

'I Am Nothing Just Zero': Exploring the Experiences of Black Unemployed Teachers in a South African Rural Community.

MAKWENA JULIA HLAHLA

Research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Psychology (Community Counselling)

September, 2008

ABSTRACT

A substantial body of international research exists dealing with the experiences of unemployment. However, there is relatively little research focusing on unemployed people with postgraduate degrees and no research on qualified unemployed teachers in South Africa. Against this background, this research explored the experiences of eight unemployed Black African teachers in a rural village in the Limpopo province, South Africa by means of face-to-face, in-depth interviews. The study found that the majority of those interviewed had chosen teaching because it had a vocation or calling and that this aspect of their career choice made their experiences of unemployment even more painful. It was also noted that being unemployed was a particularly difficult state to accept because of the emphasis on the importance of education in the communities from which the teachers came and the accompanying belief that a tertiary qualification would almost inevitably secure employment. It also found that the participants expressed a number of the negative experiences such as loss of self esteem and a sense of self worth. More specifically, it was found that the inability to fulfil the traditional gender role as head of a household was one of the most significant problems confronting the unemployed men. Additional findings of particular interest include the fact that by contrast with other research, this group of teachers did not experience the extent of social isolation so often found in the international literature. It was suggested that a possible explanation for this finding related to the particularly strong social ties that operate in Black African rural communities in South Africa. A number of suggestions concerning further research into the experiences of unemployed graduates are made in the concluding sections of the study. It is suggested, for example, that it would be useful to explore the extent to which the experiences of unemployed Black African teachers in urban communities relate to those described in this research.

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my late daughter, Tlou Nthabiseng Hlahla, who passed away before this research was completed.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts in Psychology (Community Counselling) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any university.

(Name of Candidate)

____ day of _____ 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparation for this thesis, I received invaluable support from a considerable number of people. While it is not possible to mention all of them here, each has my heartfelt gratitude.

I would like to pass my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Susan Van Zyl, for her patient, critical and constructive contribution. Her support, generosity and encouragement helped me through all difficulties of completing this document.

Jacinta Ndambuki and Maina Mutonya, my research mentors, for their invaluable assistance, encouragement and motivation.

It would have been an insurmountable task to complete this research without the generosity and support of all the participants who willingly gave up their time to be interviewed in making this dissertation possible.

My friends and colleagues for their unparalleled support, interest and love throughout my academic years.

Let me thank my mother, brothers, sisters and relatives for their support in all fronts which enabled me to grow and develop.

It would rather be unthankful not to pass my special thanks to my nephew Lesly Mokoena Mabotja for his unqualified support which contributed to the completion of this document.

Most importantly I would like to give special thanks to my husband, my son Koena, and my late daughter Tlou Nthabiseng for their patience and moral support. They have given me the strength and courage to carry on. They have put up with my frustrations and they have each shown interest in my work. They have been wonderful. Without them, this

could not have been possible. Once again from the bottom of my heart, I say, THANK YOU.

Above all I would like to thank the Almighty God for His blessings and the strength He gave me throughout my studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	i
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
CHAPTER 1: THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
Introduction	1
1.1. Rationale	2
1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study	4
1.3. Chapter Outline	5
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Introduction	6
2.1 Unemployment in South Africa	6
2.2. Experience of Unemployment	7
2.2.1 The impact of unemployment on self-esteem	8
2.2.2 The impact of unemployment on presents life satisfaction	10
2.2.3 The impact of unemployment in relation to gender	10
2.2.4 The impact of unemployment on social system/ network	12
(a). Family	12
(b). Friendships and social life	12
(c). Society or community	13
2.3. Unemployment and Teaching	14
2.4. Coping with Unemployment	16
2.5. Summary	18
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	20
Introduction	20
3.1. Research Design	20
3.2. Sampling	21
3.3. The Interviewer Process and Settings	21

3.4. Translation	22
3.5. Research Instruments	22
3.6. Data Analysis	22
3.7. Ethical Consideration	23
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	24
Introduction	24
4.1. Deciding to be a Teacher	25
4.1.1. Sharing of knowledge and ideas	25
4.1.2 An opportunity to change other people's lives	26
4.1.3 Teaching as a vocation or calling	27
4.1.4 Teaching as providing good salary and good work condition	28
4.1.5 Working with children and young people	29
4.2. Difficulties Encountered While Studying	30
4.3. Practical Aspects of Unemployment	32
4.4. Psychological Aspects of Unemployment	33
4.4.1 Experiences of Failure, Uselessness and Frustration	33
4.4.1 (a) The inability to fulfil male responsibilities	35
4.4.2 (b) The experience of gossip and criticism from community members	37
4.4.3 (c) The psychological consequences of failed interviews	37
4.4.4 (d) the demoralizing effects of perceiving favouritism and nepotism	39
4.4.2 Social Isolation	40
4.5. Social Aspects of Unemployment	41
4.5.1 Support from the family	41
4.5.2 Support and lack of support from friends	42
4.5.3 Support and lack of support from the community	44
4.6. Coping with Unemployment	46
4.6.1 Having a positive outlook	46
4.6.2 Community participation	48
4.6.3 Self-employment and other ways to keep busy	49
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION	52
Introduction	52

5.1. Summary of Major Findings	52
5.2. Scope and Limitations of the Study	55
5.3. Recommendations	57
5.4. Suggestions for Further Research	58
REFERENCES	59
APPENDICES	