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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Research Objectives.....	10
Methodology.....	10
Study Design.....	10
Participants.....	10
Data Collection.....	11
Data Analysis.....	12
Trustworthiness.....	12
Ethical Considerations.....	12
Findings.....	13
Theme 1.....	13
Theme2.....	14
Theme 3.....	15
Theme 4.....	16
Theme 5.....	17
Discussion.....	18
Study Limitations.....	19
Implications for Practice.....	20
Future Research.....	20
Conclusion.....	21

Acknowledgements.....21
References.....22
Appendix A.....27
Appendix B.....28

Effects of Unemployment: A qualitative analysis

Abstract

This study aims to explore through qualitative analysis the subjective experiences of unemployment, particularly in the areas of mental health, physical health, occupational roles and time use. The study is intended for Occupational Therapy practitioners in particular as well as sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of unemployment in this economic recession. Participants were recruited as part of a larger intervention; with 8 participants partaking in a semi-structured interview. Results may guide future Occupational Therapy interventions in unemployment by addressing key occupational disruptions experienced by participants.

Unemployment has been described as a time of catastrophic change, affecting an individual in all life domains. It is therefore necessary, to understand the complex factors involved to provide a holistic service of support, advice and education to successfully negotiate through this tumultuous period.

Research indicates that unemployment results in a deterioration in mental health. The most significant impact on a person's mental health is the loss of collective purpose, regular activity, status and identity as well as perceived financial strain. Further investigation is warranted to fully understand the effects of unemployment in the growing migrant population.

Introduction

Ireland has been in the throes of a major recession since the first half of 2008. Currently, the unemployment rate in Ireland stands at 14.4% of the population (CSO, 2012), with emigration figures rising daily. Since the last major economic recession in the 1980s, researchers sought to analysis the complex interplay of health, well-being and employment. While on the one hand, health conditions affect the likelihood of gaining employment, on the other hand, unemployment has a negative health impact particularly on mental health (Leach et al, 2010). Unemployment is highly stressful for an individual provoking reactions such as anxiety, depression and lowered physical health (McKee-Ryan et al, 2005; Paul and Moser, 2009). The discipline of Occupational Therapy is ideally placed to address such issues. Achieving positive health and well-being by engaging in meaningful occupations is congruent with Occupational Therapy philosophy of all ages to achieve health, well-being and life satisfaction through participation in activities of everyday life (WFOT, 2004).

Previous studies have demonstrated the positive effect of Occupational Therapy in assisting people to engage in meaningful occupations and thus improving their health and well-being. The Well Elderly Study (Jackson, 1998) assessed whether a type of preventative Occupational Therapy leads to improved health and well-being in older adults. Health related outcomes of the Well Elderly Study included enhanced physical health, improved mental health, superior occupational functioning and increased life satisfaction. In 2008, Barnes et al, examined the effect of an Adaptive Living Program on quality of life and life satisfaction of 19 low-income adults. Qualitative results indicated that participants had increased quality of life and life satisfaction on completion of programme.

Although research has shown the potential for Occupational Therapy programmes in addressing issues such as well-being, there has been little application of these programmes among people experiencing unemployment. This article presents a small scale qualitative examination of the unemployment experience from the perspective of a group of individuals in the Limerick area. The study aims to explore the complex relationship unemployment has on well-being, physical health, relationships and within the growing immigrant population. This article may serve to guide Occupational Therapy interventions by providing an understanding of the consequences of unemployment from the perspective of a sample of participants in Limerick.

Literature Review

Introduction

Research into the effects of unemployment spans more than 60 years from the Great Depression of the 1930s to the present (Creed, 2001). However, in recent times, research has predominantly centred around two main theories, Jahoda's (1981) latent deprivation theory and Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model. Subsequent research has focused on different aspects of both theories to understand the relationship between unemployment and health.

Effects of Unemployment on mental health

Employment is central to a person's well-being as it increases an individual's perception of self-worth and self-esteem, while unemployment leads to a reduced locus of control and feelings of helplessness (Winkleman, 2009). Much research has examined the physiological impact of unemployment and well-being. Stravrova et al, 2011 describe unemployment as one of the most devastating life experiences, while McKee-Ryan et al, 2005, state that job loss is highly stressful, provoking reactions such as anxiety and depression. Langens et al, 2006 proposed that unemployment's secondary stressors included worry, uncertainty, financial and marital difficulties.

Several theories abound regarding the reasons why unemployment causes such dramatic consequences to an individual's health and well-being, the most popular of which comes from Jahoda's latent deprivation model (Jahoda, 1981). Jahoda argued that engagement in paid work provides manifest (associated with income) and latent (associated with hidden psychological) benefits. People seek employment primarily for manifest benefits, i.e. to provide for themselves and/or family members. However, while employed, they profit from 5 key latent benefits of employment 1) time structure; 2) social contacts; 3) experiences of social purposes; 4) status and identity and 5) regular activity.

Jahoda conducted her research in the 1980s, a period of economic recession which closely mirrors today's financial climate. Her work suggests that the five latent by-products of employment serves as an integral part of how an individual structures their daily routine (McKee, Song, Wandberg, and Kinicki, 2005; Waters and Moore, 2002). Subsequently, the removal of this structured routine through unemployment has a significant impact on their psychological or physical health. Research has also shown that poor psychological functioning and well-being, may hinder the individual in attempting to occupy his or her time

with activities during employment (Brenner et al, 1983). Feather and Bond, 1994 found that while some individuals manage their time constructively and successfully maintain a daily routine leading to a sense of purpose in their days, others do not establish a routine and instead engage in excessive contemplations of the past. Unemployed individuals tend to report lower levels of structured daily routine. Those who can successfully integrate a routine report better psychological health. Creed and McIntyre, 2001 showed a significant association between well-being and time structure, status and collective purpose in particular.

Contacts with friends and social networks have been found to be beneficial on psychological well-being (Hawroth and Ducker, 1991), high levels of social capital equates to an increase in well-being (Helliwell & Putman, 2005). Similarly, social isolation has been linked with low self-esteem and a decrease in participation in social activities when compared to an employed sample (Underlid, 1996; Hammer, 1991).

Jahoda, 1981, reported that employment provides a platform for people to feel connected to society, and the loss of this through unemployment will have a negative impact on well-being. This was tested by Haworth and Paterson in 1995 whose research agreed with Jahoda in that having a collective purpose was beneficial to an individual's mental well-being. Social network embeddedness allows people to feel good about themselves, leading to an enhancement of an unemployed person's propensity to maintain a positive future outlook (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, and Kinicki, 2005).

Engagement in purposeful, meaningful occupations has been well established as providing psychological benefits. Law (1998) stated that withdrawal or changes in occupation leads to a significant decrease in an individual's self-perceived health and well-being. Unemployment has been found to influence a person's involvement in social activities (Underlid, 1996). Winefeld et al, 1992 suggest that structured activity was more beneficial for psychological well-being in unemployed youths. Activity may also serve to mediate influence in gaining access to other latent benefits (Evans & Hayworth, 1991). Social identity or roles are often determined by employment. The higher the social status, the higher the perceived success in life, leading to increased life satisfaction and self-esteem (Pinquart, 2000).

Effects of Unemployment on relationships

Spousal relationships have generally been considered as one of the most valuable sources of social support, offering advice, motivation and comfort to their unemployed partner. However, Paul and Moser's 2009 meta-analysis found no signs of a moderating effect of relationship status. They postulated that perhaps having a spouse may cause social undermining or negative support within intimate relationships which minimise or eliminate the perceived positive effects of a spouse.

There also appears to be a dynamic relationship of distress levels between spouses, where one spouse is unemployed and the other is employed. Song et al, 2011, identified three stress crossovers: direct crossover where the psychological distress of one spouse is transmitted to the other spouse, indirect crossover where marital support level can mediate the couple's distress levels through the encouragement of partners in positive behavioural gestures such as sensitivity to view points. Finally, the common factor of daily family hassles, for example a sick child, can lead to a synchronising of distress levels between partners.

Unemployment and financial strain

Fryer in 1986, proposed the agency restriction model as a means to understand the effects of financial strain on an individual's well-being. Fryer considers unemployment to be the cause of corrosive poverty and alienates the person from the future. This leads to a decreased ability to plan for a personally satisfying future thus impacting on health and well-being. Subsequent research has shown similar effects, indicating a strong correlation between financial resources and well-being (Creed & McIntyre, 2001, Feather, 1989). McKee-Ryan et al, 2005 meta-analysis found that financial resources and financial strain are important predictors of well-being during unemployment.

Effects of Unemployment on the immigrant population

Aycan and Berry (1996), examined the impact of employment related experiences on immigrants' psychological well-being and adaptation to life in Canada. The authors suggest that an inability to successfully obtain employment may result in status loss. According to their Acculturation Framework (Berry, 1996), individuals may face life change events as a direct result of cultural contact and participation. These experiences may, in turn, cause acculturative stress, i.e., a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the

experience of acculturation (a change in the cultural behaviour of an individual following contact with another culture) (Aycan and Berry, 1996). It is commonly manifested in the form of depression (because of culture loss) and anxiety (because of uncertainties). Employment related difficulties and low socio-economic status have also been found to be associated with depressive symptoms and stress in various groups such as Mexican (Golding & Burnam, 1990). According to the Tarki European Social Report (Monostori, 2009), work, for former socialist countries, is valued far more highly than leisure time.

It would appear from this that the opportunities to obtain social contacts, purpose, structured time use, status and identity, regular activity as well as financial gains, all rest on an immigrants work status. Indeed, Stoloska's work among Polish immigrants in Canada (Stodolska and Jackson, 1998; Stodolska, 2002) found that many obstacles lay in the way of immigrants accessing various leisure pursuits such as lack of social network, isolation, and language barriers. Furthermore, Dzbenksa-Berney and Pettigrew's (2011) analysis of leisure participation experiences among Polish immigrants in Ireland, found that participants valued their work occupations more than leisure occupations. Their analysis also suggests a decrease in engagement in leisure activities upon their migration to Ireland. It is hypothesised, that unemployment will have a greater negative impact on well-being among this population.

The review of existing literature suggests that unemployment has several negative consequences on an individual's well-being. It is also clear, that understanding the complex interplay of different aspects of unemployment will play a crucial part in developing coping strategies and education to affected people. The literature review shows a lack of research in this area from an Occupational Therapy perspective. This study aims to contribute to the body of work on unemployment experience.

Objectives of study

- To explore the complex relationship between unemployment and health
- To explore the role of meaningful occupations in replacing paid employment.
- To explore the meaning of unemployment for immigrants.

Methodology

Study design

Pre-intervention interviews were qualitatively analysed using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative analysis involves an in-depth investigation on individuals. The investigator attempts to understand the thoughts, feelings and experiences of participants as people coping with their conditions and treatments within their social context (Polgar and Thomas, 2008). As this research aims to critically explore the subjective experience of participants, qualitative research is the most suitable, taking the 'emic' perspective or the insider's point of view to gain a clear understanding of what unemployment means to the participant.

Participants

Participants identified for this study were unemployed adults in Limerick. As this research is a strand of a larger project, recruitment was conducted by project manager, who recruited participants through a poster outlining details of the intervention. Inclusion criteria include, people who are over eighteen years old and unemployed for less than two years. Participant's demographic information are presented in Figure 1.

	Unemployment Duration	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Living area	Previous work experience	Relationship status
1	8 weeks	45	Female	Irish	Urban	Administration	Married
2	2 years	19	Male	Irish	Rural	Sales	Single (lives at home with mother)
3	3 months(sick for 7 mths)	52	Female	Irish	Urban	Factory worker	Separated, grandmother
4	1 ½ years	26	Male	Irish	Rural	Factory worker	Married
5	2 years	42	Male	Irish	Rural	Construction	Married
6	3 years	41	Male	Irish	Rural	Self-employed	Separated during unemployment
7	2 years	39	Male	Ukrainian	Urban	Sales	Married, children.
8	2 years	Not disclosed	Female	Japanese	Urban	Teacher	Single.

Figure 1. Demographic information of participants.

Data Collection

In-depth semi-structured interview approach was adopted to fully capture the unemployment experience. Interview questions were open-ended to allow for more detailed, descriptive answers (Polgar and Thomas, 2008). Interview questions were adapted from the Occupational Performance History Interview (OPHI-11), (Kielhofner, 1998) and so can be used and applied easily to different settings. The OPHI-11 allowed for a broad and detailed appreciation of a person's life history. Questions addressed occupational roles, daily routine, occupational behaviour settings, occupational choices and critical life events (Appendix b).

Raw data including tape recordings, field notes and diaries as well as the analysed data, findings and the process followed may be examined by my research supervisor. Interviews were conducted within the Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Limerick by occupational therapy lectures who led the Work Ready interventions. Audio files were received from the project manager in person to ensure safe transfer of confidential data.

Data Analysis

To truly capture the unemployment experience, a thematic analysis was applied to allow for a rich, detailed account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun & Clarke provide a six stage guide when applying thematic analysis to qualitative research, a process that was adhered to by the researcher. Familiarity with the data was achieved by reading and re-reading the transcripts. Following this, codes were generated to allow for segments of the data to be analysed in a meaningful way regarding the unemployment experience. Coding was done in terms of any emerging themes, concepts or keywords. All data which fell under these codes were categorised together. The Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis System of NVivo was used to make coding more efficient; however, some text was coded manually.

Trustworthiness

Pre-intervention interviews allowed for optional member checking after the interview to check for credibility and assist in diminishing the power imbalances between researcher and participant (Carpenter & Suto, 2008). This consisted of an e-mail sent to participants summarising the content of their interview, seven to ten days following the interview. Interviews were then transcribed, checked, corrected and coded until researcher was satisfied that a detailed account of the interview was completed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the EHSREC, University of Limerick. While there was no substantive risk to the participant it was acknowledged that participation in this interview may have caused some level of discomfort. It was hoped that any potential discomfort from the interview process was counteracted by the benefits of the intervention that followed and allowed participants to discuss their experience of unemployment and in so doing prepared them for the intervention. Participants were given the opportunity to opt out at any time, or refrain from answering questions that caused distress. The interviewer was aware of any non-verbal cues from participants that pointed to any level of discomfort and would stop the interview if the participant chooses or take a break for a short time.

Information regarding the potential benefits and risks was provided to participants prior to the interview and participants were asked to sign a volunteer consent form (appendix a) prior to commencement. Although anonymity could not be guaranteed, confidentiality can be guaranteed.

Results

Theme 1.

Effect of status loss and collective purpose

One overarching theme that emerged is that employment provided the latent benefits of social purposes and status or identity; this was identified by all participants.

“It gave me a sense of purpose and an identity” (Female)

*“It’s everything to me, its, it’s the air I breathe, the life I do, it’s a sense of self-fulfilment”
(Male)*

For one participant, it defined who they were:

“Necessary for society, be necessary for family and eh, open my mind” (Male).

Unemployment seems to have stripped participants of the collective sense of purpose and the status or identity that work brought to their lives. One participant described her first week of unemployment as if...

“Someone has painted me black or invisible or something” (Female).

Participants also spoke of the stigma of unemployment and how this affected their identity within their families and the wider community. One participant spoke of the need for accountability in his day, in some way, to diminish the loss of purpose since becoming unemployed.

“I make the dinner for the wife before she comes home and stuff like, take the dog for a walk... she’s kinda, what did you do today, what did you get up too, and I’d feel as though I’d have to fill the day with stuff almost like you know, and not even lie but kind of like just embellish what I did too like you know...I go through phases of being more conscious of what people think of ya...people have this perception of ...unemployed people are, you know, kind of dregs of society...you don’t want to be seen as kind of a waster” (Male).

“Because you are not employed, means you are useless” (Female).

This lack of purpose and identity has been suggested by participants as impacting on their psychological well-being, which has been affected by all participants, in varying degrees.

” you do feel down, you feel a bit snappy...probably due to frustration I suppose” (Male).

“I think psychologically I am depressed, I’m teary sometimes, yes” (Female).

Others have described a deeper impact on their mental health, contemplating suicide on occasions:

“I’ve gone beyond (being worried, anxious, depressed)...contemplate suicide? Hell yeah, I have, I’ll admit it now, I will admit it” (Male).

Theme 2.

Impact on social contacts

Interestingly, social contacts since unemployment for this sample of eight participants, has not been negatively affected. As previously mentioned, Jahoda 1981 described one of the latent benefits of employment as the ability to interact with social contacts. Participants in this research have described negative interactions with work colleagues and limitations to wider social interactions during their employment. One participant’s work involved travelling and he described the lack of social contacts through his employment.

“I did find, yeah, it was a bit kind of lonely on the road...you wouldn’t be talking to that many people every day” (Male)

While social contacts through employed should, in theory be a positive experience, two participants described contacts with work colleagues in a negative sense:

Speaking about a colleague *“...he disliked me and I was, I was very badly treated, yeah, it’s a nightmare...” (Female)*

You kind of got the feeling it was very hard to kinda break into some sections of, some, some, cliques, I suppose” (Male)

This period of unemployment appears to have provided participants with the opportunity to socialise more with friends outside the work environment; it seems that unemployment has provided the opportunity to access social contacts, with one participant commenting...

“I think (name of company) might have had a big impact on that (socialising), because there was a lot of 12 hour shifts, and then there was shift work....because of the hours I worked...I didn't get to see people as often...” (Female).

Theme 3.

Effect of financial strain

Loss of income has been identified by all participants as a cause of anxiety and worry to varying degrees. For some, loss of income has caused a restriction in occupations

“I'd like to join up as a member of the gym, but it costs too much, I'd like to be able to buy new clothes, but that costs too much and I'd like to be able to change my car, and that involves money, basically everything” (Male).

“I always need it financially...obviously having more money would allow me to do a lot more things” (Male)

For some participants, loosing finances meant more than a restriction of occupations, but rather impacted on their role within the family. One participant described it as...

“Work meant the security of knowing that...what my children needed, I could cater for” (Female)

One participant spoke of the dramatic impact of financial loss on his life and the subsequent demise of his marriage...

“...the cash all of a sudden wasn't coming in and you're inundated with bills, bills, bills, people calling to the door, people ringing the phone, ringing my wife, and it just mentally cracked the two of us up...” (Male).

Theme 4.

Regular activity

Jahoda's work suggests that work provides individuals with the opportunity for structured time use and engagement in regular activity. While this was acknowledged by all eight participants...

"I could get up every morning and have a routine and go to work" (Male)

"it (work), gave me some place to go every day, it gave me something to do" (Female).

For others, being unemployed did not restrict their engagement in occupations and some had successfully replaced work with different forms of regular activity

"My day would be fairly full....I've started to create websites for people" (Male).

"I've always been involved in a love of history but never actually got involved...I got involved, and last year I went out and set up my own historical society...this is a turning point for the rest of my life and do I want to really do something that I can't wait to wake up in the morning and do something I love...history is my passion...looking at an idea that would generate livelihood and an occupation out of history" (Male).

Regular activity was replaced with meaningful roles, either within the family or in the wider community

"well, seeing as I'm not getting an income, she expects me to do more work around the house during the week, like, which is fair enough coz, um, I'm 19 like, I should have really be moved out by now... (Male)

"My role as a mother is exceptionally important and I'm a grandmother to a 3 year old, I'm also involved hugely in sport as well you see, and charity fundraising, so those kind of things at the moment have taken over the work thing" (Female).

Theme 5.

An immigrants perspective

Participants appeared to describe a more negative effect of unemployment on their well-being and overall life satisfaction. For some, the replacement of the ‘breadwinner’ role with the child-minding role had a profound effect on their status or identity, with one participant reporting:

“I prefer my wife to stay with kids, I want to work for them, now it’s all unacceptable because she’s working, I’m sitting with kids, absolutely worse...my wife is good, she’s very supportive of my life but sometimes I realise, I’m unnecessary at home...I want to do and nobody can give me even chance to try to do...I realise, I’m not going to get good career in Ireland”
(Male).

For another participant, the financial loss of unemployment had a deeper impact:

“I think, if I had a good job, maybe my relatives...my family in Japan, it (work) might give encouragement” (Female)

Discussion

This study aimed to shed some light on the effects of unemployment from the perspective of a sample of 8 participants. The analysis highlights some of the latent benefits that work provided such as affording individuals an opportunity to engage in regular activity and a sense of collective purpose and identity. Findings suggest that the overall consequences of unemployment are a decrease in mental well-being although in varying degrees. All participants acknowledged the negative effect of unemployment on their mental health, with some reporting feelings of anxiousness and depression, with one participant stating that he contemplated suicide. This finding is in support of previous research from McKee-Ryan et al, Clark et al 2003, and Paul and Moser, 2009.

Findings suggest, that employment brings with it a decrease in collective purpose and of status and identify. All participants identified a collective loss of purpose, however, interestingly; participants in this study have been successful in replacing regular activity with other meaningful occupations, thus negating the deprivation of both purpose and activity. In contrast to previous research which suggests that unemployed people have a lack of structure to their day, participants in this research have all maintained a routine in their day, through engagement in occupations such as attending courses, physical activity and adopting the role of carer within the family to achieve a sense of purpose outside the work environment.

Jahoda acknowledged that although the latent functions are most often met through employment, not all work situations are positive environments. Indeed, Jahoda (1981) suggested that in some work situations “time structure can be too rigid, contact with supervisors unpleasant, the purposes unclear or unacceptable, the status too low, and the activity boring or exhausting”. In these situations, latent functions are not fulfilled, leading to a decrease in well-being and life satisfaction. Participants of this study identified some of the negative aspects of employment and so, for some, this period of unemployment has afforded them the opportunity to increase their mental and physical well-being as well as life-satisfaction, through engagement in purposeful activity.

Another possible buffer for the negative effects of unemployment may be what Clark (2003) described the social norm of unemployment. In the midst of an economic recession, thousands of individuals have become unemployed. Clark suggests that “the main implication of unemployment as a social norm is that the psychological (or utility) impact of an individual’s own unemployment will be reduced by a higher level of unemployment

among relevant others” (Clark, 2003). This appears to be the case among some participants who alluded to the fact that their anxiety and depression is in line with other people throughout the country experiencing similar situations.

All participants seemed to value the financial security which employment brought. The loss of this income, from this research, suggests that the agency restriction had the most dramatic effect on participant’s well-being during unemployment. This tentatively supports Fryer’s agency restriction model and subsequent work by Creed and Klisch’s 2005 study that unemployment brings about deterioration in well-being. However, for some, the availability of, what McKee-Ryan et al (2005) call “financial resources” appears to have provided some security, and so in a sense, buffered the negative consequences of income loss during unemployment. Findings also emphasis the role of income loss among unemployed people. Occupational therapy interventions may be utilised to provide information and training with regards money management.

Two of the participants of this study were immigrants. The effects of unemployment on the immigrant population warrants further investigation. It appears that work is valued far more highly than, leisure time. This is consistent with findings from Montosori (2009) in the Tarki European Social Report. It can be tentatively concluded that, for the immigrant population, who have little access to leisure pursuits, which successfully ‘filled the gap’ for Irish participants, this period of unemployment is a much more stressful time. For some, roles have been reversed, with men relying on their wives as the primary breadwinner, which has been considered unacceptable by some participants.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, which must be acknowledged when considering the findings. The main limitation is the small sample size, particularly the migrant sample size of two may not allow for generalisation of results. A larger, diverse sample would effectively capture the true essence of the unemployment experience. The sample could also be extended to a wider area, to understand the effects of unemployment on a more national level.

Implications for Practice

The aim of this study was to explore the effects of unemployment on a sample of participants in the Limerick area. Through semi structured interviews, the author investigated the consequences of unemployment on their mental, physical and occupational well-being. The main findings suggest that unemployment has a negative effect on an individual's mental health, provoking feelings of helplessness, anxiety and depression to varying degrees in all participants. However, through an exploration of their occupational roles and time use, it appears that some have successfully buffered the negativity by engaging in meaningful occupations.

In keeping with Occupational Therapy philosophy, engagement in meaningful occupations is central to an individual's well-being. Results of the study provide additional confirmation of this. The findings may be used to inform future occupational therapy interventions in the area of unemployment. Hammell (2004) identified that Occupational Therapists believe that occupation provides a source of meaning and purpose, choice and control, with occupational engagement contributing to the experience of a life worth living. It can be suggested, that promoting the engagement in occupations can provide people who are out of work with the latent benefits that employment brings, such as collective purpose, status and identity as well as regular activity.

Future Research

A more detailed study on the rising immigrant population's experience of unemployment is warranted. Research would suggest that the implications of unemployment to this population may have more drastic consequences. Future research could also analyse the effects of unemployment at different stages of unemployment, and on a larger scale. Future studies could benefit from adopting a mixed method approach to allow for a more detailed analysis of occupational disruptions.

Conclusion

Findings of this research suggest that unemployment has a negative effect on an individual's mental health, provoking feelings of helplessness, anxiety and depression to varying degrees. This study also highlights that through an exploration of occupational roles and time use, the negative experiences of unemployment may be buffered by engaging in meaningful occupations. The discipline of Occupational Therapy is therefore, ideally suited to address issues related to the rising unemployment experience.

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Appendix A



**Volunteer Consent Form
Evaluation of an Occupational Therapy Programme for
People who are Unemployed**

I _____ am aware that I am being invited to participate voluntarily in a research study evaluating an occupational therapy programme for people who are unemployed. I have read and understand the volunteer information sheet.

I have been informed by the researcher, Nancy Salmon or her designate that:

The purpose of this research is to assess the effectiveness of the 8 week occupational therapy intervention programme.

My participation will involve taking part in an interview with a student investigator before and after the programme and responding to a summary of those interviews via email.

My participation will also involve filling out a time use diary before and after the programme.

I understand that I will be asked to complete a set of assessments that focus on my health, well-being and participation.

My participation and responses will be kept confidential at all times. I will not be identified, nor will identifying information about me be reported in any publications or presentations arising from this research.

My participation in this research is completely voluntary and I am free to refuse to participate.

If I agree to participate, I can withdraw at any time without consequences.

If I do withdraw from the study I can still remain in the occupational therapy intervention programme.

I UNDERSTAND THAT BY SIGNING THIS FORM I AM GIVING MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY DESCRIBED ABOVE.

I have received two copies of this form, one for me to keep and one to return to the researcher, Nancy Salmon or her designate.

Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Researcher Date

Appendix B.

PRE-INTERVENTION INTERVIEW GUIDE

FIRST REVIEW AND SIGN THE CONSENT FORM

Introduction

Thanks so much for coming in to meet with me today to discuss your experience of unemployment. Before we begin I just to mention some ground rules for the interview:

- Please turn off your mobile phone. We should not be disturbed during the interview but if we are I will turn off the tape recorder to deal with the interruption.
- Feel free to interrupt or ask for clarification and let me know if you require a break during the interview.
- If I take notes during the interview it is for me to use as a prompt as part of a question- to assist my memory
- I am interested in your opinions and personal experiences. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions.

Again, please can I have your permission to record this interview?

TURN RECORDER ON IF PARTICIPANT CONSENTS

OPENING QUERIES

First of all please can you confirm

- Your previous work experience before starting the group?
- How long you have been unemployed?
- Your age?

To begin our conversation tell me how you heard about this project. What attracted you to this unemployment group?

LIFE ROLES

Tell me about your most recent job

- How long did you work there?
- What training did you have to do this work?

What parts of your job did you enjoy the most? Least?

How did that job fit into your overall career plan?

- (prompt for past, present, future to get sense of career trajectory)

What did your work mean to you?

In addition to your role at work, what other roles in life are important to you?

- **Consider your role as the member of a family. Tell me about what it was like to be a (partner/parent/sibling) while you were employed. Have you noticed any difference in these relationships during your period of unemployment? If so, please explain.**
- **Now think about your role as a friend. Describe your friendships at present.** (prompt how many friends, how often are they seen, what activities do they engage in). **Has anything about your friendships changed during this period of unemployment? If so, please explain.**

- **Being a member of a community is important to many people. For example, this could include being part of a local group in your area, being part of a religious group or member of a church, a member of a voluntary organization. Do you belong to any particular communities? If so, please describe. Has your involvement within your community changed in any way during this period of unemployment? If so, please explain.**

DAILY ROUTINES

Please describe a typical weekday while you were employed. What would you have done on a typical weekend while you were employed?

Now I'd like you to describe a typical day during this period of unemployment. What does a typical weekend look like now?

Are you currently able to do the things you want to do? If not, please explain.

Everyone responds to changes in daily routines differently. How would you describe your response to these changes in how you spend your time?

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

How would you describe your health right now?

Health can mean many things. It can include physical, emotional, social and spiritual health for example.

- **Physical health can be quite affected by the loss of paid work. Have you noticed any changes in this regard?**
- **Many people who are unemployed describe feeling worried, anxious or depressed at times. Does that reflect your experience?**
- **Other people who are unemployed notice that they spend less time with family and friends. Have you noticed this in your life?**

- **Some people who are unemployed describe quite a different response to unemployment – they talk about having more time to explore other interests and to think differently about what is important to them. What do you think?**

WRAP UP

How are you dealing with this period of unemployment? What are some of the challenges you experience? Are you able to identify any positive aspects of this period in your life?

What do you see yourself doing in the future? (probe around roles of work, family, friends, community)

Is there anything about your experience of unemployment that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview. The typed summary of your interview will be sent to you within the next 7-10 days so that you can review this document.