



# UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

*"I see myself in a different light":*

Participants' views of a group occupational therapy programme to promote wellbeing during unemployment.

<b>Student:</b>	0128481
<b>Research Supervisor:</b>	Alison Warren
<b>Module:</b>	OT6054
<b>Module Leader:</b>	Dr. Judi Pettigrew
<b>Wordcount:</b>	4,848 words

## Contents

Abstract.....	3
Key words.....	3
Introduction .....	3
Literature Review.....	4
Impact of Unemployment on Health .....	5
Interventions Targeted at the Unemployed .....	5
Evaluation of the Participants' Experience .....	6
Methods.....	7
Study design.....	7
Work Ready Group Research Project.....	7
Participants .....	7
Ethical considerations.....	8
Procedure.....	8
Findings .....	9
Change .....	9
Self-evaluation .....	10
Group support.....	11
Recommendations from Participants .....	11
Discussion.....	12
Limitations .....	15
Recommendations .....	15
Conclusion.....	16
Acknowledgements.....	18
References .....	18

## Abstract

Unemployment rates in Ireland are high and have risen, despite the economic recession officially ending in 2010. This study investigates the participants' experience of a group occupational therapy programme to promote wellbeing during unemployment. The participants completed an eight week group programme which draws upon the understanding of the relationship between work, health and wellbeing. There is a paucity of research within the profession of occupational therapy of interventions targeted at maintaining the wellbeing of the unemployed. Previous studies have neglected to give attention to the participants' experience of such interventions. In this qualitative study, five participants completed an individual, semi-structured interview. Three main themes: change, self-evaluation and group support evolved in the thematic analysis, which contributed to the success of the programme from the participants' perspective. The programme supports change in patterns of thinking and doing, and facilitates self-evaluation. The group support is an important element of the programme. The participants made several recommendations to guide similar groups in the future. The findings of this study highlight the key role occupational therapy can play in supporting people to maintain their physical and mental health during unemployment, and ensuring they are ready to re-enter the workforce when employment becomes available.

## Key words

*Unemployment, occupational therapy, health and wellbeing, group intervention, participants' experience, evaluation*

## Introduction

Ireland experienced an economic recession from 2008 until 2010 (Press Association 2010), and returned to recession during the last three months of 2011 (RTE 2012). Unemployment rates are high and have continued to increase since December 2010, to the current rate of 14.2% (CSO 2012). With high unemployment rates, and daily reports of job losses and business closures in the press, it is essential to analyse, and understand the impact of unemployment on health and wellbeing, and to identify how occupational therapy as a profession can support the needs of this population.

Occupational therapy is founded on the health promoting benefits of engagement in meaningful occupation (AOTA 2008; Wilcock 1993; Wilcock 2006; WFOT 2012). Research in this area has identified the link between occupation, health and wellbeing and concludes that engagement in social, productive and physical activity are all independently associated with survival, health and wellbeing (Clark et al 1997; Clark et al 2011; Glass et al 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that unemployment is linked to poor physical and psychological health.

Contributing to society through employment is highly valued (Pierce 2003), and occupational therapists understand the disruption and devastating consequences unemployment has on daily routines (McKee-Ryan et al 2005). With its client-centred approach, and unique focus on occupation, occupational therapy is well suited to assist people cope with the negative effects of unemployment (Douthwaite 1994; Yerxa et al 1989).

This study is one part of a larger study by the Occupational Therapy Department in the University of Limerick for people who are unemployed. The overall intervention aims to promote wellbeing during unemployment, and ensure people maintain their physical and mental health, so that they are able to re-enter the work force when employment opportunities arise. This study focuses on gaining an insight to the participants' experience of the intervention in order to evaluate its effectiveness, to add to the knowledge base of the profession, and to guide future interventions targeted at this population.

## Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the participants' experience of a group occupational therapy intervention to promote wellbeing during unemployment. During the literature search, the date parameters were set to 1980-2012: research from this era is pertinent to the current economic climate because most countries globally were gripped by recession and high unemployment during this time (Allen 2000). Only articles primarily concerned with unemployment, and not any diagnosis or disability which impacted employment status were reviewed. The literature reviewed included: the effects of unemployment on health, interventions for the unemployed, and studies which addressed the individual's experience or evaluation of interventions.

## **Impact of Unemployment on Health**

Unemployment is linked to poor physiological and psychological health, as concluded by national and international studies (Brown et al 2003; Bundy 2011; Korpi 2001; McCrea 1996; Platt and Kreitman 1984; Preti and Miotto 1999). The health of those unemployed is poorer than their employed counterparts. There are higher rates of suicide, parasuicide, depression and lower levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction among the unemployed (Blakely et al 2003; Clark and Oswald 1994; Dooley et al 1995; Feather and Bond 1983; Lester and Yang 2003; Martella and Mass 2000; Paul and Moser 2009; Platt and Kreitman 1984; Preti and Miotto 1999). Furthermore, unemployment can cause diagnosable mental illness, which in turn reduces the chances of returning to work (Paul and Moser 2009).

Employment, can provide both latent (hidden) and manifest (financial) benefits (Jahoda 1981). The hidden benefits include: imposing time structure on the day, encouraging activity, allowing individuals increased status, collective purpose and social contact with peers. Jahoda (1981), a social psychologist concluded that among the latent benefits of employment, the loss of time structure has the greatest effect on psychological wellbeing of the unemployed. In contrast, other studies conclude it is the loss of financial reward that has the greatest effect on psychological wellbeing (Creed and MacIntyre 2001; Matoba et al 2003).

Researchers identify a critical period for adapting to unemployment which occurs immediately after job loss; the length of unemployment is proportional to a deterioration of subjective wellbeing and psychological health (Brenner and Bartell 1983; Hepworth 1980; McKee-Ryan et al 2005). Unemployment is complex, and it affects not only the individual, but their families and communities (McKee-Ryan et al 2005). Research, however, suggests that not all unemployed individuals are equally unhappy, as determined by society's expectations and levels of unemployment in local areas and (Clark and Oswald 1994; Stravrova et al 2011).

## **Interventions Targeted at the Unemployed**

A literature search highlights a dearth of research available within the profession of occupational therapy, aimed at re-employment and reducing mental distress of those who are unemployed. However, research of this group of people exists in other professions, particularly in organisational psychology and career counselling.

In the field of organisational psychology, Audhoe et al (2010) completed a systematic review of vocational interventions aiming to improve work participation and reduce mental distress for unemployed adults. Of the five studies which met their inclusion criteria, only one randomised control trial, deemed to be of fair quality (Vinokur et al 1995), reported significant effect on decreasing psychological distress. None of the studies reported a significant effect on re-employment. Audhoe et al (2010) concludes that there is weak evidence to support the use of vocational interventions to improve work participation, and limited evidence that they reduce mental distress for the unemployed.

Proudfoot and Guest (1997) used cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) in a group training programme for long-term unemployed (>12 months). They investigated effects on measures of mental health, job-seeking, and job-finding using participants randomly assigned to a CBT group, or to a control programme. Significant improvements in the general health, and measures of mental health were recorded post-intervention among those assigned to the CBT group compared to those in the control group.

### **Evaluation of the Participants' Experience**

Extensive research of the literature on this topic reveals that the participants' views of the success of an intervention receive little attention. The participant is the most important component of any intervention (Sumison 2006). Understanding the participants' experiences can ensure the intervention is client-centred, determine if the goals were met, and evaluate the quality of the intervention (Letts et al 1999). Gaining an insight of the participants' experience of an intervention, can guide the therapists, and other key stakeholders, in designing and implementing future interventions.

Research acknowledges that unemployment affects physical and psychological wellbeing, but the findings of interventions aimed at alleviating these negative consequences are inconclusive and conflicting. The review of existing literature leads to the conclusion that, with the increasing rates of unemployment in Ireland, there is a need for greater research and evaluation of interventions aimed at maintaining the health and wellbeing of the unemployed, particularly within in the profession of occupational therapy. This study aims to add to the current knowledge base by describing the participants' evaluation of a group occupational therapy programme.

## Methods

### Study design

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed for this study as it generates deeper, richer data which can address issues of quality, and the participants' experience (Taylor 2007). A phenomenological approach enables the researcher to explore the experiences of individuals, and insights gained can be used to reflect upon and evaluate practices. Individual, semi-structured interviews, lasting up to 90 minutes, were deemed the most suitable approach as it allowed the interviewer guide the participant to discuss certain topics, yet, was flexible in format allowing for clarification to be sought, and the opportunity to explore topics in greater detail (Taylor 2007).

### Work Ready Group Research Project

The Work Ready Group Research Project is an eight week group occupational therapy programme for people who are unemployed, and aims to promote living well with unemployment. Each session had a discussion and activity based focus. The sessions included: understanding the benefits of activity and occupation, establishing structure and routine, community exploration, stress management, physical activity, career exploration and job seeking/job skill development. The programme was facilitated by the Occupational Therapy Department in the University of Limerick, and this study is one strand of the larger research project. The researcher of this study collaborated with a co-researcher throughout the study; both researchers worked on separate studies with different research aims. The co-researcher aimed to explore the lifestyle change in the participants post intervention.

### Participants

The participants for the Work Ready Group Research Project were recruited through various routes, including posters displayed in local unemployment offices and post offices, notices on the 'events' section of the University website, and through contacts at the Career Services at the University.

The participants, who met the inclusion criteria for this study, were identified by the project manager of the Work Ready Group Research Project. Inclusion criteria for the study are as follows: adults over 18 years, currently unemployed, and unemployed for 24 months or less, and who attended at least four of the eight sessions of the intervention. Initially, 10 people

attended the first group session. Ultimately, five participants met the inclusion criteria for this study and consented to the post-intervention interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out with three male and two female participants. The mean age of the participants was 43.6 years old, with the youngest being 37 and the oldest being 53. The mean length of unemployment at the time of recruitment for the study was 21 months, with the shortest being one month and the longest being 24 months.

### **Ethical considerations**

The participants were informed of this study by the project manager of the Work Ready Group Research Project. All contact and arrangements were made through the project manager. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, provided written consent, and were aware that they were free to refuse participation at any stage. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured by providing pseudonyms, and all data was securely stored on password protected computers. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Limerick, Education and Health Sciences Ethics Committee.

### **Procedure**

The researcher and co-researcher, compiled the interview schedule together to ensure the questions addressed the aims of both individual research projects, thus saving the participants from completing two post-intervention interviews. Each researcher completed a pilot interview to test the language and content of the schedule. The interviewing was shared between the two researchers, who each recorded and transcribed the interviews they completed and removed all identifying data. The interviews took place in private rooms. A summary of the interview was emailed to the participants within 10 days of the interview for member checking; no changes were requested by the participants.

Both researchers analysed the same transcripts for their individual studies. The transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo9 qualitative data analysis software. The researchers created a code list together. Categories began to emerge through re-reading the transcripts. The categories and themes which emerged were discussed with the co-researcher, and research supervisor. Field notes were maintained throughout the process and reflexivity was encouraged through discussion with the research supervisor.



## Findings

Three main themes emerged from the process of analysing the interviews: change which is divided into change in doing and thinking, self-evaluation and group support. These themes are presented below with supporting quotations, suggestions and recommendations to guide future interventions.

### Change

*Change in Doing.* All participants identified changes they made to their routines and their activity patterns following the intervention. Participants implemented changes to their routines when they became aware of their pre-existing negative or unhealthy behaviours. These behaviours included: poor sleeping patterns, watching too much television, “*doing nothing*”, and unfocussed job searching online. Most identified new activities they started since attending the group including: attending art classes, exercising more, renewing contact with friends and volunteering with local charities.

They now react differently to stress than they did previously. For example they cope better with stressful situations such as their car being repossessed or receiving rejection letters. They reported changes in their ability to request help from others, this ranged from requesting assistance with mortgage repayments to doing household chores.

Participants stated the most valuable element of the programme was the Curriculum Vitae (CV) skills workshop and the practice interview. Since these sessions, all are applying for jobs in different industries which they did not consider previously. Their job searching strategy also changed. They are more focused on the amount of time they spend searching for jobs online and the websites they access.

Tom “[I plan to] *extend my job search, not sitting at home maybe, even meet potential employers face to face, it’s all because actually of this [programme]*”.

*Change in Thinking.* Change in how the participants' think about themselves, their capabilities, their current situation, their wellbeing and their future is evident in the transcripts. Feelings of shame, embarrassment and hopelessness changed to acceptance of their situation, belief in their skills and hope for future employment.

John: “[I went from] *I couldn't go for that to it being turned around to well, why not?*”

Following the intervention, the participants are more aware of the importance of their health and wellbeing, of their coping strategies and the importance of taking some time for themselves.

The acknowledgement of their transferable skills changed their views of their future employment path. Some participants are now more focused, determined and encouraged to follow their own business ideas. Others are excited by the challenge of applying for jobs in new industries, and are more hopeful about their future and confident that they will find employment.

### **Self-evaluation**

The programme provided a time, and space, that enabled the participants to evaluate and reflect on themselves, their abilities, their attitudes, their past and current situation, and their relationships. This, in turn, gave them added confidence and hope.

Tom: “[I am] *more relaxed...my view is more optimistic on the situation. I realise what I have to do at the moment and what I have to do in the future*”.

Through reflection, they were able to reframe their skills and experiences and became more aware of their capabilities. Some were challenged to evaluate their current coping strategies. All participants are able to identify their set of transferable skills which they can offer future employers.

### **Group support**

The positive effect of group support figured very strongly throughout the transcripts. All participants spoke favourably about the group setting, the facilitators, their peers in the group, and what they gained from the group format.

*Ann: "Here you're in a group with the same people who have the same mindset as yourself, the same want to go to back to work... the fact you can sit around and say I'm finding this tough ... You know we're all going through the same thing".*

The participants identified that they are all at a similar lifestage, and share the experience of being unemployed. The group provided a safe, and supportive, environment where they could be open, and honest, with each other which facilitated the development of friendships. The group approach supported the sharing of ideas, facilitated participants to receive confirmation of their abilities from others, and allowed them to both draw comparisons, and identifies differences between themselves.

The participants were eager to tap into the knowledge of the facilitators, and they respected their professional status. Sometimes, the opinions of the facilitators were valued more than those of the group members.

### **Recommendations from Participants**

All participants stated they benefitted from the programme, and would recommend it to anyone experiencing unemployment. They provided many suggestions regarding: the advertisement and recruitment, the size of the groups and considerations when selecting the location for each session. Feedback on the choice of activities used during the intervention was mixed, however all stated they understand the value of the activities, and why they were selected. The health and wellbeing element of the programme should be emphasised during the recruitment, as this is a unique selling point of the programme. A follow up session was not scheduled, however the participants expressed their desire for a session two to three months following the programme so they could all report on their progress, share their experiences and knowledge with others, and ensure they were still on track.

## Discussion

Overall, the participants acknowledged their participation in the group as being a positive experience. The group afforded them the opportunity to meet new people, to reflect on and consider their previous experience, work roles, their skills and abilities, their current situation, routines and relationships. It also enabled them to evaluate how they can go forward to implement changes, to actively maintain their health and wellbeing and to secure new employment opportunities. These findings are similar to qualitative research in the field of career guidance and career counselling which aimed to improve job searching strategies, employment status and to reduce mental distress. The common findings include: the participants having increased knowledge of self, improved direction in career goals and job searching skills, confirmation of own abilities and improved confidence (Donohue and Patton 1998; Amundson and Borgen 1988; Salveson et al 1994).

The group format provided a forum where they could share their experiences and ideas, compare and contrast with each other and support each other. It is evident from the analysis, that the participants in this group experienced a sense of cohesiveness which enabled friendships to form. One participant identified, that there aren't support groups for people who are unemployed similar to those which exist for people with addiction problems. The participant, who identified feelings of shame prior to attending the group, now expresses the sense of belonging to this group, and of not feeling alone. Support groups are frequently used in occupational therapy practice and by other professions and with many different client groups including: stroke patients and their carers (Ch'Ng et al 2008), cancer survivors (Ussher et al 2006), and people with mental health difficulties (Sundsteigen et al 2009). Results from this study highlight the benefit of using a group format when working with the unemployed.

According to research in group dynamics and group theory, key factors for a therapeutic group include: the instillation of hope, members share their common experiences, members learn from each other, members offer each other support and ideas, role play that supports social skills for different settings, and members use each other to model behaviour (Finlay 1993; Yalom 1975). The group structure in this study appeared to contain all these elements which added to the success of the intervention. Furthermore, all the participants are of a similar age with somewhat similar circumstances and responsibilities, including partners,

spouses, children, mortgages, debts which made it easier for them to relate to each other. The researcher queries, if the group members were of disparate age and outlook would the group support be such a key element of the intervention.

The facilitation of the group by experienced and knowledgeable professionals was a crucial element, and should be considered in the implementation of future interventions. The participants respected the ideas and support from their peers, but valued the opinion of the facilitators even more.

All participants stated they would recommend this programme to anyone who was unemployed. Starova et al (2011) found that not all unemployed people are equally unhappy. However, not all unemployed people are equally motivated to participate in such programmes. The participants in this study, appeared to be motivated and were actively seeking to make changes to their routines and unemployment status prior to the group being set up. This may have contributed to the success of this intervention. Research shows, that those who are least psychologically affected by unemployment are those who engage deliberately in activities that help to replace their work roles (Fryer and Payne 1984; Kay 1989; Kilpatrick and Trew 1985). It could be suggested, that the personal attributes of the participants contributed to the success of the intervention, and that non-participants or those who dropped out of the programme, actually needed the intervention most. Therapists implementing similar interventions in the future need to consider the type of unemployed person they are targeting, and how best to encourage them to participate.

Overall, the intervention was a positive experience for the participants, and facilitated change in their routines and attitudes. The programme was an empowering experience, it instilled them with hope, and made them aware of their own abilities.

Through analysis, it was clear that the participants are now more hopeful and optimistic about their current and future employment status. Participants reported confidence in finding work, excitement of the adventure ahead, and belief in their skills. Career guidance counselling research finds that the preferred timing for a job search group is within the first three months of unemployment, thereby potentially preventing longer periods of unemployment (Amundson and Borgen 1987; Amundson et al 1991). Other studies conclude that job-search activity tends to decrease with increasing length of unemployment

(Feather 1982; Warr and Jackson 1985). Follow-up is required to evaluate the long-term durability of the findings of this study and if changes can be sustained.

The data would suggest that the identification, and awareness, of their own skills and abilities was an on-going process. Interestingly, all participants stated that the CV preparation and the practice interview sessions were the most beneficial elements of the programme. This could owe to the fact that, updating their CV was a tangible activity which cemented their abilities in their own minds following the previous sessions of self-exploration and reflection. The participants now feel empowered to acknowledge their skills and abilities, and to sell these as assets they can offer future employers. They are empowered to follow business plans, and to offer their skills on a voluntary basis to charity organisations.

Along with change in routines, and greater optimism for the future, the participants also developed a greater awareness of their psychological health and wellbeing, and explored how to maintain this in the future.

Awareness of the importance of maintaining health and wellbeing was apparent in the data, but, not as clearly stated by the participants. Participants spoke about the importance they now place on making time for themselves. They no longer feel guilty about doing activities or things for themselves, in contrast to how they felt prior to starting the intervention. Previously, they worried they would be perceived as being lazy, but now they realise the importance of balance, and time for self. A study by Rowley and Feather (1987), found that psychological distress tended to increase with increasing length of unemployment, and that the older men had significantly higher scores than the younger group for decreased self-esteem and increased psychological distress. The College of Occupational Therapists (2012) identify that it can be hard to return to work, especially if you are absent for a long period of time. During a recessionary economy, intervention outcomes should focus on maintaining the person's physical, and psychological, wellbeing and the ability to re-enter the workforce when employment becomes available (Shifron et al 1983). Results from this study, suggest that the participants are now more aware of their health and wellbeing, and are equipped with the skills and knowledge to ensure they are ready for work when the opportunity presents itself.

Unsurprisingly, once participants became aware of negative and unhealthy routines, that developed when they became unemployed, they tried to change these routines. However, during this intervention they became aware of unhealthy behaviours that also existed when they were employed, such as not making time to meet friends, checking work emails at the weekend and not making time for sport or leisure activities. All participants are motivated to find re-employment, but now, they are equally conscious of maintaining their health and wellbeing. Most participants identified changes they made and new occupations and activities they started since participating in the programme which they hope will become routine, and continue to be part of their routine when they find work again.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to this study. Qualitative results from this study suggest that the intervention had strong effects on those who participated, however, quantitative findings, or a mixed methods approach would substantiate this finding (Cresswell et al 2004). Also, the gender, age, socioeconomic status, marital status, duration of unemployment, and personal characteristics of the participants as mediating factors on the success of the intervention are unknown. A larger sample size and participants from different age groups, and backgrounds, are required to further evaluate the programme and generalise the findings.

The participants completed pre-intervention interviews with another researcher for different research studies. However, if one researcher had completed the pre- and post-intervention interviews, this would have further developed the rapport between the research and the participants (Dilley 2004). Furthermore, if the researcher was involved in facilitating the intervention, this would have enabled more probing questioning around certain topics and potentially gained richer insights. Also, reflexivity on the part of the researcher may have highlighted subtle changes in the participants' language or attitude since starting the intervention (Dilley 2004; Richie and Lewis 2003).

### **Recommendations**

Practicing Occupational Therapists can use these findings to structure and guide their interventions when working with people who are unemployed. Interdisciplinary sharing of knowledge and skills, for example with organisational psychology and career counselling is necessary to ensure that other professions are aware of the unique benefits

occupational therapy can offer. Equally, government bodies, unemployment agencies and the Health Service Executive, need to be made aware of, and understand the role occupational therapy can play in supporting people who are unemployed.

With increasing rates of unemployment, occupational therapy students need to be equipped with the skills to work with this demographic. Universities, governing bodies and healthcare providers must invest in training to ensure their students and employees have the necessary skills to engage with, and support people who are unemployed.

Further quantitative, qualitative and longitudinal studies are required with larger sample sizes to strengthen or challenge the results of this study, and to enable us to better understand the long-term needs of the unemployed.

## **Conclusion**

Unemployment has detrimental consequences on physical and psychological wellbeing. The unemployment rates in Ireland are high, and are still rising. Research and evaluation of interventions aimed at maintaining the health and wellbeing of this population are required within the field of occupational therapy.

The aim of this study, was to gain insight to participants' experience of a group occupational therapy programme to promote wellbeing during unemployment. The group ran for eight weeks and drew on occupational therapy's understanding of the relationship between work, health and wellbeing. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the researcher aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention as viewed by the participants. The main findings suggest that the programme supports change in patterns of thinking and doing, facilitates self-evaluation and that group support is an important element of the programme.

Changes to the participants' daily routines, activity patterns, job-searching techniques and how they react to stressful events were identified. The programme facilitated a time for reflection and self-evaluation. It enabled the participants to reframe previous employment experiences, and identify the unique combination of skills they bring to future employers. Feeling of shame and hopelessness about their unemployed status changed, to ones of hope and optimism for the future. The group format appears to be a key feature in the success of



this intervention. Being at a similar lifestage and in similar situation fostered an atmosphere of understanding, cohesion and camaraderie among the participants. The group format facilitated the sharing of ideas and the confirmation of one's own abilities. Facilitation of the group by experienced professionals, with specific knowledge and skills that support maintenance of health and wellbeing during unemployment, was also an important factor.

While the participants had much in common with each other, this study also highlights the uniqueness of their unemployment journey. Prior to the intervention, the participants were struggling to manage their unemployment as best they could. Unemployed people are at greater risk of being diagnosed with mental distress which makes it even more difficult to re-enter the workforce.

The results of vocational training and interventions by other professions, aimed at achieving employment and reducing psychological distress are inconclusive: their findings do not answer the question of how to maintain physical and psychological health during unemployment, so that one is ready to accept an employment offer when it arises. Results from this study, suggest that the group occupational therapy intervention does support wellbeing during unemployment, however, further research is required with this cohort to determine the sustainability of these results long-term. Further quantitative and qualitative research is required with unemployed people from different age groups and backgrounds to generalise the findings of this study.

Future interventions need to carefully consider the recruitment policy, the location of the intervention, the age of participants in the group, and the importance of a follow up session. Occupational therapy must share the findings of such interventions with the wider group of professionals, and government bodies that also work with, and are concerned with the wellbeing of the unemployed.

Occupational therapy's holistic and client-centred approach, coupled with its unique focus on occupation, mean the profession is ideally suited to working with unemployed individuals. Occupational therapy can positively contribute to the national and international debate, on how to maintain the health and wellbeing of the increasing numbers of unemployed.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my research supervisor Alison Warren, for her support and guidance throughout the project; my co-researcher Claire Farrell, for her support and collaboration at every stage of the project; the project manager of the Work Ready Group Research Project, Dr. Nancy Salmon, who acted as a gatekeeper to the participants; and the participants, for being so open and honest during the interviews, without whose participation this study would not have been possible.

## References

- Allen, R.D. (2000) *Financial crises and recession in the global economy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2008) 'Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process', *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 62, 625-683.
- Amundson, N. And Borgen, W. (1987). Coping with unemployment: What helps and hinders. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 24, 97-106.
- Amundson, N., and Borgen, W. (1988). 'Factors that help and hinder in group employment counseling', *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 25, 104-114.
- Amundson, N., Firbank, O., Klein, H., and Poehnell, G. (1991) 'Job Link: An employment counseling program for immigrants', *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 28, 167-176.
- Audhoe, S.S., Hoving, J.L., Sluiter J.K., and Frings-Dresen M.H.W. (2010) 'Vocational Interventions for Unemployed: Effects on Work Participation and Mental Distress. A Systematic Review', *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 20, 1-13.
- Blakely, T.A., Collings, S.C.D. and Atkinson, J. (2003) 'Unemployment and suicide. Evidence for a causal association', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 57, 594-600.
- Brenner, S.O. and Bartell, R. (1983) 'The psychological impact of unemployment: A structural analysis of cross sectional data', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 56, 129-136.

- Brown, D.W., Balluz, L.S., Ford, E.S., Giles, W.H., Strine, T.W., Moriarty, D.G., Croft, J.B. and Mokdad, A.H. (2003) 'Associations between short- and long-term unemployment and frequent mental distress among a national sample of men and women', *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 45(11), 1159-1166.
- Bundy, A.C. (2011) 'Promoting wellbeing in young unemployed adults: The importance of identifying meaningful patterns of time use', *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 58, 111-119.
- Central Statistics Office (2012) 'Live Register', *February 2012* [online] available: [http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2012/lreg\\_feb2012.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2012/lreg_feb2012.pdf) [accessed 14 Mar 2012].
- Ch'Ng, A.M., French, D. and McLean, N. (2008) 'Coping with the challenges of recovery from stroke: long term perspectives of stroke support group members', *Journal of Health Psychology*, 13(8), 1136-46.
- Clark, A.E. and Oswald, A.J. (1994) 'Unhappiness and Unemployment', *The Economic Journal*, 104(424), 648-659.
- Clark, F., Azen, S.P., Zemke, R., Jackson, J., Carlson, M., Mandel, D., Hay, J., Josephson, K., Cherry, B., Hessel, C., Palmer, J. and Lipson, L. (1997) 'Occupational therapy for independent-living older adults: a randomized controlled trial', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(16), 1321-1326.
- Clark, F., Jackson, J., Carlson, M., Chou, C.P., Cherry, B.J., Jordan-Marsh, M., Knight, B.G., Mandel, D., Blanchard, J., Granger, D.A., Wilcox, R.R., Lai, M.Y., White, B., Hay, J., Lam, C., Marterella, A. and Azen, S.P. (2011) 'Effectiveness of a lifestyle intervention in promoting the well-being of independently living older people: results of the Well Elderly 2 Randomised Controlled Trial', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 1-9.
- Creed, P.A. and Macintyre, S.R. (2001) 'The relative effects of deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits of employment on the well-being of unemployed people', *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 6(4), 324-331

- Cresswell, J.W., Fetters, M.D. and Ivankova, N.V. (2004) 'Designing a mixed methods study in primary care', *Annals of Family Medicine*, 2, 7-12.
- Dilley, P. (2004) 'Review Essay: Interviews and the Philosophy of Qualitative Research', *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75(1), 127-132.
- Donohue, R., and Patton, W. (1998) 'The Effectiveness of a Career Guidance Program With Long-Term Unemployed Individuals', *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 35(4), 179-194.
- Dooley, D. and Prause, J. (1995). 'Effect of unemployment on school leavers' self-esteem'. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 68, 177-192.
- Douthwaite, J. (1994) 'Unemployment: A Challenge to Occupational Therapy', *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 57 (11), 432.
- Feather, N . T . (1982) 'Unemployment and its psychological correlates: A study of depressive symptoms, self-esteem, protestant ethic values, attributional style, and apathy', *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 34, 309-323.
- Feather, N.T. and Bond, M.J. (1983) 'Time structure and purposeful activity among employed and unemployed university graduates', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 56, 241–254.
- Finlay, L. (1993) *Groupwork in Occupational Therapy*, Cheltenham: Stanley Thorne.
- Fryer, D., and Payne, R. (1984) 'Proactive behaviour in unemployment', *Leisure Studies*, 3, 273–295.
- Glass, T.A., de Leon, C., Marottoli, R.A. and Berkman, L.F. (1999) 'Population based study of social and productive activities as predictors of survival among elderly Americans', *British Medical Journal*, 319(7208), 478-483.
- Hepworth, S.J. (1980) 'Moderating factors of the psychological impact of unemployment', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 53(2), 139-146.
- Jahoda, M. (1981) 'Work, employment, and unemployment: Values, theories, and approaches in social research', *American Psychologist*, 36(2), 184-191.

- Kay, T. (1989) 'Active unemployment – a leisure pattern for the future?', *Society and Leisure*, 12, 413–430.
- Kilpatrick, R. and Trew, K. (1985) 'Life-styles and psychological wellbeing among unemployed men in Northern Ireland', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 58, 207–216.
- Korpi, T. (2001) 'Accumulating disadvantage: Longitudinal analyses of unemployment and physical health in representative samples of the Swedish population', *European Sociological Review*, 17(3), 255-273.
- Lester, D. and Yang, B. (2003) 'Unemployment and suicidal behaviour', *Journal of Epidemiology Community Health*, 57, 558-559.
- Letts, L., Law, M., Pollock, N., Stewart, D., Westmorland, M., Philpot, A. and Bosch, J. (1999) *A programme evaluation workbook for Occupational Therapists: An evidence-based practice tool*, Ottawa: CAOT Publications ACE.
- Martella, D. and Maass, A. (2000) 'Unemployment and life satisfaction: The moderating role of time structure and collectivism', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 30, 1095–1108.
- Matoba, T., Ishitake, T. and Noguchi, R. (2003) 'A 2-year follow-up survey of health and life style in Japanese unemployed persons', *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 76(4), 302-308.
- McCrea, P.H. (1996) 'Trends in suicide in Northern Ireland 1922-1992', *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 13(1), 9-12.
- McKee-Ryan F, Song, Z., Wanberg, C., and Kinicki, A. (2005) 'Psychological and Physical Well-Being During Unemployment: A Meta-Analytic Study', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(1), 53–76.
- McKee-Ryan, F., Song, Z., Wanberg, C.R. and Kinicki, A.J. (2005) 'Psychological and Physical Well-Being During Unemployment: A Meta-Analytic Study', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(1), 53-76.

- Paul, K.I. and Moser, K. (2009) 'Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 74(3), 264–282
- Pierce, D.E. (2003) *Occupation by Design. Building therapeutic power*, Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company.
- Platt, S. and Kreitman, N. (1984) 'Trends in Parasuicide and Unemployment among Men in Edinburgh, 1968-82', *British Medical Journal*, 289(6451), 1029-1032.
- Press Association (2010), 'Recession officially over' [online] available: <http://www.independent.ie/business/irish/recession-officially-over-2240269.html> [accessed 31 Mar 2012].
- Preti, A. and Miotto, P. (1999) 'Suicide and unemployment in Italy, 1982-1994', *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, 53(11), 694-701.
- Proudfoot, J., Guest, D. (1997) 'Effect of cognitive-behavioural training on job-finding among long-term unemployed people', *Lancet*, 350(9071), 96-100.
- Richie, J. and Lewis, J. (2003) *Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Rowley, K.M. and Feather, N.T. (1987) 'The impact of unemployment in relation to age and length of unemployment', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 60(4), 323-332.
- RTE (2012) 'Ireland back in recession in late 2011' [online], available: <http://www.rte.ie/news/2012/0322/economy-business.html> [accessed 31 Mar 2012].
- Salveson, P., Ward, P. and Zukas, T. (1994) *Gateway learning: Empowering individuals*. Leeds: Leeds University, Department of Adult and Continuing Education.
- Shifron, R., Dye, A. and Shifron, G. (1983) 'Implications for Counseling the Unemployed in a Recessionary Economy', *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 61(9), 527-529.
- Stavrova, O., Schlösser, T. and Fetchenhauer, D. (2011) 'Are the unemployed equally unhappy all around the world? The role of the social norms to work and welfare state provision in 28 OECD countries', *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 32(1), 159-171.

- Sumsion, T. (2006) *Client-centred practice in occupational therapy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Philadelphia: Elsevier Ltd.
- Sundsteigen, B., Eklund, K. and Dahlin-Ivanoff, S. (2009) 'Patients' experience of groups in outpatient mental health services and its significance for daily occupations'. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 16,172-180.
- Taylor, M.C. (2007) *Evidence-based practice for occupational therapists*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford: Blackwell.
- The College of Occupational Therapists (2012) 'Occupational Therapy and Employment', Working is good for you [online], available: [http://www.cot.co.uk/sites/default/files/marketing\\_materials/public/working-is-good-for-you.pdf](http://www.cot.co.uk/sites/default/files/marketing_materials/public/working-is-good-for-you.pdf) [accessed 20 Mar 2012].
- Ussher, J., Kirsten, L., Butow, P. and Sandoval, M. (2006) 'What do cancer support groups provide which other supportive relationships do not? The experience of peer support groups for people with cancer', *Social Science and Medicine*, 62(10), 2565-76.
- Vinokur, A.D, Price, R.H. and Schul, Y. (1995) 'Impact of the JOBS intervention on unemployed workers varying in risk for depression', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(1), 39-74.
- Warr, P.B. and Jackson, P.R. (1985) 'Factors influencing the psychological impact of prolonged unemployment and re-employment', *Psychological Medicine*, 15, 795-807.
- Wilcock, A. (1993) 'A theory of human need for occupation', *Journal of Occupational Science*, 1(1), 17-24.
- Wilcock, A. (2006) *An Occupational Perspective on Health*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Thorofare, NJ : SLACK.
- World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2012) 'What is Occupational therapy?' [online], available: <http://www.wfot.org/information.asp?id=2> [accessed 29/3/2012].
- Yalom, I. (1975) *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Basic Books.

Yerxa, E. J., Clark, F., Frank, G., Jackson, J., Parham, D., Pierce, D., Stein, C., and Zemke, R.  
(1989) 'An introduction to occupational science, a foundation for occupational therapy  
in the 21st century', *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, 6(4), 1-17.