

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND COPING
STRATEGIES AMONG YOUTH IN RUNDU: IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL-BEING

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS (CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY)

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

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OCTOBER 2025

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Abstract

Unemployment amongst the youth in Namibia can have detrimental effects on the quality of life of youth, on national and political peace, social stability, and economic growth. Indeed, work has been identified to be an important factor, amongst others, contributing to the meaningful living of an individual. High rates of unemployment, therefore, may be a possible psychological stressor that may increase the risk of mental disorders in the community. This study explored the experience of unemployment amongst the youth in Rundu, a town situated in a region with one of the highest youth unemployment rates, in relation to their well-being and their coping strategies. For the current study, the unemployed comprise all those above a specific age who were without work during a particular reference period, were available for paid employment or self-employment, and had taken active steps to seek paid employment or self-employment. A qualitative approach, which included a phenomenological design, was adopted. Overall, 14 participants (43% females, 57% males, with a mean age of 27.2 years old) were recruited through a purposive and snowball sampling technique and interviewed on a one-on-one basis. The study employed thematic analysis using an inductive coding process. Results revealed themes that indicate that participants experienced unemployment as distressful, leads to a lack of structure in their daily life, financial vulnerabilities, and a decay in their social relationships. Despite the negative emotions attributed to being unemployed, most participants adopted emotion-focused coping strategies and remained hopeful of employment prospects. Negative coping strategies include, self-isolation and social withdrawal, driven by a need to avoid the stigma associated with being unemployed. Fostering graduate trainee programs and approaching the unemployed in a compassionate manner is therefore necessary to avoid harming their already-threatened self-esteem.

Keywords: Youth unemployment, mental health, well-being, coping strategies, Rundu

List of publications/conference proceedings

Sintango, F. M., & Gentz, S. (2025). *Exploring the experience of unemployment and coping strategies among youth in Rundu: Implications for well-being*. [Conference presentation] Health Africa International Conference (HAIC), March 2025, Windhoek, Namibia.

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List of abbreviations

CV	Curriculum Vitae
DEC	Decentralized Ethics Committee
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
MoHSS	Ministry of Health and Social Services
MLIREC	Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, and Employment Creation
NIEIS	Namibia Integrated Employment Information System
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
TIPEEG	Targeted Intervention Program for Employment and Economic Growth
TVET	Technical, Vocational Education and Training
U. S	United States
UKHLS	UK Household Longitudinal Study

Acknowledgement

Firstly, I thank the almighty God who has abundantly poured out all the blessings that I needed to carry out this project – to him I unreservedly give all the glory. Secondly, my utmost appreciation goes to Dr Shelene Gentz, the academic giant that patiently and enthusiastically supervised and wisely monitored my work from the start to the end. Dr, to you I owe a heartfelt appreciation and draw inspiration. In the same vein, I pay due diligence to Sanmari Steenkamp, my practicum on-site supervisor, who rolled the ball of becoming a professional in my hands while gently watching, guiding, and constantly reminding me of ‘having what it takes to be a professional’. Thirdly, my sincere gratitude goes to Cynthia Beukes, who unknowingly or maybe intentionally served as a mentor for me throughout my introduction to the field of psychology, all the way, through where I am today. Cynthia, the kind, uplifting, and encouraging words that you sowed in me have yielded a fruit of zeal for professional, personal, and academic growth in me.

Last, and definitely not least, I thank my twin brother, Silvester Sintango ‘Papa Nova’, whom I have journeyed with from birth through the academic ladder and somewhat continue to share common life and academic goals with. In the same vein, I wholeheartedly pour out my utmost thanks to my siblings, particularly Gustav Kanyali, for their unwavering support in so many ways throughout my livelihood and academic journey. I also owe many thanks to Augusta Refiloe, for the adorable journey and moments shared together and her solution-focused words of encouragement. To my research participants, thank you for walking me into your personal life experiences of unemployment and you, for certain, made this project come to fruition.

Dedication

I dedicate this project to my parents, Mrs Sikukutu Sabina Kapinda, my lovely and caring mom, and Mr Sikukutu Sixtus Sintango, my kind, patient, and hardworking dad, with whom their support and understanding made it possible for me to go through the demands of this research work.

Declarations

I, Fransiskus M. Sintango, hereby declare that this study is my own work and is a true reflection of my research, and that this work, or any part thereof has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a background of the study, and then gives a discussion of the problem statement, objectives of the study, study significance, and delimitations. The chapter also provides a brief overview of the concepts under consideration, with a summary of some empirical research on unemployment and its implications in Namibia.

1.1 Background of the study

The study aimed to investigate the experience of unemployment among young graduates in the town of Rundu. It focused on exploring the impact that unemployment has on the well-being of the unemployed youth, as well as establishing their coping strategies. According to the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA, 2023), unemployment is a labour market situation in which individuals who are not in employment are actively seeking work or business opportunities and make themselves available for work during a specified short reference period.

Mainly either unemployed in the strict sense or unemployed in the broad sense have characterized conceptualization of unemployment. Unemployed in the strict sense comprise all persons of working age who were: a) without work during the reference period, i.e. were not in paid employment or self-employment; b) currently available for work, i.e. were available for paid employment or self-employment during the reference period; and c) seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in a specified recent period to seek paid employment or self-employment (Eita & Ashipala, 2010; Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2016, 2019). According to Eita and Ashipala (2010), this narrow definition excludes many unemployed people who are without a job and are available to work, but

not actively looking for employment from the labour force. Unemployed in the broad sense is described as comprising all persons of working age who were: a) without work during the reference period, i.e. were not in paid employment or self-employment; and b) currently available for work, i.e. were available for paid employment or self-employment during the reference period. The broad definition always results in high unemployment than the strict or narrow definition of unemployment (Eita & Ashipala, 2010). Although unemployment is described in numerous ways, this study adopts the definition of the unemployed in the strict sense as a way to conceptualize youth unemployment.

Just as it is in many countries across the world, the unemployment phenomenon is not uncommon to Namibia. The 2018 Labour Force Survey, according to the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA, 2019), shows that overall broad unemployment rate for Namibia was at 33.4%. The survey also found that overall unemployment rate is high amongst younger age groups with the rates 69.6 and 57.0 percent for the age groups 15-19 and 20-24 years respectively. Compared to the 2018 statistics on overall broad unemployment in Namibia, the recent 2023 Labour Force Report revealed an increase by 3.5 percent, thus amounting to 36.9 percent, with youth (15 to 34 years) unemployment reported at 44.1 percent (NSA, 2023). This indicates a slight decrease from 46.1 percent of youth unemployment recorded in the 2018 Labour Force Survey. Despite the slight decrease in youth unemployment, Amutenya (2021) maintains that whether unemployment rate in the country is at 51 percent, 15 percent, and 10 percent or even 5 percent, it is still unemployment, which denies Namibians food on their tables, thus even a 1 percent unemployment rate warrants a full attention from the authority.

The increasing rates of unemployment in Namibia has had several negative implications to the country. This is seen in a study by Eita and Ashipala (2010) who investigated the causes of unemployment in Namibia for the period 1971 to 2007 through a review of relevant literature, microeconomic and macroeconomic models of unemployment. The authors argue that unemployment has a significant impact on poverty, hopelessness, homelessness, affects family cohesion, and may cause social evils such as crime, violence, alcoholism, and prostitution. This notion is further substantiated by Mwinga (2012) who argues that significant costs to society as well as individuals if decent jobs are not generated to absorb youth into the economy, include wasted human resources, rising youth unemployment, increased informality in the economy and, potentially, social and political instability. In the current study, therefore, the researcher was prompted to explore the possible implications to mental well-being that may arise from the high unemployment rates amongst the most affected age group.

Given the negative effects of unemployment, the unemployed youth may resort to various coping mechanisms to dealing with the unemployment crisis. This is seen in a mixed method study conducted by Mwakalapuka and Msangya (2025) who examined how prolonged joblessness contributes to psychological issues among young people in the region of Morogoro, Tanzania. Their study revealed that respondents reported using various coping strategies, such as religious involvement, sports, and informal group discussions to deal with stress, while some admitted to negative coping methods such as alcohol abuse.

Work has been identified to be an important factor, amongst others, contributing to the meaningful living of an individual. Petros et al. (2015) argue that, not only does work provide financial rewards and opportunity for friends and social contacts, but also plays

an important role in the sense of satisfaction and self-worth of an individual. A study by De Witte et al. (2012) which aimed to investigate the attitudes to work, affective experiences, and job application behaviour of the unemployed in the North West province of South Africa, found that almost 96 per cent of the sample ($n=381$) regarded work as important, particularly because it provides meaning. This highlights the significance of work in one's life.

The concept of well-being is primarily associated with the discipline of positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2013). This field of psychology is predominantly concerned with looking for ways to help people lead lives in which they are happier, have a sense of meaning and purpose, and come closer to fulfilling their potential (Joseph, 2015), amongst others. Two major perspectives that have been historically used and largely debated on in the conceptual definition of well-being include the hedonic and the eudaimonic perspectives (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic approach mainly focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, while the eudaimonic approach focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Although defining the concept of well-being remains elusive and relatively subjective, the current study aligns to the eudaimonic perspective of well-being.

Borkowska and Czerw (2022) maintain that a sense of well-being is understood as the optimal functioning and development of an individual in specific areas and the balance between the individual's resources and the requirements and the challenges they face. In order to promote well-being, one should take care of several vital elements such as mental health, social relationships, safety, emotional competencies, and job satisfaction (Zabihi & Ketabi, 2013).

The current study seeks to examine psychological well-being in relation to unemployment. Psychological well-being is often associated with mental health. In its broadest sense, mental health can be described as a state of successful performance of mental functions, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity (Gamm et al., 2003). In the Namibian National Policy for Mental Health, the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS, 2005) identifies that mental health problems may present in various ways, such as physical complaints, criminal offences, suicidal ideation and suicide, absenteeism from work, school dropouts, drug dependence, delinquency, and so forth. The policy identifies high rates of unemployment as a possible psychological stressor that may increase the risk of mental disorders in the community. Collins and Saxena (2016) argue that mental health disorders are a major leading cause of disability in the world, with an estimated 30% of the global population being affected by either mood, anxiety or substance use disorders. Therefore, with the increase in unemployment in Namibia, the affected population may continue to remain being at risk of experiencing a decline in mental well-being. Hence, this study may help provide empirical evidence on the implication of unemployment on the well-being of the unemployed youth. In turn, this may inform the establishment of effective interventions and policies to address the challenges that may arise as a result of unemployment.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The high and persisting unemployment rate in Namibia is a cause for concern as it has the potential to have particularly detrimental effects on improved quality of life, national and political peace and stability, and economic growth. Furthermore, unemployment poses a

threat to the overall mental health of the unemployed individuals, including low self-esteem, increased stress, alcohol and substance use disorders, as well as mood disorders (Dlamini et al., 2019). Therefore, this study seeks to assess the experience of unemployment and its effect on mental well-being amongst the youth living in Kavango-East region, one of the regions with the highest (48.2%) level of unemployment in Namibia (NSA, 2019).

1.3 Objectives of the study

The current study had several objectives, which are:

1. To explore the experience of unemployment of the youth in Rundu.
2. To explore the well-being of the youth in relation to unemployment in Rundu.
3. To investigate coping strategies of unemployed youth in Rundu.

1.4 Significance of the study

Literature on unemployment reveals that unemployment is often associated with mental health challenges. However, Chipare et al. (2021) state that there has been very little research in Namibia on factors associated with mental health. Therefore, this study may be significant by addressing the gap in knowledge on the literature available in Namibia pertaining to unemployment and mental well-being, particularly in the Kavango-East region.

According to the researcher's understanding, previous studies on unemployment in Namibia (Gonzo, 2001; Plattner & Gonzo, 2010; Bigenius, 2014; Amakali, 2018; Uugwanga, 2020; De Koker, 2021; Matondo, 2022) were mostly confined to the Khomas region, thus creating a contextual gap. As a result, the findings of the present study may help provide insight and understanding to healthcare policy makers, employers, mental

healthcare practitioners, and community leaders on the impact that this psychosocial problem has on the unemployed youth, focusing on a town (Rundu) with insufficient research on the topic of unemployment. Findings from this study may also provide evidence-based information needed for addressing the plight of unemployment and its influence on the mental well-being of the youth.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

The study was confined to assessing the experience of unemployment and the mental well-being of unemployed youth in the capital town of the Kavango East region, including coping strategies. Participants that were included in the study were unemployed graduates that obtained a certain level of tertiary education, post-secondary.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide the context of the study by looking at how the researcher arrived to the formulation of the research problem as well as objectives of the study. Most particularly, the significance of the study was also discussed by emphasizing its contribution to the body of knowledge pertaining to unemployment and its impact on the well-being of young graduates. The rest of the study unfolds by beginning with a discussion of the literature that has been reviewed for the study (chapter 2), thereafter provide a documentation of the research design and methodology that was adopted in carrying out the study (chapter 3), a presentation of the results (chapter 4), a discussion of the findings from the study (chapter 5), then a provision of recommendations and a conclusion (chapter 6).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Five steps were taken in the process of reviewing related literature in order to find primary sources (Brynard et al., 2014). This included (A) demarcating the research topic by simplifying the search strategies with a particular focus on key facets of the study; (B) writing down relevant bibliographic references as fully and as accurately as possible, and determining where they could be found; (C) deciding on particular sources which could be consulted; (D) obtaining the sources from the library, government reports, and the internet; and lastly, (E) studying the sources and noting the relevant information.

This chapter begins with a discussion on unemployment in the Western contexts and an African perspective of unemployment, and then establishes the unemployment rate amongst the youth in Namibia. Additionally, it examines the effect of unemployment on the mental well-being of young people, and finally, it will explore the theoretical frameworks to understanding unemployment and well-being, the role of work, as well as some of the coping strategies that are employed in dealing with unemployment, and then a conclusion.

2.2 Unemployment in Western contexts: The case of Europe and USA

Unemployment has been identified to be one of the pervasive global problems prevalent in numerous nations across the world. Over the past few decades, the global economy has witnessed a paradoxical occurrence called jobless growth, characterized by economic progress that does not lead to a proportional rise in job possibilities (Kumar, 2024). The notion of jobless growth gained prominence in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis,

a time marked by significant economic downturns followed by sluggish and unequal recoveries (Kumar, 2024). This is seen in a qualitative study in East Central Sweden, which sought to provide an understanding of the experiences of unemployment and perceptions of well-being among persons who involuntarily lost their work during the recent economic recession (Hiswals et al., 2017). The researchers indicate that among adults aged 16-64 in Gävle municipality, Sweden, the unemployment rate increased considerably during the period 2008-2012, from 5.9% in 2008 (5.5% in the whole county) to 10.8% in 2012 (9.6% in the whole county). In the U.S, the Great Recession also had a profound impact on labour markets as it resulted in the loss of jobs of over 7.5 million, pushing the national unemployment rate from 4.4% to 10.1% between 2007 and 2009 (Thiede & Monnat, 2016).

Liotti (2022) conducted a study that was aimed to empirically test the validity of the hypothesis of a beneficial effect of higher labour market flexibility on youth unemployment in 28 European countries in the 2000-2018 period. The study analysed the trend in youth unemployment in the three European country groups: the Northern, Southern, and the Eastern European country group. In the Northern country group, youth unemployment increased almost uninterruptedly until 2014, achieving a peak of 17.5% in that year (Liotti, 2022). In contrast, Liotti found that since 2015, youth unemployment has slightly declined, and in the last year of observation, 2018, it was about 14.5% (almost 4% points higher than 2000). In the Southern European country group, youth unemployment rate was stable until 2008 (about 17%), and then, as a consequence of the economic crisis, it increased to 36.3% in 2014. However, it strongly declined, achieving 24.2% in 2018 (almost 7% points higher than the value in 2008). Lastly, Liotti found that youth

unemployment strongly declined (from 26.1 to 15.4%) in the period between 2000 and 2008 in the Eastern European country group, then, in 2009 and 2010, the rate increased to 27% and remained stable in 2013. After that, youth unemployment again declined to 12.7% in 2018 (about half of the level in 2013) (Liotti, 2022). These trends in youth unemployment rate in Europe depict how the prevalence of unemployment crisis has persisted over the years across the world.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has also been observed to have contributed to the increase in unemployment rate globally. In the U.S, 17 million people became unemployed and 8 million left the labour force, marking a much higher figure than in previous recessions, although this development did not take long to reverse (Salvador & Soudan, 2022). Lambovska et al. (2021) conducted a study that aimed to analyse the impact of Covid-19 on the unemployment of people under the age of twenty-five in the European Union (EU). The authors found that the situation was worse in Spain, where youth unemployment reached a record high of over 40% in the last four month of 2020, an increase of more than 10% from the previous year. The study further revealed that in Italy, there was likewise a slight increase in the youth unemployment rate to almost 30%, or next to 400,000 unemployed people. In Sweden, which was one of the “top 5” countries by youth unemployment rate at the end of 2019, including Greece, the situation worsened in 2020, with the youth unemployment rate having risen from 20.4% to 23.8% - 25.6%, which translates to 20,000 more unemployed young people than in the year before the pandemic. According to Lambovska et al. (2021), the situation also worsened in Lithuania, as the youth unemployment rate almost doubled, rising from 14.9% in 2019 to 24.9% - 28.4% in the pandemic year. For many countries, unemployment crisis came as a result of the anti-

pandemic measures. This included measures such as the temporary or permanent closure of certain essential industries necessary for providing employment opportunities, generating national income, and fostering economies, for instance, tourism, manufacturing, and agriculture.

2.3 Unemployment in Africa

The African continent has grappled with the unemployment phenomenon for a number of years. Youth unemployment in Africa neither appeared overnight nor emerged from a single source, but evolved over a long period from a mix of factors (The African Capacity Building Foundation, 2016). The colonial period in Africa introduced a cash economy, through cultivation of export crops, exploitation of minerals, and forestry activities, thus creating demand for wage employment and a basis for migrant labour (The African Capacity Building Foundation, 2016). The African Capacity Building Foundation further states that during the late colonial period, investment in formal education created a new African youth with higher expectations than working on the farm or in the mines. As rural–urban migration grew, employers were simultaneously seeking to raise productivity by replacing labour with machinery, adding to the already growing problem of youth unemployment (The African Capacity Building Foundation, 2016). These and the ever-evolving labour market trends have given rise to unemployment in Africa.

Given the inadequacy of the formal economy to meet the high demands for labour, many African countries continue to struggle to resolve the prevailing unemployment (Yamben & Assah, 2020). For instance, Northern Africa featured the highest unemployment rate, driven by very high rates among the youth (34% more of the total unemployed population) and women, 19.8%, more than twice that of men (9.3%) (Kuhn et

al., 2018). Still in the same report by Kuhn et al., Sub-Saharan Africa's unemployment rate stood at 7.2% in 2017, although South Africa's unemployment rate was at 27.7% in the same year. In Nigeria, one of Africa's most densely populated country with a population of over 167 million, the unemployment and underemployment rate according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) rose to 23.1 percent and 16.6 percent respectively (Makinde & Adegami, 2019). Yamben and Assah (2020) argue that high unemployment rates are a major characteristic of developing economies and most of them being found in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, this psychosocial problem may contribute to the increase in socioeconomic and health challenges.

2.4 Unemployment in Namibia

Unemployment appears to be a global problem, which is not uncommon to Namibia. Before independence, unemployment can be attributed to the war of independence, which destroyed infrastructure and caused despondence in the economy (Sunde & Akanbi, 2016). Eita and Ashipala (2010) postulate that black people (mainly youth) had no real expectation of being able to live a good life, pre-independence, which has been changed, post-independence, and led to people to believe that they can get jobs and have a good life, but the economy is not generating enough job opportunities.

Unemployment has been an issue of concern in Namibia since independence, 35 years ago, due to its consistency in rising (Kagola & Abur, 2022). However, a number of efforts by the Namibian government, post-independence, have focused on job creation, improving employability skills among men and women, and curbing the plight of unemployment. This includes the implementation of programs and policies such as the Targeted Intervention Program for Employment and Economic Growth (TIPEEG) (Rafael, 2020). According to Rafael, TIPEEG was implemented in 2011/12 fiscal year and its main

aim was to address the high unemployment rate, while also supporting strategic high growth sectors. By September 2013, a total of 83 315 jobs were created in all TIPEEG projects, which is 44.6 percent of the 187 000 jobs that were targeted (Rafael, 2020). She further states that in addition to TIPEEG, the Namibia National Employment Policy was also implemented which ran for the period between 2013 and 2017. This is a framework that ought to direct the processes of public employment services that lead to employment creation in the labour market, contributing to economic growth and social development (Shinguadja, 2019). In addition to this, the government, through the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, and Employment Creation (MLIREC), has established the Namibia Integrated Employment Information System (NIEIS). The system aims to register job-seekers, vacancies in the public and private sector, and assist job-seekers with accessing digital employment opportunities. Despite all these efforts by the government, Namibia continues to be confronted with staggering unemployment rates.

The national statistics show that unemployment has increased rapidly over the past decade, and is a huge cause for concern in economic and psychosocial terms (Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2015). The Namibia Labour Force Survey report of 2018 found that the overall broad unemployment rate for Namibia was at 33.4% (NSA, 2019). More specifically, overall unemployment rate appears to be high amongst younger age groups, 15-19 and 20-24 years respectively. The Labour Force Report of 2023 revealed that unemployment rate increased from 33.4 percent in 2018 to 36.9 percent in 2023, with a similar trend observed in urban (33.4 percent in 2018 to 36.4 percent in 2023) and rural (33.5 percent in 2018 to 38.0 percent in 2023) areas, and among males (32.5 percent in 2018 to 34.6 percent in 2023) and females (34.3 percent in 2018 to 39.6 percent in 2023) (NSA, 2023). Still in the same report, regional unemployment rate shows that the rate was

highest in Kavango-West (52.8%), Kavango-East (52.0%), and Ohangwena (47.2%) regions.

The Afrobarometer, which is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life, conducted face-to-face interviews through a random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Namibians between 31 October and 16 November 2021 (Mpako & Ndoma, 2024). Amongst other findings from the interviews, unemployment ranks at the top among problems that Namibian youth (aged 18-35 years) want the government to address. The alarming nature of the Namibian unemployment rates, therefore, call for interventions that are supported by research-based evidence. Left unabated, the unemployment phenomenon amongst young people may then continue to deprive them from both the manifest and latent functions of work.

2.5 The role of work

Work has been identified as one of the factors that play a significant role in the improvement of an individual's well-being. Conroy (2010) maintains that work provides the fundamental means to an individual's livelihood and the absence of work has been correlated to numerous problems for the individual, families, communities and society as a whole. It can be deduced from this notion that those in paid jobs may have the means for accessing resources and services needed for improved quality of life, such as better healthcare services and nutrition, compared to the unemployed. In addition to societal recognition and prestige that comes with one's employment status, work is often associated with forming part of one's identity.

Lambovska et al. (2021) assert that work gives people material security, a sense of self-realization, and utility in society. This is consistent with Jahoda's (1982) work which culminated to the development of the latent-deprivation model. This model proposed that individuals principally engage in paid work to attain manifest functions such as financial income, while work also provides an equally important set of latent functions which fulfil the prerequisites of a person's psychological needs. The three basic psychological needs as suggested by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) include the need for autonomy (the need to making free choices), competence (the need to master tasks), and relatedness (the need to connect with others).

According to the Self-Determination Theory, individuals' basic psychological needs should be satisfied for optimal psychological growth (Coxen et al., 2021). These needs are fundamental to the development of psychological health and personal well-being, and they are described as innate and universal (Van den Broeck et al., 2016; Gil-Florez et al., 2022). In relation to the psychological need for autonomy, work, therefore, enables the achievement of this need by one's exercising of free and independent choices for a preferred healthy lifestyle. With reference to the psychological need for competence, development of a sense of mastery is achieved by one's successful performance or completion of a work-related task. Lastly, the need for relatedness is experienced by one's affiliation to work colleagues and shared collective work targets. This then demonstrates the fundamental role that work plays in the fulfilment of the basic psychological needs associated with psychological well-being.

However, it remains arguable that work in itself has a causal effect on the achievement of psychological needs, since the type of work and the quality of work-

environment that one is engaged in has a significant role to play in the attainment of by-products of work such as psychological well-being. Being unemployed, therefore, somewhat deprives one from the free exercise of autonomous choices in relation to access to resources and a preferred lifestyle, due to the economic limiting factor that unemployment causes in the life of an individual.

2.6 Unemployment and mental health

Unemployment has been associated with a number of mental health problems. A number of studies have attributed the experience of ill-health, particularly mental health problems, to the rise of job loss or no job at all. This is seen in Boardman and Rinaldi (2021) who state that the rising rates of unemployment in the UK during the 1980s prompted a revival of studies on the health effects of unemployment. According to Boardman and Rinaldi (2021), studies typically find higher rates of anxiety and depression, alcohol and substance use and alcohol-related deaths among the unemployed than among those in work. The authors further argue that suicide rates, especially among the long-term unemployed, are greater than among those in work. This decline in mental well-being amongst the unemployed, as identified above, could be attributed to their loss of hope for opportunities for improved quality of life.

Similarly, Mokona et al. (2020) conducted a community based cross-sectional study that was aimed at assessing the prevalence and associated factors of depression among 1452 unemployed young adults in Gedeo zone, Southern Ethiopia. The authors found that the overall prevalence of depression among unemployed young adults was 30.9%, and of the total study participants with depression, 56.7% had mild depression, 36% had moderate depression, and 7.3% had severe depression. Mokona et al. (2020) further posit that family and societal pressures associated with job seeking activities and higher expectations from

college or university graduates to be employed act as potential mediators of depression among unemployed young adults. Very often, unemployment causes socioeconomic or financial distress. This then evokes feelings of perceived failure, which in turn leads to depression.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has had a debilitating effect on the increase of unemployment, thus having a negative impact on mental health. In the analysis of the January wave of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), Wilson and Finch (2021) from the UK Health Foundation, suggest that 700,000 unemployed people had poor mental health in January 2021. Wilson and Finch (2021) postulate that unemployment, which often entails not having a job and actively seeking work, has consistently been found to have a negative impact on a range of health outcomes. They identify mechanisms through which unemployment could harm mental health. This includes experiencing stress and reduced self-esteem arising from the loss of the day-to-day structure of work or the stigma associated with unemployment and through financial hardship, insecurity, and reduced future earnings potential. Therefore, these findings indicate how work can play a significant role in the promotion and maintenance of psychological well-being as opposed to being unemployed, which may lead to a decline in mental health.

However, some individuals do not hold a negative perception of unemployment in all entirety. It could be argued that those from better socioeconomic backgrounds and with good psychosocial support tend to have lesser negative consequences of unemployment as discussed above. This could be attributed to the low expectations from them in terms of contributing to the financial provisions in their households. The strong psychosocial support from their peers and family members during their period of unemployment may

then help with alleviating their psychological and economic distress. More so, while unemployed, some individuals tend to have ample time to their disposal for fostering social relationships and pursuing their hobbies.

2.7 Effects of unemployment on the mental health of young people in Africa

Several studies in the African context found that being unemployed has a significant impact on the mental well-being of the youth. For example, a study conducted among unemployed youth in selected communities in Eswatini by Dlamini et al. (2019), found that unemployment leads to a lack of time structure, social contact, social status/identity, collective purpose, and activity, which leads to poor mental health amongst unemployed youth. Another study in South Africa's North-West province found that psychological effects of unemployment include increased hostility, depression, anxiety, stress, anger, fear, despair, loneliness and social isolation, and decreased self-esteem, life satisfaction, aspiration levels, concentration and personal identity (De Witte et al., 2012). These findings indicate how unemployment can have a negative impact on one's psychological well-being.

Amissah and Nyarko (2017) conducted a cross-sectional study that sought to investigate the effects of youth unemployment in Ghana. The study recruited a sample of 362 youths, both the employed ($n = 172$) and the unemployed ($n = 190$), who were purposively selected. In this study, the employed youths served as a control group for comparative analyses. Amissah and Nyarko (2017) found that there was poorer psychological health among unemployed youths as they had higher levels of depression, cognitive distortions, suicidality and lower levels of self-esteem, compared to employed youths. In the same study, the authors found that longer duration of unemployment significantly predicted poorer psychological health, higher levels of depression, cognitive

distortions and suicidality and lower levels of self-esteem among the youths. This indicates how prolonged duration of unemployment can have a negative impact on psychological well-being amongst the unemployed.

Not much research has been conducted on the psychological effects of youth unemployment in Namibia, although a qualitative study by Bigenius (2014) was done in the Katutura location of Windhoek. In this study, six unemployed young people were interviewed to deepen the understanding about the phenomenon of young adults' unemployment situation in Namibia. The researcher found that in addition to financial problems that seem to be the main issues confronting the unemployed youth, they also experience shame when comparing to their peers. Moreover, the study also found that the unemployed tend to have lack of routines, structure, status and identity (Bigenius, 2014).

Another study in the Namibian context on unemployment and well-being is that of Plattner and Gonzo (2010). Their phenomenological study aimed to explore how poverty-stricken job seekers (10 men aged 18 to 40 years) in Namibia felt about their unemployment situation and how they perceived themselves, their social support, and their future. This study revealed that the lack of a job caused feelings of helplessness, nagging thoughts, and difficulties to sleep. Plattner and Gonzo (2010) also found that participants perceived their position within their social network as low and degrading, thus negatively impacting their self-image. While these two studies (Plattner & Gonzo, 2010; Bigenius, 2014) provided insight into understanding how participants experienced unemployment, a contextual gap still remains, thus prompting the need for the current study to further investigate this topic in underserved areas, such as Rundu.

2.8 Unemployment and psychological well-being: Theoretical frameworks

Numerous theories have emerged to explain the negative consequences of unemployment on psychological well-being. In this study, more emphasis will be put on Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model due to its significant and influential theoretical role in explaining the effects of unemployment on well-being. As such, the current study adopts Jahoda's latent deprivation theory as it seeks to explore the lived experiences of the unemployed youth in Rundu, through a phenomenological approach. This framework will help provide a perspective for exploring how participants perceive their realities while unemployed, taking into consideration some of the underpinnings of the theory such as participants' daily and time structure during their period of unemployment. This theory served as a stimulant for other subsequent theories on unemployment and psychological well-being. Therefore, a brief review of some of the prominent subsequent theories, Warr's (1987) vitamin model and Fryer's (1995) agency restriction model, will be discussed.

2.8.1 The latent deprivation model

Marie Jahoda was a pioneer in the field of social psychology, known for her work on the effects of unemployment on emotional well-being. In her extensive research work on the unemployed in Marienthal in the 1930s, Jahoda (1982) developed the latent deprivation model. This model states that when individuals get unemployed, not only do they lose the manifest functions of employment (i.e., their salary), but they also get deprived from the latent functions, namely: time structure, social contacts outside of the immediate family, collective purpose and effort, regular activity and social status and identity (Ribeiro et al., 2005). According to Jahoda (1981, p. 188, as cited in Bahr et al., 2022), work provides the following: (1) collective purpose, the opportunity to contribute to a higher collective purpose, thus, linking an individual to goals and purposes that transcend their own; (2)

status and identity, as work defines certain aspects of status and recognition; (3) social contacts, in the sense of regularly shared experiences and contacts with people outside the nuclear family, thus, enlarging social horizons; (4) required activity; and (5) a time structure for the waking day, the week, and the year. The latent functions of work, as identified by Jahoda, are explained further (Paul et al., 2023):

A) *A collective purpose* pertains to the feeling of being useful to others and leading a meaningful life. This latent function is about the perception that one is part of collective projects that transcend one's restricted individualistic existence and give it a deeper meaning. Jahoda assumes that practically every form of employment allows the respective job incumbent to construe some form of collective purpose around the job, which is beneficial for well-being.

B) *Status and identity* refer to experiences of being valued and appreciated by the people around a person and by society at large. According to the latent deprivation model, being employed and earning one's own money itself confers a certain amount of status and just about every job is more respected than being unemployed. Since appreciation is highly important for the self, experiencing a certain status positively influences mental health.

C) *Social contact* is established through work, since almost any kind of job provides contact with a range of other people on a regular basis, which is important for maintaining a good mental health. Jahoda notes that these social contacts are not only important for single people, but also for people with a family, because they broaden one's social horizon beyond the narrow confines of family relationships.

D) *Activity*: While Jahoda assumed that being active had positive effects on psychological well-being, she also assumed that humans tend to be idle if they are not

challenged by externally set goals that push them into activity. Employment regularly sets such goals and thus improves psychological well-being.

E) *Time structure*: From early childhood on, people in modern societies are enrolled in institutions that enforce a strict structure of the day, the week and the year, such as a kindergarten, school, university, and later employment. Thus, people become so deeply accustomed to externally imposed rhythms of time that they are not able to structure their time for themselves when, through being unemployed, the externally imposed time structure breaks down. The huge amount of time that is suddenly available for personal discretion becomes a “tragic gift”, leading to chaotic and squandered days, which in turn lead to negative emotions and a decline in mental health (Jahoda et al., 1933/1975, p.83, in Paul et al., 2023).

In Jahoda’s opinion, it is the deprivation of the latent functions of work as a result of unemployment, therefore, that primarily accounts for the decline in mental well-being (Ribeiro et al., 2005; Paul & Batinic, 2010; De Witte et al., 2012). For instance, Paul et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of 106 primary studies based on meta-analytic methods in order to test the basic assumptions of Marie Jahoda’s latent deprivation model. The authors found that employed people reported higher levels on all five latent functions, as well as on the manifest function, compared to unemployed people. In that same study, all latent functions, as well as the manifest function, emerged as significant independent predictors of mental health, when the influence of the other manifest and latent functions was controlled.

Overall, this theory denotes how the latent functions of work, of which the unemployed may be deprived, are essential for maintaining mental well-being. It somehow

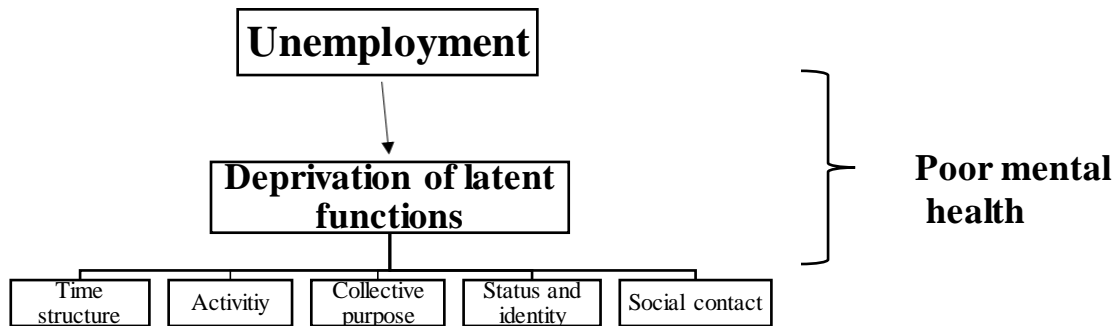
places little emphasis on the possible ample leisure time that the unemployed may have during the unemployment period and the mental relaxation that comes due to the lack of meeting work demands and stress, which could relatively be necessary for psychological well-being. Nonetheless, the latent deprivation model still remains seminal to the current study.

Therefore, as a way to conceptualize youth unemployment and mental well-being in Namibia, the current study was informed by Marie Jahoda's latent deprivation model. This theoretical approach provided a framework for exploring and attempting to understand the affective experiences of unemployed youth in Rundu, taking into consideration the role that the latent functions of employment play in maintaining psychological well-being.

Since the current study adopts the phenomenological approach, examining participants' perceptions and experiences of unemployment through the lenses of the latent deprivation model is considered suitable. This model is illustrated in the table below, indicating how unemployment may deprive the youth from the latent functions of work, thus possibly leading to a decline in mental well-being:

Figure 1:

Jahoda's latent deprivation model



2.8.2 The vitamin model

Marie Jahoda's latent deprivation model served as a stimulant for further development of social psychological theories that sought to explain the negative consequences of unemployment on mental well-being. Following Jahoda's model, Warr (1987) developed the vitamin model, a theory of the effect of work and unemployment on people's mental health (Bahr et al., 2022). The vitamin model is seen as a further extension of Jahoda's latent deprivation model, although having an unclear distinction from its predecessor. Moreover, this theoretical approach does not clearly state whether or not a decline in mental health is as a result of being unemployed. However, this model assumes that nine contextual factors or "vitamins," which are very similar to the functions of work according to Jahoda, provide for the working person, as well as for the unemployed person, thus, protecting their mental health (Bahr et al., 2022). This includes the "vitamin A-D model", which includes environmental features that are harmful above a certain level (externally generated goals;

variety; environmental clarity; opportunity for control; opportunity for skill use and opportunity for interpersonal contact) and the “vitamin C-E model”, which includes environmental features that have a constant effect from a certain point (availability of money; physical security and valued social position) (Ribeiro et al., 2005). In this case, a negative effect on mental health, therefore, may be seen in the unemployed if their unemployment duration is prolonged, as they may begin to lack the identified ‘vitamin A-D’ and ‘vitamin C-E’ in due course. Simply put by Ribeiro et al. (2005), transitions to lower levels for each of the environmental features have negative effects on psychological well-being, and that the extent of those effects is dependent of the amount of change in a given feature.

2.8.3 The agency restriction model

In contrast to Jahoda’s latent deprivation model and Warr’s vitamin model, Fryer’s (1995) agency restriction model focuses on the financial impoverishment of unemployed people and postulates that this deprives people of their freedom of action, which ultimately has a negative impact on their mental health (Bahr et al., 2022). This model places more emphasis on the manifest functions of work, although acknowledging the significant contributions of the latent functions to improving psychological well-being. According to Aitken et al. (2023), the agency restriction model emphasizes the monetary (manifest) benefit of work, asserting that it is the financial strain caused by lacking income that is primarily responsible for restricting agency and lowering well-being in unemployment. Therefore, a decline in mental health amongst the unemployed as denoted by this notion could be attributed to the financial distress that comes with the lack of financial resources, one of the means for an improved quality of life. This is evidently supported with the

findings from a meta-analytic study by Aitken et al. (2023) based on 90 primary studies/sources, 1147 effect sizes, and 69,723 people. The study revealed a unified account of the latent deprivation theory and the agency restriction theory: employment provides access to all of the psychological and monetary benefits of work, and each benefit is significantly associated with lower psychological distress and higher life satisfaction. In the same study, the authors found that the monetary benefit was especially strongly related to life satisfaction.

This section provided a theoretical framework on unemployment and psychological well-being, with more emphasis on Jahoda's latent deprivation model, through which the unemployment experience is conceptualized in the current study, in relation to mental well-being. The latent deprivation model, which is seminal to the current study, assumes that the unemployed experience poor mental well-being due to the deprivation from the latent functions of work. The vitamin model succeeded the latent deprivation model and assumes that certain environmental features may be essential to the well-being of an individual if provided in fair amounts. The unemployed, therefore, may experience poor mental health due to the lack of certain environmental features, associated to the role of vitamins in the body, that work offers, which are necessary for psychological well-being. The agency restriction model, on the other hand, holds the view that it is the lack of the manifest functions of work, monetary benefits, that lead to poor life-satisfaction, thus contributing to psychological distress.

2.9 Coping strategies

The psychological distress experienced as a result of being unemployed often necessitate the need for coping mechanisms. Very often, individuals employ several mechanisms

aimed to fulfil their need for survival or protect themselves against any possible threats to their well-being. This common practice has been observed since the evolution of the human species. Relating it to the unemployment phenomenon, coping strategies comprise the appraisal of the threat posed by an external event (i.e., unemployment) and the thoughts and actions taken to protect one's well-being (Griep et al., 2015). Therefore, an important question worth unpacking is: "how then does one deal with the psychological effects of unemployment"?

Griep et al. (2015) conducted a study in Brussels, Belgium, that sought to assess the experience of unemployment and its associated coping strategies, grasping context-specific details using photovoice. Four participants were purposefully recruited in this study and the researchers found four significant coping strategies that participants adopted in dealing with unemployment. This included problem-focused coping (strategies aimed to overcome the problem at hand) such as intensive job-application behaviour and access to education and training. Another coping mechanism that Griep et al. (2015) found useful amongst their participants included emotion-focused coping strategies (aimed to preserve a minimal sense of psychological well-being) such as social support, creating structure in time, outdoor-activities, and hope. These findings concur with the effective coping strategies to unemployment found in other qualitative studies (Mayer & Halloderer, 2022; Arena et al., 2022).

Mayer and Halloderer (2022) found that through friends and family, their participants experienced social support in form of emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Thus, the received social support helped with distress management, coping with the experience of failure, and a reduction in financial hardships (Mayer &

Halloderer, 2022). However, despite the significance of these coping strategies in promoting mental well-being, it remains arguable that coping strategies in relation to unemployment relatively vary amongst individuals. The usefulness of these strategies, therefore, may depend on the nature of the pressing problem at hand experienced by an individual.

In addition to the positive coping mechanisms identified above, research studies on unemployment and well-being conducted in both high and low income countries have also found some unhealthy coping strategies employed by the unemployed youth. For instance, a cross-sectional study by Mokona et al. (2020) in Gedeo Zone, Southern Ethiopia, found substance usage or dependence (alcohol, Khat-Amphetamine type stimulant, illicit drugs such as cannabis and marijuana, and cigarette smoking) amongst their participants, unemployed young adults. Mokona et al. (2020) argue that substance use such as alcohol consumption might be used as a strategy for self-medication against the distress of unemployment.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of the existing empirical literature on unemployment. It examined the prevalence of unemployment and its impact on mental well-being in the Western and African contexts. Unemployment is identified to be one of the psychosocial problems serving as a predictor for poor mental health. As a result, the unemployed may adopt coping strategies that are both helpful and unhelpful as a way to deal with the unpleasant experience of unemployment. The literature review also demonstrated that work is identified as a possible contributing factor to well-being. This is due to its role in contributing to the fulfilment of psychological needs (for instance, the need for competence

and autonomy), one's social prestige, identity, utility in society, time structure, and security. Jahoda provided a theoretical conceptualization of unemployment and psychological well-being, with emphasis on the latent deprivation model. The latent deprivation model is adopted for the current study as it provides a theoretical framework for conceptualizing how the deprivation from the latent functions of work due to being unemployed may have a negative effect on mental well-being. Its usefulness and influential role as a stimulant for subsequent theories on unemployment and well-being (e.g. the vitamin model and the agency restriction model) also makes it a preferred framework for conceptualizing the youth unemployment experiences in the current study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological approach undertaken in the study. Sequentially, it begins by providing an outline of the research design, then a description of the study population, the sample, research instrument, data collection procedure, data analysis, and then the ethical considerations observed throughout the undertaking of the study.

3.2 Research design

In order to investigate the research problem, the study adopted a qualitative research approach, with a phenomenological design. The qualitative approach was considered suitable for the study as it allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information needed for gaining better insight into the experience of unemployment from the participants' perspectives. "Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that emphasizes the direct experience of phenomena in order to determine their essences, the things that make them what they are" (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 258). This definition is similar to Cresswell (2009) who holds that phenomenology is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants.

In carrying out the current study, the researcher employed the six steps involved in a phenomenological research design as outlined by Bernard and Ryan (2010): (1) identifying a thing, a phenomenon whose essence you want to understand; (2) identifying your biases and doing as much as you can to put them aside; (3) collecting narratives about the phenomenon from people who are experiencing it by asking them open-ended

questions and then probing them; (4) using your now-fresh (after bracketing) intuition to identify the essentials of the phenomenon; (5) laying out those essentials in writing with exemplary quotes from the narratives; and (6) repeating steps 4 and 5 until you are sure that there is no more to learn about the lived experience of the participants you are studying. This approach provides a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Cresswell, 2009). Therefore, a phenomenological design was considered suitable for the study, in order to explore participants' feelings and experiences in ways that go beyond the crudity of traditional categories such as age, gender, or ethnicity (Davies & Hughes, 2014).

3.3 Population of the study

The target population of the study included unemployed graduates in the town of Rundu that are within the youthful age bracket of 18 – 30 years of age. This age bracket was considered suitable since post-secondary students mostly obtain their first undergraduate tertiary qualifications around this age range. This included a total number of 3097 unemployed young graduates, males and females within the town of Rundu, that are registered on the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, and Employment Creation's online employment database referred to as 'Namibia Integrated Employment Information System' (NIEIS). This population was regarded as a representation of the Namibian case in investigating the research problem.

3.4 Sample

From the targeted population, the study employed a sample of 14 research participants. The researcher considered this sample size adequate as it enabled the achievement of data saturation by capturing all relevant perspectives and themes (Ahmed, 2024). Participants

were primarily selected through a purposive sampling technique. This technique was considered suitable as the researcher was able to recruit participants that had characteristics of interest, which is a key feature of purposive sampling technique. To reach the targeted sample size for the study, the researcher additionally used snowball-sampling method. This sampling method involves using key informants to identify or refer other prospective participants that meet the study criteria that could be interviewed (Davies & Hughes, 2014). In this case, the researcher asked initially recruited participants to refer other participants that were also unemployed to be interviewed. This was done for the last three participants, since those that were initially identified and contacted were unable to make it to the interviews.

The inclusion criteria for participation in the study as a research participant were as follows:

- (A) Individuals that have been unemployed for at least six months and more;
- (B) Have employability skills such as completion of secondary education, as well as being in possession of a tertiary qualification or Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) certificate;
- (C) Actively seeking for employment by submitting CVs/resumes to work establishments and attending job interviews; and
- (D) Age bracket between 18 – 30 years.

The sample consisted of six unemployed females and eight unemployed males that have obtained tertiary qualifications. Their ages ranged between twenty-four to thirty years old (24 – 30yrs.) as depicted in table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Completed tertiary qualifications duration	Unemployment
P1	Male	30yrs.	BEd. Junior Primary	2yrs.
P2	Male	28yrs.	BA: Philosophy & Politics	2yrs.
P3	Male	30yrs.	BEd. Junior Primary	3yrs.
P4	Male	26yrs.	BEd. Junior Primary	1yr.
P5	Female	28 yrs.	Dip. Accounting.	6yrs.
P6	Male	29yrs.	B. Sc. Statistics	4yrs.
P7	Female	24yrs.	BA: English.	8mths.
P8	Male	30yrs.	BEd. Junior Primary	6yrs
P9	Female	25yrs.	Cert. Nursing	1yr.
P10	Male	24yrs.	BEd. Secondary	1yr.
P11	Female	26 yrs.	B. Marketing	10mths.
P12	Male	27yrs.	B. HR.	8mths.
P13	Female	24yrs.	Dip. Accounting	1yr8mths.
P14	Female	29yrs.	BEd. Junior Primary	5yrs.

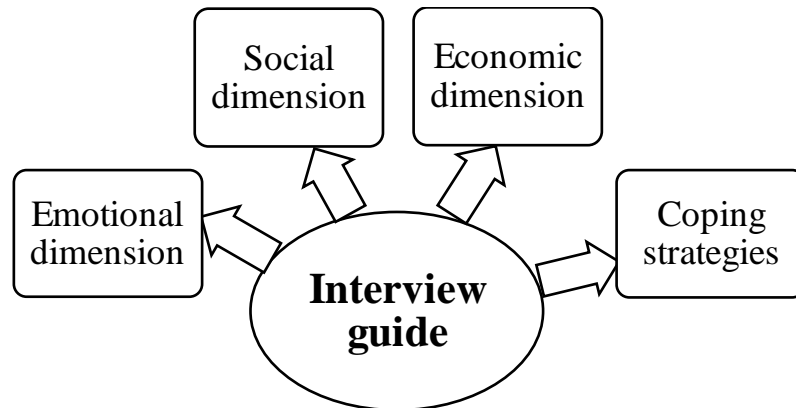
Note. **BEd.** = Bachelor of Education; **BA.** = Bachelor of Art; **BSc.** = Bachelor of Science; **Dip.** = Diploma; **Cert.** = Certificate; **B.** = Bachelor; **B. HR.** = Bachelor of Human Resource

3.5 Research instruments

The study used a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 5) to allow the researcher to ask a set of similar open-ended questions to the participants. Interviews allow people to convey information from their own perspective and in their own words (Gill et al., 2008). Davies and Hughes (2014, p. 101) further elucidate this notion by stating, “The aim of any research interview is to create a climate in which the respondent can talk freely and be able to offer the full range of responses that apply”. The use of this instrument for data collection was regarded a good fit for the study as it enabled the researcher to obtain adequate information from participants, based on their subjective perspectives and experiences of unemployment. Below is a diagram illustrating the dimensions of the interview guide.

Figure 2

Research interview guide



The interview guide was pilot tested prior to the actual interviews and the supervisor was involved in this process to ensure validity and trustworthiness. The pilot study enabled the researcher to identify any technical difficulties that could be encountered during the actual data collection process. More so, the researcher was able to restructure some questions and do minor rephrasing of certain questions that needed to be rectified in order to enhance comprehension of interview questions by participants.

3.6 Data collection procedures

Ethical clearance was first obtained from the University of Namibia's Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC) (see Appendix 1). Data collection took place between July and August 2024. Prior to the study, the researcher sought permission from the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation before using the ministry's online employment database for identification of job seekers (see Appendix 2). After permission was granted (see Appendix 3), research participants that met the inclusion criteria for the study were then identified through the Ministry of Labour's online employment database (Namibia Integrated Employment Information System [NIEIS]). This is an open public

system that displays online job listings in the Namibian labour market. However, access to participants' sociodemographic details on the system that aligned with the participation criteria in the study was enabled by the researcher's professional affiliation to the Ministry as a staff member. Of the 14 participants that were interviewed, the last three participants were identified through referrals by third parties known to the researcher.

The researcher contacted the participants telephonically for information sharing on interview scheduling as well as the details of the study. Emails containing information that provided an overview of the research were then sent to the identified participants. Thereafter, a conducive environment, the researcher's work office (Ministry of Labour – Rundu office building), was used for the one-on-one interviews. However, one of the participants was interviewed at her residential area, as she could not make it to the researcher's office. Only a single interview was conducted with each participant.

The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured phenomenological interviews comprising open-ended questions in English with the participants. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to modify the order and details of how topics are covered. Due to the unemployment phenomenon being sensitive, the researcher remained attuned to the expressed and unexpressed feelings and bodily cues of the participants. The researcher kept a research journal in which the researcher reflected personal feelings and impressions drawn from each participant at the end of each interview. Questions varied in structure for each participant, mostly based on their personal experiences of the phenomenon and according to the flow of the interview, while ensuring that all questions were asked. The researcher recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder and later transcribed verbatim for

data analysis purposes. The duration of the interview sessions per participant, as estimated by Gill et al. (2008), lasted for about 45 minutes on average.

3.7 Data analysis

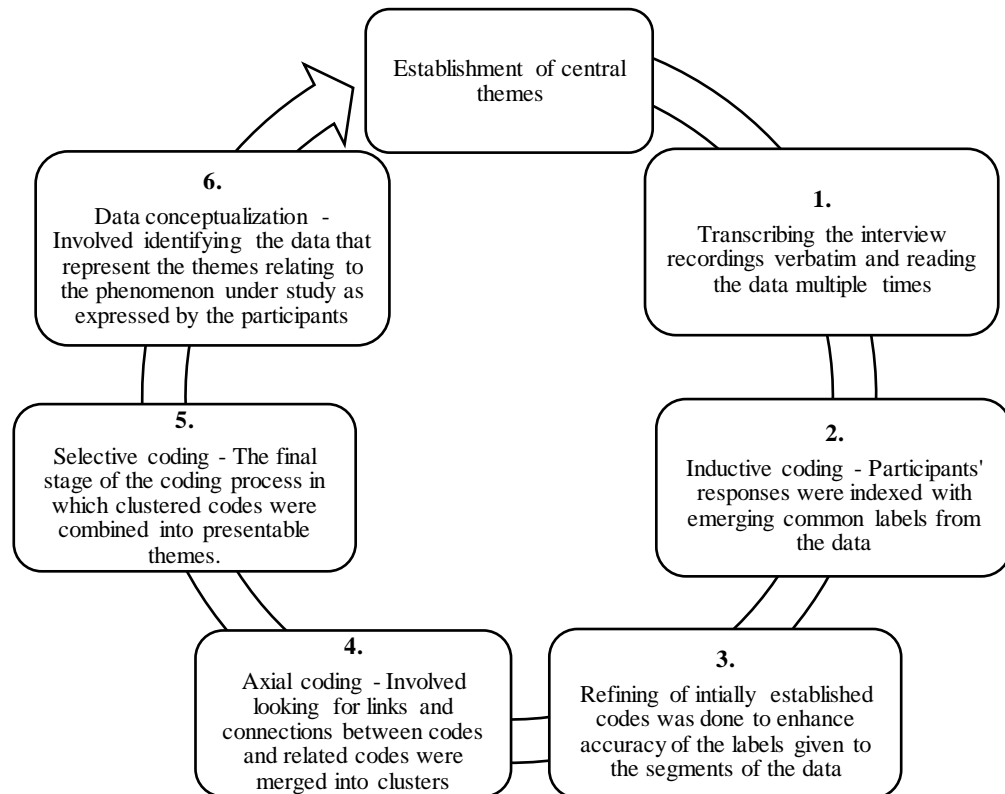
The collected data was rigorously analysed manually using Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet as the researcher had limitations to the use of qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo or ATLAS.ti. The use of a spreadsheet for analytical purposes was done following the guidelines of Ose (2016). Thematic analysis, a type of analysis that searches for patterns and themes (Hiswals et al., 2017), was used as an analytical tool. In order to address the objectives of the study, an interpretive phenomenological analysis was employed. This is an approach that aims to examine and interpret the ‘lived experiences’ of people who have experienced a similar (common) phenomenon (Alase, 2017). This approach was applied by adopting Creswell’s (2014) six steps of data analysis: A) organizing and preparing the data for analysis, B) reading through all the data, C) coding of the data, D) description of the setting or people and categories or themes for analysis, E) presenting the results of the analysis, and F) the interpretation of the results of the analysis.

Data analysis was done by first transcribing the interview recordings verbatim and reading the data multiple times for familiarization purpose. Thereafter, an inductive coding approach was used in order to identify central and overarching themes and sub-themes. Inductive coding involves developing themes from the analysed data set. Initially established codes were then refined after a rigorous close look at the data until the researcher was relatively satisfied with the accuracy of the final codes assigned to participants’ response segments. The final codes were then grouped into categories based

on their similarities in meaning and themes were developed from these categories in response to the objectives of the study. This process is illustrated below:

Figure 3

Thematic data analysis process



Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher ensured conscious bracketing while analysing and interpreting participants' expressed experiences of the phenomenon. This involved the use of a reflective journal where the researcher made notes to reflect on his thoughts and examine his knowledge of the research problem. This enabled the researcher to avoid his personal knowledge and judgment of the topic from influencing his data analysis and interpretation of participants' experiences, thus maintaining reflexivity as a

researcher. In qualitative research, reflexivity entails reflection on the process of knowledge production and meaning-making based on theoretical (as well as personal) assumptions (Ide & Beddoe, 2024). Memos on overall impressions of the participants' responses were also done simultaneously as a way to remain sensitive to the emerging themes.

This process of thematic analysis enabled the researcher to engage thoroughly with the data and delve deeply into the lived experiences of the participants. As a result, central and overarching themes and patterns associated to participants' responses were established. This was done in an iterative process, meaning the researcher was able to move from one stage to another and back until some level of accuracy was relatively established before moving to the next stage.

3.8 Research ethics

The researcher ensured that the study was conducted by observing the ethical guidelines and principles as outlined by the University of Namibia. This meant conducting the research study once the ethical clearance certificate (see Appendix 1) was obtained from the University of Namibia's Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC). Moreover, the researcher ensured that written informed consent (see Appendix 4) by participants for their voluntary participation in the study was done. The usage of an audio tape-recorder for data analysis purposes was explained to the participants and their consent to be recorded was obtained.

Completed participant sociodemographic forms (see Appendix 5) were then stored in the lockable cupboard of the researcher's office. Audio recordings were stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer of which access to recorded

information is only limited to the researcher. Participants were informed of the details of the study, their voluntary participation in or withdrawal from the study if they wished to do so, and that their information would be treated with confidentiality and anonymity when disseminating findings through presentations at conferences or publications.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided a documentation of the methodological approach employed in carrying out the study. This involved a discussion of the research design, study population, sample, research instrument, a demonstration of the data collection procedure, data analysis undertaken, and then the ethical considerations observed throughout the undertaking of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the 14 participants (43% females, 57% males, with a mean age of 27.2 years old) described in Table 1 (See 3.4 Sample). Most of the participants had children of their own who depended on them. All the participants lived within the town of Rundu, although some came from informal settlements that are characterized by zinc houses, while others came from formal settlements that are characterized by houses made up of bricks.

The analysis revealed six overarching themes: Theme 1 - Employment seeking habits and unstructured daily activities; Theme 2 - Psychological distress as a result of unemployment; Theme 3 - Unemployment as a cause for decay in quality social relationships; Theme 4 - Financial vulnerability; Theme 5 - Social withdrawal and isolation; and Theme 6 - Remaining hopeful and optimistic about employment prospects. These themes were developed from the grouping of final codes of the participants' responses into categories based on their similarities in meaning in order to address the objectives of the study. The particular order of arrangement of the themes is based on the systematic structure of the interview guide's dimensions. Several sub-themes were also identified as illustrated below:

Table 2*Major themes and sub-themes*

Major themes	Sub-themes
Employment seeking habits and unstructured daily activities	
Psychological distress as a result of unemployment	Social exclusion and rejection Feelings of despair Self- doubt and a poor self-esteem Learned helplessness
Unemployment as a cause for decay in quality social relationships	Distance in friendship Infrequent conversations and a change in interactions Feeling left out and perceived rejection by friends Tense family relations and unmet family expectations
Financial vulnerability	Financial dependency Conscious spending Tough financial experience
Social withdrawal and isolation	
Remaining hopeful and optimistic about employment prospects	Positive self-talks and internal motivation Faith and spirituality Physical activities and social engagement

4.2 Theme 1: Employment seeking habits and unstructured daily activities

This theme illustrates participants' experience of unemployment in relation to what a typical day is like as an unemployed graduate. Most of the participants spoke about their day-to-day job hunting and interview preparation activities. For instance, participants expressed common sentiments that were centred on active job hunting activities through various platforms such as online recruitment systems, social media, and submitting CVs physically to work establishments. In addition to that, most of the participants indicated how they lacked structured activities and time in their days, thus resulting in unplanned

daily activities and being ready to perform precarious remunerative work that is available at their disposal. These were identified as everyday tasks in their effort for employment seeking, as reported by one of the participants:

Most of the thing that I do is wake up in the morning, I have to read my books for interview, because when we used to go for interview, interview is almost like a course. Let me say a course because we have like 4 to 5 books that you can read so that you can be interviewed. Every morning I have to read to update myself and to make sure that I am going to pass the written test. That is my daily activities. (P1, 30yrs, Male).

In addition to the day's activities of actively searching for work, most of the participants indicated that they conclude their days with a review of job interview guides or as stated by two of the participants:

Actually, I like sports. So, my typical day as a young person is like always in the evening I have to go and play soccer, training with others. Away from training then I look at my interview guides then read my books. So, that is the only thing I have been concentrating much on so far. (P4, 26yrs, Male).

At the moment, I just recently became a mom, so most of the days I am just at home. So, I wake up, get ready for the day, prepare the baby, and make food. There is not much to do. I go online like any other unemployed person, you go on some groups and search for vacancies that are in line with what you are looking for. (P11, 26yrs, Female).

Almost half of the participants remarked on how unstructured their days were as a result of being at home and not having work commitments. For most of them, being unemployed meant spending longer hours at home and attending to home chores being an everyday task. This became one of their ways to avoid maintaining an idle lifestyle, and rather keep

themselves busy and active through carrying out home chores, which became a more than usual task, as stated by two of the participants:

As usual, I do house chores, to say, in order to keep myself busy I just work. That is it, day in, day out, just like that. (P8, 29yrs, Male).

I do not really do much at home, because you just wake up, just do the normal stuff like maybe just pray, sometimes read the Bible, just watch movies, watch series, watch soaps on TV or you just cook at home. There is nothing much to do. Yeah, basically that or sometimes I have friends that will send you to go run errands for them in town and they kind of give you something for taxi or for cool drink. (P14, 29yrs, Female).

Due to having ample time at home and their active employment seeking habits, half of the participants further emphasized their readiness to perform any available work in return for an income, whether the job is suitable or not. For instance, three male participants (P2; P4; P8) collectively acknowledged the devaluing nature of precarious work that they do for the sake of an income, considering their level of academic training achieved thus far. They expressed their need to work as a way to keep themselves occupied and earn an income, thus reflecting the common societal gender role and expectation for males being providers.

One of the participants had this to say:

Anything that comes is unplanned. Like maybe helping someone or if someone maybe gets a tender, then I go and help, maybe like plumbing. I just go assist the person to give me something or I help a person that is building a house and so on. Just depends on how the day goes. (P2, 28yrs, Male).

Another participant said:

I just go and help to get something. Let me say unskilled job, to dig a hole, fix the fence, just something that is very simple and those things you do not even get a lot of money, you

just get something for copies, even a 30 dollar or 40 dollar per day, it is not even every day. (P1, 30yrs, Male).

4.3 Theme 2 - Psychological distress as a result of unemployment

Most of the participants reflected on the emotional suffering that they experience as a result of being unemployed. This revealed the emotional harsh reality of unemployment, in addition to the deprivation from the manifest function (i.e. salary) of work as discussed in the review of related literature in chapter 2, with reference to Jahoda's theory. Very often, participants associated their psychological struggle to their experience of social exclusion and rejection as well as feelings of despair, citing the disappointment, discouragement, anxiety, stress, and depression, which comes as a result of prolonged unemployment and failed attempts to secure job opportunities.

4.3.1 Social exclusion and rejection

Due to being unemployed, most of the participants reported that they felt left out and uncared for in comparison to their employed peers. This reflected their unmet psychological need for belonging, which was not adequately fulfilled due to their unemployment status, thus negatively affecting their self-perceptions in relation to their social positions. Participants particularly narrated how unaccomplished they felt in life, compared to their working peers whom they perceived to have advanced more in life. Therefore, unemployment was experienced to be hard and not easy to deal with as expressed by some of the participants when asked to describe how they feel being unemployed:

Uhm, actually it is hard. Being unemployed is not easy, especially in this generation. Seeing others are working, your age mates maybe have gotten a job already and you are just at home doing nothing, and you do not know where to get

anything, you do not know where to get toiletries. So, being unemployed is something else compared to a school dropout or someone who just failed grade 12. Being unemployed is like parents leave you on your own since you are matured and you can look for whatever you want on your own. (P4, 26yrs, Male).

I have been unemployed for so long. At some point, it becomes so exhausting. You wonder what you are doing wrong cause you look at other people and they are being employed, some people are employed immediately after graduating or out of school. So, it is very difficult honestly. (P11, 26yrs, Female).

Moreover, all the participants pointed out how unbalanced their life situation became due to being unemployed. More emphasis was put on their unmet expectations for securing a formal job after obtaining post-secondary education qualifications. Which in turn, had a negative impact on their outlook of life and self-appraisal. One participant remarked:

They say education is the key for success. They say if you want to be successful in life, you must go and study, and that is what I did. I went to tertiary to do my studies, but after my studies, I stayed at home. So, sometimes I feel like it is a waste of time that I did. Sometimes I check my paper, tears are coming out. The bad thing that I normally regret is seeing my parents in the situation that they are. I feel like at this moment I would maybe improve their standard of living. I should say it is not a good thing. It negatively affected my life, since I have my paper. (P3, 25yrs, Male).

Another participant also shared similar sentiments and expressed her feelings:

Growing up, we were told as soon as you graduate, get a job then you are set for life. So, reality started hitting after I graduated. I got that paper, I got the degree, so now it was just me against the world trying to find a job. I am applying for different kinds of positions, but I am not getting any calls back, so it took me into this pit of depression for some time. It was hard. I was so discouraged, I stopped looking for a job I think maybe two months. I see people around me getting jobs.

People I graduated with, people who did my course getting jobs and I always wondered why? What is the problem with me? (P7, 24yrs, Female).

These responses reflect how participants felt disappointed and left out compared to others and in turn began questioning themselves and the validity of their acquired knowledge from their academic training. The interviews also show that as a result of unemployment, feelings of stress, depression, frustrations, and discouragement became predominant, thus demonstrating the influence of unemployment on psychological well-being. A male participant (P10) echoes this:

It has been quite hard as there are times where I would sleep and ask myself like why are things tough? Why is life not fair for everyone? I was so stressed that I am unemployed. I would look at my daughter thinking of the life that I wanted to give her while I was in university. I wanted to give her that life were whatever she wants I can provide. However, looking at her I am not providing for her quite that much, though I am trying. It has been quite tough. Another thing that have hit me so hard with unemployment is depression. Because if you sit alone at home, in your room, in your bed, and ask yourself, how am I going to get a job? I am not going to lie, to be honest, I've smoked and I've also tried to resort to all sorts of drugs. (P10, 25yrs, Male).

4.3.2 Feelings of despair

Furthermore, several participants pointed out their demotivation, discouragement, including feelings of depression, resulting from their unfavourable unemployment experience. Joining the unemployment pool after having graduated with the high hopes of securing a job needed for improving their livelihoods precipitated emotional suffering in some of the participants. Participants' emotional distress was characterized by a low mood

and feelings of worthlessness, which are some of the key features of a poor mental health. This was mostly prevalent among the participants that had a relatively longer duration of unemployment, coupled with the perception of being a breadwinner, and responsibilities of taking care of their children and family members. Participant 5, who is a 28-year-old mother of one, reflects this:

It really does not feel good, because I have been unemployed for quite some time, unemployed for like 6 years now, and I feel like my paper is invalid when seeking for employment. The employer will be wondering what you have been doing all along. Why are you still unemployed? So, at this point it feels like it is invalid. I wasted my time getting this qualification. Depression kicks in because you are having a qualification while others are getting work after graduating. Really, it depresses someone in a way. You are just there, sitting at home, while others are getting up to work. It really brings someone down like you are not doing good enough. Like you'll just be there wondering what you have done wrong like am I really worth it, will I ever get work or when am I getting work like you'll just feel useless, I don't know how to describe it but you just don't feel good...

Another participant expressed her emotional experience of unemployment as resulting into feelings of regret and stress. She attributed these negative emotions to the prolonged gap in securing a formal employment after completion of tertiary education and in turn questioned her career choice. She stated:

It comes with stress, anxiety, and regrets. It is as if you feel like you have taken the wrong course. Why did you not do this? Why didn't I become a nurse? Because let us say you graduated in 2021, you did a different course, someone in 2023 graduates, and then after two months they already get a job. So, you're like, if I also did the same, I would have gotten a job by now. (P13, 25yrs, Female).

On the contrary, another participant acknowledged her challenging and difficult experience of unemployment, and being misunderstood by her grandparent, but continued to remain hopeful. This is illustrated in her response:

It's a bit challenging you know, in our society parents comparing you to other graduates that are getting jobs immediately after they graduated. You know, the pressure is there and grandparents don't understand they think just the moment you are done, immediately you were supposed to get a job and when you tell them yes, I'm applying, they don't believe you. I feel bad at home whereby the parents need money to do something and you feel like helping out, but then you can't since there is no way, so you feel left out like I was just supposed to do better than this... Or maybe there is no electricity or just food in the house and then you are just sitting at home and doing nothing, so you feel bad you feel like if I was working I would have helped, but then since I'm not working it's like a burden on my parents. It's stressful, yes, but I've not given up. (P9, 25yrs, Female).

4.3.3 Self-doubt and poor self-esteem

Most of the participants discussed how their unemployment situation had a negative impact on their self-esteem. They considered themselves worthless for being unemployed. The interviews also show how participants negatively evaluated and perceived themselves as inadequate compared to others. In turn, they doubted their preparedness for entry into the world of work. In most cases, such negative self-evaluation may affect one's ability to realise their potential, hence negatively shaping their self-identity construction and self-efficacy. This may lead to self-doubt, hopelessness, and feelings of depression. These negative feelings mostly lead to a poor mental well-being. Two participants reflected on their experience of unemployment in relation to their self-esteem in this way:

My self-esteem has just gone down and I feel like maybe the things I even learned back then are probably even outdated, cause I haven't been able to practice at all. Apart from that, it really affects your self-esteem when you are sitting home, like you ask yourself am I good enough, am I even ready? Even if the jobs come now, you're like how am I going to handle it? So it has really had a negative effect on my self-esteem, my self-esteem has definitely gone down. (P11, 26yrs, Female).

I think it affected it in a more so negative way. People around me started getting employed. They look like they have lives, they are moving forward. I wasn't in that space or position yet. So, it brought this sense of worthlessness in me. (P7, 24yrs, Female).

Another participant (P13, 25yrs, Female) reported how being unemployed negatively affected her self-image as she struggled with an unclear self-identity due to regrets for not doing meaningful work in the community:

Loss of identity, when it comes to what unemployment does. It makes one feel they're not being recognized, it makes one feel like you are not doing the most. So, it has actually been a very bad thing that at a point whereby even you yourself you don't recognize yourself, because you are full of regrets and stress.

Most of the participants narrated their unemployment experiences in relation to their planned life goals, self-confidence, and their continued dependence on others at a time were they thought they would be independent. According to them, these aspects of their lives were negatively affected and contributed significantly to a poor self-image. These sentiments highlighted how their state of unemployment contributed to a lack of self-reliance and a poor personal will for self-directedness. This is illustrated in their responses below:

A lot of my life goals have been affected whereby I graduated at the age of 22 and I am currently 28. So, within that period I could have achieved a lot of things, I could have maybe bought a house, I could have bought a car, I could do a lot of adventures, but all those things are currently on hold cause I'm not employed. I am still depending on someone, even after graduating. (P5, 28yrs, Female).

I feel down of myself. It's like the years that I went to school for is of a waste. You cannot stand on your own and again it's almost like a yes thing to whatever people say to you, because you don't have that power to say no or that confidence to say no to something. For example, a person can come to you, here, I have a N\$50.00 can you dig for me a hole? The situation that I find myself in will force me against my will to say no just go for that N50.00 and do the thing. I had a goal at least to have my own house in 3 to 4 years, but then looking at unemployment and the state that I am currently in now, life is kind of like upside down now. Everything that I dreamed for is like on hold because of unemployment. (P8, 30yrs, Male).

Contrary to what most of the participants reported above, two of the participants shared different views on their experience of unemployment in relation to their self-esteem. They referred to their unemployment state as a period for talent exploration within themselves and a chance for discovering new insights. For instance, participant 6, a 29-year-old father of one who has been unemployed for about four years, reported that being unemployed did not really have a negative impact on his self-esteem. He, however, used his academic strength to assist students that are encountering academic difficulties. According to him, this enabled him to still maintain a good self-esteem. Another participant also shared a similar view and identified possible aspects that resulted from being unemployed such as identifying and exploiting her creativity by saying:

Some good things you learn from being unemployed is that every day you wake up and you're like I'm not going anywhere today what else can I do? So, for me, I've tried to stay positive and productive and improving myself. I've been working on

my computer skills, I even do logos now for people. I do letterheads, at least it keeps me busy. I'm trying to understand that oh I can actually do this, I just didn't know about it because you always have to wake up every day and try to do something. (P13, 25yrs, Female).

4.3.4 Learned helplessness

Moreover, half of the participants shared views of lacking the enthusiasm to bring about change in their situation due to their prolonged exposure to unemployment, eliciting in them a sense of guilt. Reference was made to their socioeconomic backgrounds, pointing out their strong desire to financially help their families. In turn, they felt incapacitated to meaningfully contribute at home. This is illustrated in the responses below:

Time is going and you are just home, you don't even experience that life were you want to build something for your family or you just want to start a business for your family or you want to do anything as a foundation for your family. I am still unemployed. I do not think I still have that hope in me that one day I will get work. (P4, 26yrs, Male).

I'm unable to contribute to certain things at home it's really difficult and it's challenging. Sometimes I beat myself down. (P9, 25yrs, Female).

I do the chores at home like raking and watering and whatnot but I see as though the family needs help you know. In a sense, my mother sent me to school so I can be able to bring something on the table. Internally I feel guilty, I'm supposed to help my mom cause my dad is now unemployed for a year. For me personally, I feel the guilt like I should do better. I was supposed to be helping, but now I don't have means of income to be able to fill that gap at home. I actually feel bad, I'm just struggling. (P2, 28yrs, Male).

4.4 Theme 3 - Unemployment as a cause for decay in quality social relationships

Most of the participants reflected on how unemployment affected their friendships and family relationships. A stronger focus was more on how the quality of their friendships deteriorated due to being unemployed. This denoted how important quality friendships is to the youth and the impact that a decay in these relationships has on their psychosocial well-being. This theme reflects the key dynamics in friendships and family relationships that were impacted by the participants' unemployment status.

4.4.1 Distance in friendship

Most of the participants revealed that being unemployed significantly hindered closeness in their relationships with friends. They indicated that due to being unemployed, distance was observed and could be felt in their relations with friends as opposed to when they were students, thus intensifying their feelings of loneliness. This is seen in some of the responses from them:

When you are not working and your friends are working it won't be the same, because the level now is different for someone who is working and you are not working, because where they are they will go to work, they will find friends, like workmates, and they will really forget about you, they will not see you as a friend until you work also. (P1, 30yrs, Male).

Most of my friends now it's like they are distant from me, maybe they are occupied with work. I don't have friends that check up on me every day. Some of them will just check up on you maybe twice a week, some of them maybe even months, like those that are working out of town. (P2, 28yrs, Male).

The responses above show how participants narrated their experience of unemployment in relation to the impact it has on their friendships.

4.4.2 Infrequent conversations and a change in interactions

According to several participants, another aspect of their lives which unemployment affected was their conversation patterns and interaction styles in their friendships. A number of participants identified a change in their conversations, citing a reduction in their conversations and a change in the type of conversations they would have with their friends due to being unemployed. This change in their conversation patterns and interaction styles was perceived as a form of rejection and patronizing from their peers due to their unequal employment status. One participant said:

We are not close or on the same level, like we used to be before. Even if we are engaging, we just talk about no I am tired from work whatnot and you are not contributing anything because you are not on the same level. I will not relate as much, because they are either talking about work or what they did or complaining about something and you cannot contribute because you have no idea what they are saying. The only part that maybe you can contribute is maybe when they tell you there is a vacancy that came out, here and there, and all that, that is it. (P9, 25yrs, Female).

Some participants observed infrequent conversations with their friends, attributing it to their differences in terms of employment status. One participant expressed himself in this way:

It's like day-to-day communication is not there and mingling is not almost like we were, but sometimes you understand maybe it's the workload that they are into, but that day today thing is almost limited now. It's like I'm outside the boat or should I

say as currently I'm unemployed that's why maybe I'm not getting the day today communication or whatsoever. If the person tries to talk to you, what then should they communicate? Otherwise, it's only on the past stories. Even if they are to bring up new plans, with what will you fit in into that plan? (P8, 30yrs, Male).

4.4.3 Feeling left out and perceived rejection by friends

In addition to experiencing a change in the frequency of their interactions, most of the participants also shared their perceived rejection by their friends and feelings of being left out compared to their friends. For instance, participant 10 (25yrs, Male) had this to say:

After varsity, some of them have secured paid jobs. Our friendship is not there anymore. Like, we barely talk, barely call each other, barely text each other. Unless you meet somewhere in town, you just wave from a distance. They would not want to associate with someone who is unemployed. Just picture yourself, I am employed, you are my friend. We go out and I'm with my colleagues. We are talking things about work, whatever happens at work. You will just be quiet, because you have nothing to contribute to that conversation.

Participant 4, a 26-year-old father of one, emphasized on how behind he felt he was compared to his employed peers and reiterated how difficult the situation was for him.

When someone is working, but you both or all have the same qualification, it's not easy to look at yourself just sitting at home. Waking up you don't know what to eat, you don't know what to dress, you don't know what to do, you are just at home and your friend is waking up with the same qualification and going to work, getting paid, helping others, helping himself and his family and your family is just watching you as you did nothing in life – it's not easy.

Moreover, several participants shared their perceived societal judgement and rejection, emanating from their unemployed status. Consequently, they stated that this had an impact

on their self-evaluation, reinforcing in them a poor sense of utility to their societies. These participants felt that they were easily and negatively judged due to their unemployment status, thus experienced inadequate respect and recognition in society. They further indicated having experienced some forms of criticisms in the community, including discrimination due to being unemployed. In addition, they felt unvalued due to their inability to contribute monetary resources in their households or family gatherings, thus evoking feelings of worthlessness in them. All these contribute to a decline in mental health. This is seen in some of their responses:

I remember during those days when we were students at the university how the community members treated us, there was respect. They would say that no those guys are educated, something like that. Those guys are students at the university, but now after tertiary, you are like back to stage one. You are just like the people in the community that don't have any paper. So, in the community, now they are seeing you just like a normal guy. That respect that they used to give you, it's no more there, you are not being treated like when you were a student. (P3, 30yrs, Male).

There is just a certain respect that is placed on people that have jobs or that have at least a source of income, cause they value your opinion more because they have something to offer like monetary wise. I would have gained more respect from the people around me as well and people obviously treat me different like family. Some friends that are working make their plans, but because they know you don't work, they might not include you. So, it also affected my social standing like with regards to how people look at me. (P11, 26yrs, Female).

Another participant cited how he has been mocked by his peers for having obtained a tertiary qualification that did not secure him a job immediately after completion of his studies. This mockery incited in him feelings of shame and regret.

Other people have been mocking me for just being unemployed. Sometimes people mock me especially those whom we went to school with, but failed grade 12. They'll be there mocking me it's like it's of no use of you obtaining that degree. The mocking part is up to today, now I feel like a person who never went to university. (P8, 30yrs, Male).

4.4.4 Tense family relations and unmet family expectations

Several participants reported experiencing tense relations with their family members, as a result of being unemployed. Emphasis was put on how being at home caused alienation for them and how parents felt their expectations, such as receiving financial help, were not met due to unemployment. In turn, this strained family cohesion and also exerted mental pressure on the participants to meet family expectations. Thus, participants perceived themselves as being of no value to their families as they could not live up to their family expectations, which is one of the key features that precipitate and perpetuate poor psychological well-being. One participant expressed himself this way:

Sometimes when you have tension in the house mom will go to an extent of saying you are almost like of no use, you went to study for no use, but then you understand it's just her frustration making her say so. Somehow, it also affects our day-to-day activities in the house. You might need to ask something from her, but then she'll be referring to you "you were supposed to be working by now," such stuff. (P8, 30yrs, Male).

Participant 1 highlighted how he felt his family members were seeing him as unimportant due to his inability to provide necessities that are needed at home, as they expected so upon completion of his tertiary studies. He stated:

My family is expecting me to provide something. I am a breadwinner, I'm not doing anything so they are like saying "why did this guy study, they are studying for nothing, we are almost the same"? (30yrs, Male).

Another participant experienced unemployment in relation to her home environment with her family in this way:

Like now your opinion matters when you bring something to the table, so that has also affected our relationship. They had a lot of hope when I was in school, they are like yeah, perhaps when she is done, she will also come and cater for other people's needs while still at this point, I'm being catered for. So, it's really disturbing whereby they are always like, your friends are working, you are just home doing nothing. It's not a good environment, so better just stay alone cause when you are with them they are forever rubbing salt in your wounds like it's your fault you are not working. (P5, 28yrs, Female).

However, although a number of participants pointed out family tension and a negative impact in their interactions with friends, a few reported no major changes in their social relations, as demonstrated by the responses below:

In terms of the quality of my friendship, I still have them and we do communicate if they are in Rundu. We will make time and meet up. (P6, 29yrs, Male).

I wouldn't really say there is much of an effect on our family relationship. Maybe because most of us are unemployed. So, this is not really something I could say that our relationship has been affected this way or that way because of unemployment, but obviously life could be better, you know, if we were employed but at the moment, I wouldn't say there is much of an effect. (P11, 26yrs, Female).

4.5 Theme 4 - Financial vulnerability

This theme reflects participants' experience of unemployment, with specific emphasis on material well-being and economic impact. All participants highlighted financial dependency due to being unemployed, thus leading to a tough financial experience, and a limitation in their spending or consumption. The lack of self-reliance indirectly affected their self-determination, thus having a negative impact on their psychological need for autonomy. A lack of fulfilment of either one of the psychological needs may lead to a decline in mental well-being, as proposed by the self-determination theory in chapter two of the study.

4.5.1 Financial dependency

Participants reported a stronger reliance on financial assistance from their family members, thus causing financial struggles and disempowering them from making independent and free financial choices relating to the acquisition of their preferred necessities. This financial dependence, especially after obtaining a tertiary qualification, evoked shame, frustrations, resentment, and even limited their freedom for accessing their desired lifestyles. Some of the responses from the participants below illustrate this:

The fact that I cannot afford certain things I feel like I could afford on my own had I been employed, just the freedom that comes with having money definitely has really been affected. Sometimes I don't have money, I literally have to wait for my dad to send me money in order for us to buy groceries, those things which are like basic necessities, because of unemployment I'm not able to even buy my groceries. (P11, 26yrs, Female).

Participant 2, a 28-year-old male expressed himself this way:

I think I have also been struggling with cosmetics. You don't really have a fixed time or money or income that you know today I'm going to buy grocery or maybe

my cosmetics. It just comes like out of the blue. Just when someone gives you a N\$200, go get something, you feel a bit relieved. All the material things that you can't provide for yourself, someone will have to provide for you. I think that's depressing in a way, because you don't really get to do what you want to do.

4.5.2 Conscious spending

The lack of financial freedom expressed by participants above, therefore, resulted into them noticing a change in their spending patterns. Most of the participants indicated that their consumption was limited in order to preserve their scarce income. Moreover, they reported a restriction in their overall spending on preferences, thus having a negative impact on their quality of life. One of the participants remarked:

Only if you could be employed is when you can have that thing that you want. I want to live this type of life, but you can't, you don't have funds, you are unemployed. Only if maybe you could be employed is when you say or you could try I must have a chair this month, I must buy a bed in my house this month, I must do something for my relative. You are unemployed, finance is also a problem. (P3, 25yrs, Male).

Other participants stated:

As things are all expensive now, you have to work on a budget like the little you have, you have to know how to spend it. You don't spend on what you want, but you have to spend on the basics. Like myself, I stay alone with my child and I am unemployed. I have to make ends meet for me and my child. So, I can't go just to be buying Hungry Lion or whatnot even when I want it. I cannot buy it, cause I can't afford it, and the little I get, I have to see how I cater for my spending at home. (P5, 28yrs, Female).

Unemployment has pushed me to an extent of maybe buying for myself a t-shirt once a year or even if I want a new cell-phone, it's very tough for me to get that phone. So, I'd say unemployment has really pushed me to the limit. I'm seeing it impacting my life negatively, because something that you want to buy you cannot buy it because you have nowhere to get money. (P8, 30yrs, Male).

4.5.3 Tough financial experience

Furthermore, participants reported a tough financial experience due to being unemployed at a stage in life where you are expected to provide or be financially independent, thus leading to financial struggles and feelings of depression. Participants who could not receive sufficient financial support from their families reported having financial stress, which often leads to poor psychological well-being. This was especially prevalent among those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds who were expected to be breadwinners after successful completion of tertiary education. This is seen in the responses below:

It's very hard not being able to fend for yourself. It's not an easy thing, especially as an adult. It starts getting to your head and that's where depression starts coming in. Depression is not really about the fact that other people are having jobs and whatnot, it's about the fact that I do not have the capacity to take care of myself. It's not even about my people, it starts with me, so if I can't take care of myself how will other people take care of me?(P7, 24yrs, Female).

It's really tough that I just wake up and I don't have money for me to go to an interview. I missed so many job interviews this year. I missed interviews in Otavi, Grootfontein, and sometimes Windhoek. Like you don't have money for transport and accommodation. Sometimes I don't have money to go make copies and there are times you don't have money for toiletries. I have a kid and then maybe there are times were your child is sick and you don't even have money to go buy medicine even at the pharmacy. (P14, 29yrs, Female).

4.6 Theme 5 - Self-isolation and social withdrawal

As a way to deal with the unpleasant experience of unemployment, the interviews showed unhelpful coping strategies amongst several participants. This included resorting to self-isolation and withdrawal from social settings, staying away from home, and the company of friends. Participants resorted to these unhealthy coping mechanisms as a way to escape from their perceived social stigma and criticisms against them due to being unemployed. This harsh realities expressed by the participants demonstrated how unemployment can have an influence, not only on one's personal level of well-being alone, but on a social level as well, especially a disruption in social cohesion. Hence, negatively affecting their overall psychosocial well-being. For instance, participant 13, a 25-year-old mother of two, reports how she preferred to rather relocate to another place, where her employment status would be unknown to people:

I was at a point whereby I thought I could just probably leave town, go somewhere else and just be there. Because even if I'm not employed where I am, people will not know that I'm not working.

Another participant said:

Basically, I'm just on my own most of the times. I'm just in my room with my baby. So, if it's to help out house chores I do, when I'm done, I just go and be on my own. (P9, 25yrs, Female).

While Participant 7, 24yrs, Female, reported how being unemployed led her into isolating herself from her peers as she felt less and unequal to them. This negative self-appraisal by

the participant reflected how unemployment as a systemic phenomenon could perpetuate cognitive distortions at an individual level. The participant reported:

I don't feel like socializing or like just being in a community with people because it made me feel like if I am not on that level then I don't deserve to be with these people. So, I'd rather isolate myself.

4.7 Theme 6 - Remaining hopeful and optimistic about employment prospects

This theme reflects some of the positive coping techniques that most of the participants identified in dealing with unemployment. These strategies were employed as a way to emotionally cope with the psychosocial distress resulting from being unemployed. Participants pointed out positive self-talks and internal motivation; faith and spirituality; and physical activities and social engagement as some of the ways in which they tried to keep going through life amidst the adversity of unemployment.

4.7.1 Positive self-talks and internal motivation

Most of the participants reported engaging in self-counselling and self-motivation as a way to deal with the adverse effects of unemployment. This indicated the significance of maintaining a positive outlook that is driven by intrinsic motivation amidst adversity. Due to positive self-talks, participants expressed their ability to endure the psychosocial challenges experienced as a result of unemployment and continued to persevere. For instance, participant 7, 24-year-old female, points out how positive self-talks enabled her to put in so much effort with employment seeking:

...Self-counselling, so I keep telling myself that as long as I am putting in the work the world will return the favour. I am applying, I'm not just sitting around at home, waiting. I am actually going out there and searching, I'm dropping my applications.

So, that actually helps me, it calms me. It makes me feel like I am doing the best I can.

Participant 10 said:

I've tried to counsel myself that unemployment doesn't mean that it had to suck me out. It's something that I have to live with. Any God given moment, I might get something, I might get a job. (26yrs, Male).

4.7.2 Faith and spirituality

Most of the participants also identified their spiritual beliefs as another coping mechanism used in order to deal with unemployment. This highlighted their attempts to search for purpose and meaning in their employment seeking habits, thus helping them to draw strength for perseverance, which can be an attitude that serves as a buffer against the emotional harsh realities of unemployment. This included prayers and entrusting their employment seeking activities, as well as job aspirations, in God, as seen in two of the participants' responses:

I mostly pray and give it to God and I constantly tell myself that God's timing is the best so I just let it go and wait when maybe God will allow it, it will happen. (P5, 28yrs Female).

Every time I have to remind myself like you know everything happens for a reason and it's also all about timing. Apart from that, I just do read and listen to some motivational videos and also listen to the word of God, I'm a believer, so yeah, that's what I do. I encourage myself with the word of God and believe that when the time is right it shall happen for me as well. (P11, 26yrs, Female).

4.7.3 Physical activities and social engagement

In addition to the emotion-focused approaches to coping with unemployment such as positive self-talks, several participants pointed out engaging in physical activities and social engagements as a way to cope with unemployment. Two of the participants responded by saying:

I go out most of the time at 17H00 in the soccer field to play soccer, I think it also gives me space to think. I go to my unemployed friends and just relate with them. I relate to them then we talk, because there would be no negative comments, there would be no discrimination, yeah because I relate more to them than my friends that are pursuing their careers. I don't want to be with people that are building their careers because that will give me stress. I think that's a strategy that I use. I've been concentrating much on sport. So, I think sport is another way to relieve stress. (P4, 26yrs, Male).

I also do have hobbies. This is playing netball, doing exercises, and planting. So, if I wake up one day and I'm so stressed, I just get myself to be busy, you know, when you're physically busy, things just leave off your mind for a moment. I also try to find someone to talk to, to help me understand my goals or to help me see on what I can do. (P13, 25yrs, Female).

4.8 Conclusion

The data analysis revealed six major themes and several sub-themes. Theme 1, employment seeking habits and unstructured daily activities, reflects what a typical day is like in the life of the unemployed young graduates in Rundu. Participants cited job-hunting and unstructured daily activities as an everyday occurrence in their lives. Theme 2, psychological distress as a result of unemployment, illustrates the unpleasant emotional states experienced by the unemployed young graduates. This theme reflects the negative

emotions of stress, anxiety, and depression that participants reported to be evoked by unemployment. Theme 3, unemployment as a cause for decay in quality social relationships, shows the negative impact that unemployment has on the participants' family relationships and friendships. Theme 4, financial vulnerability, highlights participants' economic hardships due to unemployment, with an emphasis on their reported financial dependency and conscious spending limited to basic necessities over wants. Theme 5, social withdrawal and self-isolation, shows participants' unhelpful coping strategies as a way of escaping the distressing experience of unemployment. Theme 6, remaining hopeful and optimistic about employment prospects, reflects participants' positive coping strategies that most of the participants identified in dealing with unemployment. The subsequent chapter provides a discussion of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The main objectives of the current study were to explore the experience of unemployment amongst the youth in Rundu, with a focus on their psychological well-being and coping strategies. To meet those objectives, the researcher interviewed 14 participants from the town of Rundu, in the Kavango-East region. The Kavango-East region reports a youth unemployment rate of 48.2 percent in the 2018 Namibia Labour Force Survey (NSA, 2019) and a much higher youth unemployment rate of 60.4 percent in the 2023 Labour Force Report (NSA, 2023). These rates indicate Kavango-East as one of the regions with the highest youth unemployment in the country. This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the study objectives and available literature.

5.2 The daily activities of the unemployed youth.

The current study found that unemployed young graduates spent most of their time engaging in job-hunting activities and preparation for job interviews. Employment seeking activities were mostly done by means of vacancy searches on various platforms such as social media and other digital platforms. Participants also tried to access vacancies through the circulation of available job opportunities in the Namibian labour market by friends or periodic government vacancy circulars. Despite all these efforts, participants failed to secure employment opportunities. As a result, this may have a negative impact on their identity, in that participants may begin to internalize these failed attempts into their identity reconstruction and perceive themselves as failures, thus negatively affecting their mental well-being.

In addition, most of the participants in the current study discussed various ways in which they attempted to earn an income. This meant availing themselves for any precarious jobs that would yield them an income in return. However, precarious work could precipitate a negative self-appraisal, given their level of educational attainment, thus leading to a low self-esteem and a poor self-efficacy, which are some of the features of poor psychological well-being. All these efforts of employment seeking signified their desire to secure employment opportunities in order to enhance their livelihoods and in turn improve their social status, maintain a meaningful life comprising structured time and activities, which work offers (Dlamini et al., 2019). These are some of the latent functions of work identified by Jahoda, in her latent deprivation model. Therefore, deprivation from these functions due to unemployment may negatively impact mental well-being (De Witte et al., 2012).

Employment seeking activities by the participants form part of the exploration stage in career psychology, which is marked by tasks related to developing vocational identity (Stead & Watson, 2006), by investigating careers and engaging in any other work-related experiences. In so doing, participants were prepared to escape the idle and passive life, which is often prone to societal criticism, judgement, stigma, and is associated with laziness, a lack of motivation, and purpose in life. This active engagement in job-hunting by the participants in the current study also reflects a proactive behaviour consistent with the findings from a phenomenological study by Du Toit et al. (2018), which explored the unemployment experiences of residents of a previously marginalized black community in two townships in South Africa. Du Toit et al. (2018) found that their participants identified their active engagement in survivorship activities such as washing cars, re-selling beauty

products for commission, doing neighbours' hair etc., in order to earn an income, which they termed 'hustling'.

However, it is worth mentioning that although participants' engagement in job-hunting activities is considered a proactive behaviour, most of them only settled for unskilled jobs due to being unemployed, while in the quest for their ideal employment opportunities. Participants indicated that they were left with no choice, but to go for any paying jobs, due to the harsh experience of their unemployment situations. This form of reaction to their unemployment state is somewhat similar to the underpinnings of Martin Seligman's (1975) Learned Helplessness Theory. This theory posits that learned helplessness occurs when a person who has experienced a prolonged exposure to challenges comes to believe they have no control over their situation (Gonzo, 2001). Therefore, due to their prolonged exposure to unemployment, participants may internalize the believe that they do not have control over their situation. This may lead to a lack of motivation to search for alternative jobs, but rather settle for any job that comes their way despite the degrading nature of the job, which may then negatively affect their self-worth. This denotes how devastating unemployment is on the psychological well-being of individuals (Blustein, 2019).

As a result of being unemployed, the current study found that participants had unstructured daily activities, similar to what Jahoda's latent deprivation theory of unemployment proposes (De Witte et al., 2012). This could be attributed to their unplanned activities arising from spending more time at home and from their flexibility in search for any type of work that could keep them occupied. This finding also resonates with Dlamini

et al. (2019), in which it was found that unemployed youth in Eswatini lacked the latent function of time structure that employment offers in one's day.

Gonzo (2001) conducted a study on the psychological repercussions of unemployment amongst 'Windhoek's Street unemployed'. Interestingly, the finding in the current study relating to unstructured daily activities amongst the unemployed youth is contrary to Gonzo's findings, which revealed that 'Windhoek's Street unemployed' maintain a rather strict time structure. Gonzo (2001) argues that the 'street unemployed' show a time pattern very similar to that of employed people in the sense that they wake up at a certain time every day, try to be at their waiting point at a certain time (7 - 8 am), wait for a job for a specific amount of time before returning home at a specific time in the afternoon. This divergence in the findings could be explained by the differences in the sociodemographic characteristics of the samples such as education levels. For instance, all the participants in the current study have tertiary education background as opposed to those in Gonzo's (2001) study who had no specific education background. As such, the method and behaviour of daily job-seeking activities would most likely vary between these two groups.

5.3 The unemployment experience and psychosocial well-being

In the current study, the participants experienced unemployment as distressful. Psychological distress can be conceptualized as an umbrella term encompassing multiple common psychological conditions, ranging from clinical symptoms to clinical diagnoses of depression, anxiety, stress, or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Zhu et al., 2022). This theme, psychological distress due to unemployment, was consistently found across most of the participants' responses in relation to their affective experience of

unemployment. Participants felt socially discriminated and easily judged based on their unemployment status, thus leading to an unpleasant feeling that is hard and not easy to deal with. This finding concurs with Du Toit et al. (2018), who, in their study found that participants felt the pain of stigmatization by the society. In the current study, the prolonged experience of unemployment and repeated failed attempts to secure a job exacerbated feelings of despair, disappointment, anxiety, stress, and depression in the participants.

Boardman and Rinaldi (2021) state that research finds higher rates of anxiety and depression, alcohol and substance use and alcohol-related deaths among the unemployed than among those in work. Most of the participants in the current study reported feeling stressed about their lack of financial security and unmet life expectations upon completion of their tertiary studies, thus leading to the development of depressive symptoms, which is similar to the findings in other studies (Conroy, 2010; Mokona et al., 2020). The stress among the participants in the current study arising from their financial vulnerability could be explained by the cultural norms within the African context that value and expect a form of ‘payback to the family’ once a job is secured after tertiary education. This then exerted mental pressure on the participants to fulfil the need for immediately securing a job and give back to the family in order to meet the family expectations. Failure to secure a job or exposure to prolonged unemployment, therefore, may be internalized by the unemployed and begin to negatively evaluate their sense of worth to their families and communities. Hence, the unemployed may experience some sort of emotional pain and discomfort, as they may perceive themselves as less important and failures.

Compared to their employed peers, whose lives were perceived as moving forward, participants in the present study resorted to questioning and doubting their self-efficacy

and internally ascribed their failure to find work opportunities, perceived social judgement and discrimination to being inadequate. As a result of being unemployed, the current study revealed that participants experienced a lack of respect, even from their family members, and a lack of social recognition, thus leading them to a perceived low social status in the community. This often leads to self-isolation and withdrawal from social gatherings, driven by the need to avoid the stigma associated with unemployment. Moreover, being unemployed led participants into questioning their sense of utility in their societies, thus posing a threat to their sense of relatedness. This is one of the psychological needs that the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) identifies as one of the essential psychological needs that significantly contribute to an individual's psychological well-being once satisfied (Coxen et al., 2021).

Although the current study found that participants perceived a negative impact on their overall psychological well-being, unemployment was still experienced and perceived differently amongst the participants. This is also similar to what Arena et al. (2022) discovered amongst their participants. They found that their participants' growth often involved re-evaluating their priorities and re-orienting their stance toward the future, consequently creating new life and career goals to pursue deeply held personal values. This is an indication of how a positive frame of reference for a discomforting phenomenon such as unemployment can still allow an individual to maintain a good self-esteem. This is particularly so for the unemployed that may perceive their unemployment period as a chance for discovering new insights and exploring one's talents for personal growth and development, and a chance for fostering social cohesion. This is mostly achieved if the unemployed have stronger psychosocial systems.

The current study found that participants experienced perceived social rejection and discrimination in their communities due to being unemployed. Consequently, this leads to feelings of failure, worthlessness, a loss of self-esteem, as also revealed in other studies (De Witte et al., 2012; Hiswals et al., 2017), personal identity, and a poor self-concept. This, somewhat, relates to what Arena et al. (2022) found in their qualitative study in Australia that sought to explore the lived experiences of mental health and coping during unemployment. Their study revealed that the sense of failure and loss of self-worth appeared to be contextualized by the life stage of participants, whereby they perceived unemployment as inappropriate for their age group.

A decay in quality social relationships due to unemployment was another theme that was consistently found amongst the participants. Participants experienced unemployment as a contributing factor to the disruption in the development of quality relationships with friends and family. A stronger emphasis was placed more on how the quality of their social relationships deteriorated due to being unemployed, thus revealing how unemployment can strain social cohesion. The study found that the unemployed youth experienced a lack of closeness to their employed friends, citing a change in their interaction patterns and a decline in conversations. This could be attributed to a number of factors such as the differences in their time structures and daily activities. The latent deprivation theory by Jahoda (1982) proposes that work offers, not only the manifest function of an income, but latent functions as well, such as a collective purpose, status and identity, a sense of time and activity structure. Therefore, due to the flexibility in how the unemployed spend their time in a day, mostly not committed to structured activities, distance in their previously established close friendships may be experienced as their now-employed peers may be

preoccupied with work. As such, Jahoda (1982) postulates that it is the deprivation of these latent functions of work that may contribute to poor mental well-being amongst the unemployed, thus negatively affecting the quality of their social relations.

The study also found tense family relations amongst the unemployed youth and some of their family members due to unmet family expectations for financial help through work, upon completion of tertiary studies. One could argue that tense family relations among family members arising from being unemployed is a common occurrence in Namibia, one of the African countries that emphasizes the significance of 'education as a key to success in life'. Therefore, failure to secure formal employment after successful completion of one's education, relatively means delayed success and a discrepancy in the societal views that are commonly held about education and success. As a result, the unemployed youth, especially those that are considered to be breadwinners in their families, yet are exposed to prolonged unemployment, may be easily criticized and negatively judged as worthless if they are not able to economically contribute to their family households. Male participants who had the responsibilities of taking care of their children mostly reported this. Hence, denoting how commonly held societal gender roles of males being regarded as providers could exert mental pressure and stress on them when such roles are not fulfilled due to being unemployed. Unfortunately, social judgement even came from family members who only saw the urgency of lending an employment opportunity, but failed to recognize the emotional struggles experienced by the unemployed in their effort for employment seeking.

Interestingly, the study found that despite the disruption in family relations in some of the participants, a few participants still reported that being unemployed did not really have a negative impact on their relationships with family members. Rather, unemployment

served as a catalyst for fostering family cohesion. In these participants, the study also found that their family members still believed in them and their prospects for finding employment in the future, as opposed to those who often reported experiencing family tension due to unemployment. For participants with a stronger psychosocial support, social relationships were strengthened, even during their unemployment period, thus contributing to a reduction in their feelings of stress and anxiety for securing employment. On the contrary, participants who lacked stronger psychosocial support easily became vulnerable to social rejection, stigma, and criticisms, which in turn negatively affected their self-appraisal.

5.4 Unemployment and economic hardships

Another theme that consistently emerged from the study was the financial dependency and the lack of financial freedom amongst the unemployed. The study revealed that all participants were negatively affected economically, which led to an interruption in their consumption and spending patterns. This is particularly related to their lack of financial freedom to lead a preferred lifestyle, realize their major life goals such as buying a house, go on adventure trips, and social outings were also limited by their conscious spending of their scarce income on basic necessities.

The lack of financial independence amongst the unemployed poses a threat to one of the psychological needs identified by Coxen et al. (2021), the psychological need for autonomy, characterized by the need for exercising free choices. Therefore, psychological well-being may be negatively affected if this need is not realized, especially in the unemployed, due to their financial dependency, compared to their employed peers who may enjoy financial freedom and independence. In their study of those that experienced job loss in Gavle municipality, Sweden, Hiswals et al. (2017) found that respondents

described a poorer financial situation as tough to deal with and as creating worry, stress, and insecurity. Participants in the current study also share similar sentiments, in that they experience unemployment as a major hindrance to their life goals, financial stability, and a major cause for negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Overall, the study found that all the participants sought the need for financial stability, which is often regarded as a catalyst for improved living standards. Those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds experienced intense financial hardships such as the struggle to easily meet their financial and basic needs, thus worsening their perceived sense of failure, lack of utility in their social settings, and a poor self-esteem due to being unemployed.

5.5 Coping strategies to unemployment

The current study found that several participants adopted several unhelpful coping mechanisms to dealing with unemployment. This, mostly included self-isolation and social withdrawal, which could be attributed to participants' need to escape the perceived social stigma, discrimination, and criticism experienced. Other studies (Mokona et al., 2020) have found substance dependence such as alcohol and drug use amongst the unemployed as way to cope with the distressing effects of unemployment. Similarly, a study on the socioeconomic effects of unemployment in Nigeria by Yarima (2014) found that unemployed youth in Nigeria were involved in social vices such as prostitution and criminal activities. Surprisingly, only one participant reported having resorted to substance use as a coping mechanism to the adverse effects of unemployment in the current study, while majority of the participants held a general view of alcohol and substance use as a coping mechanism amongst other unemployed youth in Rundu.

This variation in the unhealthy coping strategies adopted by the participants in the current study as opposed to those in other studies (Yarima, 2014; Mokona et al., 2020) could be explained by the differences in sociodemographic characteristics. The present study interviewed participants with a good educational background who are actively seeking for employment. As such, job-seekers with this employability skill would want to maintain a positive image in the society in order to stand a good chance as a prospective candidate for a job selection.

In the current study, unemployment was identified as a major source of stress for most of the participants. One of the models that examine the adaptation of people to stressors is the transactional stress model of Lazarus and Folkman (Faryabi et al., 2022). According to the transactional model of stress and coping, individuals experience stress when the demands placed on them (stressors) exceed their resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, cited in Wolfers & Utz, 2022). As such, various coping mechanisms are then employed as a way to deal with the perceived stressor, for instance, unemployment. Lazarus and Folkman identified two major categories in which coping strategies could be classified. This included emotion-focused coping strategies, which are focused on the regulation of negative emotions to control or minimize the emotional distress (Weiten, 2010). Problem-focused coping strategies, on the other hand, are usually aimed at eliminating the stressor by engaging in adaptive behaviour (Weiten, 2010).

One of the positive coping strategies that was found amongst the participants in the current study included remaining hopeful and optimistic about future employment prospects, which was consistent in all the participants. Participants cited self-counselling, through positive self-talks and internal motivation as their coping mechanisms against the

negative emotions that accompany the unemployment phenomenon. Griep et al. (2015) identify this form of coping as emotion-focused coping strategies. In addition, participants in the present study also identified social engagement and active participation in physical activities such as sports and exercising as their other forms of coping mechanisms. These strategies are consistent with the findings from other qualitative studies (Mayer & Halloderer, 2022; Arena et al., 2022). For instance, Arena et al. (2022) found that their participants described various strategies that effectively facilitated coping and improved mental health and well-being during unemployment. This included reflective activities (e.g., mindfulness and journaling), exercise and eating well, identifying and challenging maladaptive thoughts, positive self-talk and positive reframing, and finding ways to restore routine, a sense of purpose and productivity. In most cases, these strategies serve as a buffer against unpleasant experiences, including unemployment. In the current study, participants' engagement into employment-seeking habits and their preparedness to perform precarious work is classified as a problem-focused coping strategy, since these efforts are aimed at eliminating their unemployment situation, which seems to be a major source of stress.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings in relation to the objectives of the study. The current study found similar findings found in some studies, in that unemployment relatively contributes to poor mental well-being. This is particularly related to the poor self-esteem, negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, depression, and distorted social relationships found amongst the unemployed. However, a difference in coping strategies amongst the unemployed was found in the present study, particularly relating to some of

the social vices such as criminal activities, prostitution etc. that were found in some other studies. This variation in coping strategies in comparison to other studies could be explained by the differences in the sociodemographic characteristics of the study samples. The current study revealed unhelpful and positive coping techniques adopted by the unemployed youth Rundu in dealing with the unpleasant experience of unemployment.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, a summary and an overview of the study is presented. It begins by summarizing the main conclusion drawn from the findings of the study, proceeds to provide some of the recommendations to the findings, and lastly, identifies the limitations of the study.

6.1 Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to explore how young people experience unemployment in Namibia, one of the African countries with a high unemployment rate. This was done by first trying to establish an understanding of the prevalence of unemployment across various contexts, before narrowing it down to the Namibian nation, particularly in the town of Rundu. The study further sought to understand the experience of unemployment amongst young people in relation to their well-being and some of the coping strategies adopted as a way to cope with unemployment.

In order to address these objectives, the study employed a qualitative method, through a phenomenological approach. A thematic interview guide comprising open-ended questions was used to allow participants to fully narrate their unemployment experiences. The study revealed that unemployment is one of the psychosocial problems causing a significant deterioration of psychological well-being in the life of the unemployed youth in Rundu. Consequently, this may have a negative impact on their social relationships. This finding provides insight in response to the objective of the study that sought to explore participants' overall experience of unemployment and its implication on their psychological well-being. The current study adds to the understanding that the unemployed

youth experience unemployment as an emotionally distressing phenomenon that is hard and not easy to deal with as it evokes feelings of depression, anxiety, stress, shame, and frustration. However, it is worth noting that although unemployment causes an unpleasant experience, not all the unemployed youth experience a negative impact on their social relations, as the study found that some of the unemployed participants regarded their unemployment period as a chance for fostering family cohesion and exploring some of their unknown talents. Based on the current study, the unemployed youth further experienced financial hardships such as financial dependency and disrupted consumption, compared to their employed peers. Thus, highlighting the importance of this manifest function of work as identified by Jahoda's latent deprivation theory, in promoting autonomous choices involving financial resources and a preferred lifestyle, of which they felt deprived due to being unemployed. Unhelpful coping strategies such as social withdrawal and self-isolation were found amongst the unemployed graduates in their attempt to dealing with the negative effects of unemployment. Hope and being optimistic about employment prospects, positive self-talks through self-counselling and self-motivation, reliance on spiritual beliefs, social engagement, and outdoor activities were found to be some of the positive coping mechanisms adopted by the unemployed youth in Rundu. These finding provides an insight to the third objective of the study, which sought to discover the coping strategies employed by the unemployed youth in Rundu in dealing with unemployment. Lastly, the study supports the latent deprivation model, acknowledging the threat to psychological well-being caused by a lack of structure in time and activity, a deprivation of status and a collective social purpose due to unemployment.

6.2 Recommendations

Recommendations in the current study are in twofold, considering the findings and limitations of the study. The first recommendations offer practical suggestions to addressing unemployment and improving the mental well-being of the unemployed youth. The second set of recommendations offer suggestions for further research on unemployment and well-being in Namibia.

6.2.1 Recommendations for practice

The study found that the unemployed experience negative emotions as a result of unemployment. In proactively responding to the adverse affective nature of unemployment, the emotion-focused coping strategies found in the current study are endorsed as these mechanisms enable the unemployed to endure the emotional troubles accompanying unemployment, thus promoting resilience. In addition to that, problem-focused coping strategies such as intensive efforts for accessing job vacancies through networking, digital platforms, and collaboration with established employment agencies are recommended for the unemployed. Another problem-focused coping strategy that the study recommends include the introduction of specific industry based graduate trainee programs and strengthening existing ones across various sectors, including government, state-owned enterprises, NGOs, and in private entities. This will help magnify the volume for absorbing the big number of unemployed youth in the labour market, especially intensifying job creation and promoting opportunities for self-employment in the agricultural sector, of which the Kavango-East Region is known for, for being geographically located closer to the Kavango-River.

Given the threat that unemployment poses on psychological well-being at an individual level and societal level, the study strongly advocates for enriching policies on

mental health, taking into account the findings of the study. As such, these policies will be helpful if they strive for formal establishment of psychosocial support groups and unique professional psychological support services. These services should be individually designed interventions for the unemployed, with support from both government and the private sector, similar to other community based social support groups. The study advocates for compassion and understanding when dealing with the unemployed to avoid causing further harm to their already-threatened emotions, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and perceptions of social rejection. However, this should be done in a way that does not inadvertently promote stigmatization.

6.2.2 Recommendations for further research

The study advocates for further empirical research on the unemployment phenomenon in order to establish an in-depth understanding of how the unemployed are constructing their realities. This may involve other unemployed youth with no specific education background, those in informal employment, and a look into gender as a variable for possible differences in the experience of unemployment. The current study employed a qualitative research design, therefore leaving room for other research designs, with the inclusion of a larger sample in order to empirically test Jahoda's latent deprivation theory in the Namibian context. Since the present study did not employ a detailed approach to determining unhealthy coping mechanisms amongst the youth, future research could investigate this area in detail. This will help to elaborate on the unhealthy coping strategies that might have been underreported in the present study.

6.3 Limitations of the study

The study had several limitations. The number of research participants that were only sampled from one part of the country could be a limiting factor for transferability to the youth from other parts of the country. The study only recruited research participants that successfully completed high school and obtained tertiary qualifications, thus excluding the youth in general that have not completed post-secondary education and those in informal employment. Moreover, the possibility for confirmation bias might have occurred due to the researcher's familiarity to working with job-seekers as a psychological counsellor of the Ministry of Labour and since the study was conducted in his hometown, thus possibly influencing his subjective interpretations. However, the researcher remained sensitive to all these issues throughout the study and ensured that data collection and interpretation was done cautiously and rigorously. The researcher engaged in peer discussion and review of the findings in order to implement confirmability. This enabled the researcher to suspend potential preconceived knowledge and biases about the topic of unemployment from influencing the interpretation of the findings. As such, the researcher delved deeper into engaging with the participants' expressed experiences of unemployment, while being mindful of the possible influence of his prior knowledge of the topic.

However, despite these limitations this study makes important contributions to the understanding of the experience of unemployment amongst the youth, especially to the under-researched area of youth unemployment and mental health in one of the marginalized regions of Namibia. The findings of the present study can be considered a contribution to the debates on the impact of unemployment on the well-being of the unemployed. Hence, this may inform policy makers to consider establishing effective

interventions targeted for the enhancement of the mental well-being of the unemployed youth.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: SAH50/23

Date: 12/02/2024

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the School of Allied Health Sciences Decentralized Ethics Committee.

Title of Project: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND COPING STRATEGIES ON THE WELL-BEING OF THE YOUTH IN RUNDU

Principal Researcher: FRANSISKUS M SINTANGO

Student Number: 201404339

Centre for Research Services

Take note of the following:

1. Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the ethics committee. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
2. Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the ethics committee
3. The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the ethics committee (through the Chairperson) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by the ethics committee
4. The ethics committee retains the right to:
 - i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,
 - ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

The ethics committee wishes you the best in your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T.W. Shumba", is written over a horizontal line.

Dr T.W. Shumba (Chairperson, Ethics Committee)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Davis Mumbengegwi", is written over a horizontal line.

Prof. Davis Mumbengegwi (Head, Multidisciplinary Research)

APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH PERMISSION REQUEST

March 08, 2024

The Acting Executive Director

Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, and Employment Creation
Private Bag 19005
32 Mercedes Street
Khomasdal, Windhoek

**RE: PERMISSION REQUEST TO CONDUCT A STUDY USING PARTICIPANTS
ON THE NAMIBIA INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION
SYSTEM (NIEIS)**

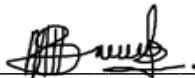
Dear Ms. Aune N. Mudjanima

I, Fransiskus M. Sintango, student no. 201404339, hereby submit this letter of request seeking for permission from your esteemed office in order for me to conduct a research study by recruiting job seekers registered on the NIEIS to form part of my research participants. I am in the process of completing my MA in Clinical Psychology with the University of Namibia, thus necessitating the need for a thesis. My research project is titled **Exploring the experience of unemployment and coping strategies on the well-being of the youth in Rundu**.

My research study intends to investigate the lived experiences of unemployment, coping strategies, and the well-being of job seekers, the youth particularly, through semi-structured interviews. As I currently practice as a vocational counsellor of the ministry in the Rundu regional labour office, I deem it necessary to conduct a study in this field in order to obtain evidence-based information needed for necessary intervention plans. The fieldwork, data collection, is estimated to take place in March through the early days of April at the ministry's Rundu regional labour office with prior arrangements intended to allow ministerial duties to continue taking place during normal operating hours without any distraction. The interviews will be carried out by duly observing the ethical provisions as stipulated by the university. It is against this background that a permission is sought before conducting the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Fransiskus M. Sintango

Principal Researcher, Psychological Counsellor

Contact details: sintangofrans@gmail.com / 0818507299

APPENDIX 3: PERMISSION LETTER



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT CREATION

Tel.: (061) 206 6111
Fax: (061) 212 323
Enquiries: Jacqueline Cloete

E-mail: Jacqui.Cloete@mol.gov.na

Private Bag 19005
32 Mercedes Street
Komasdal
WINDHOEK
12 March 2024

Mr. Fransiskus M. SINTANGO
P.O. Box 974
RUNDU

Dear Mr. Sintango

RE: ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER FOR CONDUCTING STUDY RESEARCH

1. This is to refer to your letter of **08th March 2024**, regarding the request for conducting research, towards a MA in Clinical Psychology.
2. This is further to inform you that your request has been considered favourably. Therefore, permission is hereby granted for you to interview participants on the Namibia Integrated Employment Information System (NIEIS)
3. It is trusted and hope that the above would suffice.

Yours sincerely


AUNE N MUDJANIMA
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



All official correspondence must be addressed to the Executive Director

APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Dear participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview for a research project. This form explains: **What the study is about** and **What will happen if you agree to participate in the study**. Therefore, you are kindly requested to take your time and read it carefully.

A) What the study is about

- The study aims to investigate the lived experience of unemployment, coping strategies, and wellbeing amongst the youth in Rundu.

B) What will happen if you agree to participate in the study

- You will form part of the 12 participants that will be interviewed on a one-on-one basis and will be recorded with an audio tape-recorder for data analysis purposes at a later stage.
- Interviews are estimated to take about 40 – 60 minutes with each participant and will take place at the Ministry of Labour office in Rundu.
- You still have the freedom to choose whether you want to take part or not and are free to withdraw from the ongoing interview.
- Information that you share with me will be treated as entirely confidential and recordings will be stored safely for research purposes only.
- Identifiable information such as your name will not be included in the reporting or publication of findings.

Please note that your decision to participate in this study is voluntary.

Please fill in the slip below.

I have read and understood the above information, or it has been read to me.	
I consent voluntarily to participate as a participant in this study and that I will be recorded.	
Full Name of Participant:	
Do you want to take part in this study? (<i>Please tick in the appropriate box</i>) YES	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Signature:	Date:

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me and I will take pleasure in providing more clarity to you.

Thank you,

Fransiskus M. Sintango (Researcher)
 Cell No: **081 850 7299**
 Email: sintangofrans@gmail.com

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Sociodemographic information

(Please tick in the appropriate box)

Full Name: _____

Sex: Male Female

Date of Birth: _____

Highest education level obtained: Primary Secondary Tertiary Vocational training

Length of most recent unemployment period: _____

Marital Status: Single Married Widowed Divorced

Living with a partner

Number of children: _____

Home language: Rukwangali Rumanyo Thimbukushu Rusambyu

Number of people living in your household: _____

Residential area: Formal settlement Informal settlement

Housing material: Bricks Zinc Shack Other _____

Psychological/emotional dimension of unemployment

- Can you tell me a bit more about any of your paid jobs that you have done in the past if there was any? (*probe on any employment history*)
- Can you tell me a bit about your daily life activities currently? (*probing on the daily experience of unemployment, description of what a typical day is like being unemployed, how the day is spent/time structure, activities*)
- How do you feel being unemployed? (*any difficult emotions or situation that you have experienced as a result of being unemployed, behavioural reactions to the unemployment phenomenon*)
- In what ways has unemployment affected your self-esteem/self-worth? (*any negative effect on your self-image, sense of purpose, life goals*)
- In your opinion, how has unemployment affected your social standing in society? (*look into how they see themselves in society, how their social status/recognition in society has been affected due to unemployment*)

Interpersonal relationships in relation to unemployment (Social dimension)

- Can you tell me a bit about the employment status of your friends? (*probe on the type of work they do, how much contact is made and interaction with friends*)
- In what ways has unemployment affected your friendships? (*look into the quality of friendships and social life while unemployed*)
- Can you tell me more about your family's employment status? (*the type of work they do*)
- How is your relationship with your family members at home? (*probe on how unemployment has impacted family relations/contacts, interactions, family dynamics, amount of support from family*)
- How do you see yourself at home? (*probing on contributions made at home and how their role at home has been impacted as a result of unemployment*)

- How do you think your family members and friends see you? (*probe on the type of [perceived] treatment received at home and from friends while unemployed*)

Economic dimension

- How has unemployment affected your livelihood in terms of finances? (*probe participants' description of their financial situation, material well-being*)
- How do you provide for yourself at the moment? (*probe on the current sources of income, how daily life expenses are met, financial support from family members and friends*)

Coping strategies

- How do you deal with your current unemployment situation? (*probe on coping strategies, resources used for physical and mental well-being*)
- Who supports you in coping with unemployment and looking for employment?
- How do you want to improve your current situation? (*job-seeking behavior/ Can you give me an example of what you do to get a job, looking into job aspirations/preferences, career plan*)
- How do you think unemployment has affected the youth in Rundu? (*What are your thoughts on unemployment on the youth*)
- In your opinion, what do you think should be done to support/help unemployed youth in Rundu?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about unemployment, something important that I forgot to ask?