unemployment includes the following:

- a condition (being without employment);
- an attitude (a desire for employment); and
- an activity (searching for employment) (Cawker & Whiteford, 1993).

Fundamentally, social psychological study of the effects of unemployment is concerned with one of the several classes of non-economic consequences of this particular economic condition (Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985). Research on the social psychological effects of unemployment is therefore of very little direct use to the unemployed and it is a matter of providing the unemployed with 'insight', which might help them indirectly. Such findings might also help other people understand the problems of their unemployed relatives, friends and neighbours (Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985).

#### *The affective experiences of unemployed people and the importance of work*

People who are unemployed can be affected either psychologically or even physically by unemployment. The latent deprivation theory (Jahoda, 1982) is relevant for understanding the affective experiences (well-being) of unemployed people. Jahoda, 1982 argued that unemployment is psychologically destructive, because it deprives individuals of the latent functions provided by employment. This means that people cannot support themselves and they cannot satisfy themselves in terms of having basic needs because they do not have money regarding that. This is because in the current study, the financial implication of unemployment was also a very important theme noted. A large percentage of participants reported that they find it difficult to survive financially and that they have to save on personal expenditure. This is due to the fact that they have no money to fulfil their basic needs.

Therefore, the people need social support from their families in order for them to have those basic needs to be fulfilled. Hence the family plays an important part in the lives of the unemployed person. It seems likely that the nature of the family will have an affect on the experiences of the unemployed person, (Gallie & Paugam, 2000). For instance, it seems probable that an unemployed person who lives alone, one who lives with parents or the one who has responsibility for seven children will not have the same experience (Gallie & Paugam, 2000). Hence people in the current study have different experiences regarding unemployment, of which one of them is the need for social support from their families. In considering the possible impact of family on the unemployment experiences, the first factor that needs to be taken into account is a degree of stability of the family as an institution, (Gallie & Paugam, 2000). This therefore shows that people definitely experience unemployment very negatively.

Singer, Stacey, and Ritchie (2001) studied the experiences of unemployed individuals in terms of four dimensions, namely economic, social, psychological and family consequences. Regarding the economic dimension, unemployed individuals typically have little money, therefore they cannot afford to do certain things and they cannot provide financial help to others (Singer et al., 2001). The social dimension of unemployment entails that people look down on the unemployed, they become a burden to society and social status is low (Singer et al., 2001). As far as the psychological dimension is concerned, unemployed individuals do not like themselves very much, they are bored and they are afraid of the future. Finally, concerning the family dimension, it seems that life is difficult in the families of the unemployed, they have many family worries and the family morale is low (Singer et al., 2001).

It is thus concluded that, in the current study, unemployment is clearly experienced negatively and is very unpleasant. The negative experiences of unemployment include boredom, financial strain, making it hard to save on personal expenditure for the necessities at home, and also being lonely and having feelings of emptiness. The literature review clarified that preadolescents attached greater importance to the consequences of unemployment, such as lowered self-esteem or self-worth and boredom (Despierre and Sorel 1979).

In the recent study, it was concluded that almost every one of the participants regarded work as important and that they feel worse when not having a job. The study also confirmed that work provided meaning and was meaningful. Meaning can be found in an unalterable, painful situation, by facing it bravely and with dignity, thus transforming the suffering into an achievement (Frankl, 1985). It was also concluded that participants indicated that they would do any job rather than to be unemployed. It is also difficult for people to find jobs because of a lack of opportunities and long periods of unemployment.

Hence the reasons why people find work so important is that the Work-role centrality (also referred to as employment commitment) indicates the importance of work to an individual's sense of self (Mckee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). Work-role centrality may stem from Protestant work ethic socialisation or from a belief that work is central to one's life and satisfaction. Individuals with high work-role centrality find meaning and fulfilment through work. In the recent study, reasons why people find it important to work is that they really want to be part of the society, as well as finding meaning in life. This is because for most individuals, basic life requirements are met through employment (Linn, Sandifer, & Stein, 1985). However, work does more than supply the means for meeting physical needs; it can also satisfy creative urges, promote self-esteem, and provide an avenue for achievements and self-realisation (Linn et al., 1985).

Consequently, there is a limited research regarding how people experience unemployment in the North West Province because the literature review is limited in terms of the experiences of unemployment in the Potchefstroom area of the North West province. More research is needed to confirm if unemployment is also actually experienced as very unpleasant in other areas of the province.

#### *The analysis of job application behaviour, coping and well-being*

According to the evaluation of the literature, in unemployment research, coping is frequently confused with outcome, implying that certain strategies are better than others, and that coping is more or less a problem-solving strategy (Julkunen, 2001). There is an important distinction here between problem-focused and symptom-focused coping (Leana & Feldman, 1992). Examples of problem-focused coping related to job loss are seeking a new job or getting retrained in a new job. Symptom-focused coping behaviour consists of efforts to decrease the

depression or loneliness often associated with job loss. Examples include joining social support groups or community groups (Leana & Feldman, 1992).

Sources of information about jobs falls into two main categories, formal and informal (Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985). Formal sources are advertisements and informal sources are family, friends and general personal contacts. There is one slightly ambiguous third source, namely direct approaches by an unemployed individual to potential employers. And it is therefore important to distinguish between two main classes of job-seekers: the skilled or otherwise qualified, and the unskilled and unqualified (Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985). There are, therefore, two generally very different senses of 'personal' contacts as a means of finding work. There is first the direct approach to an employer which is 'personal' only in that it is distinct from being made by an agency or in response to an advertisement. Secondly, there is the 'contact' in the form of a third person, a relative or mutual acquaintance, who becomes an intermediary between the job-seeker and the employer (Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985).

Most of the participants in the current study would like to find jobs within a month and they also expect to find jobs sooner. A lot of the participants have enquired if work was available from their friends or family members and have spontaneously presented themselves to employers. And people use advertisements in the study to find jobs. Yet it is still difficult for them to look for jobs, and somehow age affects this behaviour. It is indicated from the literature that the young people are the ones who find jobs much more quickly than the old. It is argued by Kingdon and Knight (2004) that the young are also better able to afford unemployed job-search because they have fewer financial commitments than do older persons. Moreover, they may be more ignorant about what their skills can command in the labour market; i.e., they may have higher reservation wages (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). This is because the result of the study confirmed that some people felt that they were too old to work and that they have no skills so far in making it to the workplace.

Cross-sectional studies have shown that unemployed groups tend to have lower levels of psychological and physical well-being than employed groups. Longitudinal studies have also followed individuals over time from unemployment back into employment, showing increases in psychological and physical well-being among those who become reemployed (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Also, studies have followed individuals over time from

employment into unemployment, showing decreases in psychological and physical well-being among such unemployed (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

There has been a limited amount of research on the well-being of unemployed people in the North West Province and for that reason, it is concluded that research is needed to determine how well people live under conditions of unemployment, not only in Potchefstroom area, but also in other areas of the North West Province.

The average household in the North West Province earned R37 287 in 2000. White agricultural households in general earn more than their non-agricultural counterparts, but the same is not true of African and Coloured agricultural households (StatsSA, 2003). The relatively high income figure for agricultural households is clearly skewed by the exceptionally high income levels reported by white households. Coloured agricultural households are worst off, earning on average only R6 000 per annum, compared to R22 287 earned by African households. White agricultural households earned substantially more (R626 363) (StatsSA, 2003).

Unemployment varies dramatically by race: Africans face unemployment rates of 41% but the rate for whites is only 6%. Unemployment decreases by age, ranging from 51% for the youngest group to 17% for the eldest group (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). The incidence of unemployment, importantly, also varies by region, gender and education. For example, people with higher education face an unemployment rate of 6% but those with primary education or less have an unemployment rate of close to 40% (Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

It is thus concluded by the current study that only 21% of white people, 24% of Africans and about 54% of Coloureds experience unemployment. The study is important in that it indicates the need for research based on the different demographic groups experiencing unemployment in other parts of the province, so as to obtain accurate results for the province as a whole.

### **3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The following limitations regarding the research have been identified:

- This study was done in the Potchefstroom area of the North West Province. Therefore findings cannot be generalised to other towns in the province or in South Africa. Future studies should make use of more representative samples in other towns of the province as well as the whole of South Africa.
- A need exists for more extensive research on other variables such as time and job application behaviour because the samples used were limited to the current study.
- This study made use of a cross-sectional design to study the effects of unemployment on people. Longitudinal studies are needed to study the causal effects of unemployment on unemployed individuals.

### 3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that future research should include further investigation into the experiences of unemployed people, their job application behaviour and coping as well as their subjective well-being in other context. This has to be done with larger samples or in longitudinal studies to establish more experiences of unemployment and the causal relations related to these experiences.

The findings of this study have important implications for the community and the government in assisting unemployed persons in order for the latter to also feel part of society. This will in turn help motivate unemployed people. The government can implement programmes to assist unemployed people in coping with unemployment and to improve job application behaviour. There could also be training programmes provided by the government to also enhance unemployed people's self-worth. These programmes will stimulate skills development and eventually result in economic growth as more people become employed through this intervention at the societal level by creating a better ability among the unemployed to access job opportunities. The community can help the unemployed by providing support, yet the latter should be reminded that unemployment is not a good thing, even if there is assistance.

There is an urgent need to expand the cover of societal security where there could be an injection of cash or other resources into poor households, which can be one of the most

empowering ways of assisting poor people in strengthening their own coping mechanisms, with the unemployed nevertheless keeping in mind that they should continue looking for jobs. This will help unite the community, with everyone sharing the common goal of finding gainful employment.

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