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FACTORS THAT AFFECT LONG-TERM INCOME ASSISTANCE  
RECIPIENTS' ABILITIES TO BECOME EMPLOYED,  
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

by

Tami O'Meara

B.A., The University of Victoria, 1997

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THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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in

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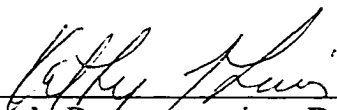
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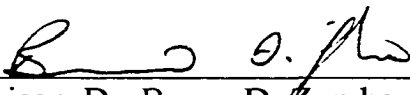
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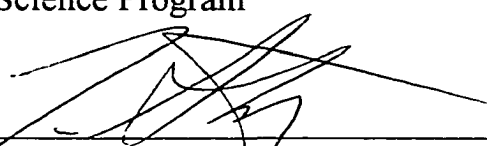
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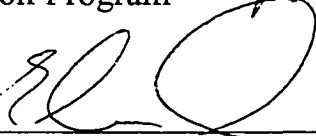
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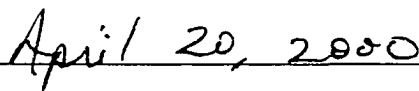
  
Supervisor: Dr. Bruno D. Zumbo  
Psychology and Mathematics Program

  
Committee Member: Dr. Alex C. Michalos, FRSC  
Political Science Program

  
Committee Member: Dr. Tom Strong  
Education Program

  
External Examiner: Glen Schmidt, MSW  
Social Work Program

Date Approved:

  
April 20, 2000

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is becoming increasingly recognized that there is a significant number of Canadians who find it necessary to not only gain short-term financial support from the income assistance system, but who also remain attached to the system for long periods of time. This thesis is exploratory in nature. Questions were posed to 40 individuals in receipt of income assistance for ten out of the last twelve months. The questions were focused on gathering information regarding factors that may have helped or hindered the participants in becoming employed and, as a consequence, eventually become financially self-sufficient. Based on the findings, a discussion of the implications for counselling is presented along with recommendations related to counselling practice.

A structured survey was used to gather demographic information and information regarding helpful and hindering factors related to securing employment. The questions were directly tied to the research questions used in conceptualizing this study in an effort to gather relevant, useful information from the participants.

This research has found that participants perceive the primary factor that will increase their employment opportunities is education. The majority of participants have not completed high school and strongly believe that furthering their education will ultimately allow them to become employed. Along with possessing a minimal level of education, participants also reported that their sense of self-worth and self-confidence were adversely affected by being unemployed and receiving income assistance for a long period of time.

A number of recommendations for counselling this population are identified within the thesis. The most significant implications were are focused on meeting the expectations of the client and a basic set of tenets from which a counsellor can work effectively with this particular population. It is hoped that this thesis will provide practical information about a group of people who are struggling to survive within the Prince George region.

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Receiving income assistance is supposed to be a last resort for Canadians who, for whatever reason, are unable to secure enough financial stability in order to survive.

Income assistance is Canada's safety net for individuals who have exhausted all other sources of income. This may include those individuals who are chronically unemployed, have a disability, or are working for wages insufficient to support their living costs.

Income assistance provides money for the very basic necessities including food and shelter. Policies, procedures and statistical data vary between provinces leaving a number of unanswered questions open for discussion among government officials and those who work within the system assisting income assistance recipients. To date, questions regarding factors that help or hinder movement away from the welfare system have not been addressed in a way that assists recipients to decrease their reliance on this particular system.

Unfortunately, the number individuals and families who are being forced to access this support system continues to rise, a symptom of increasing poverty rates within Canada. As disconcerting as it is to watch the number of people on income assistance continue to rise, it is even more alarming to note that an increasing number of individuals remain connected to the income assistance system for long periods of time, even generations. For the purposes of this thesis, the term "long-term" will include all individuals who have been in receipt of income assistance for ten (10) months or more within the last twelve (12) months. The degree of support will vary from daycare subsidies, a "topping up" of employment insurance, or the receipt of full income

assistance benefits.

Limited research has been conducted on what recipients find as being helpful or hindering factors in leaving the support of the income assistance system and becoming employed. The focus of the research literature has been on creating information that provides government officials and support workers with a view of the characteristics of the typical welfare recipient and potential causes for being attached to the welfare system. There are a number of gaps within this information system that keeps support people, such as employment counsellors from being able to develop a viable model for assisting clients to move away from income assistance and into situations that offer increased opportunities for finding and maintaining employment. Thus, counselling individuals in receipt of long-term income assistance is being compromised by inconsistencies in methodology and the effectiveness with which employment counsellors are able to assist clients in their movement towards financial independence. “Inconsistencies in methodology” refers to the present manner in which client needs are assessed and the support systems available to address these needs. Individuals who are connected to the income assistance system must observe specific policies that outline the type and duration of services available including assessment, job skills training and personal counselling.

The primary goal of this thesis is to examine what long-term income assistance recipients believe are helpful or hindering factors in their efforts to move away from the income assistance system and become employed. The secondary goal is to reflect on the information gathered and discuss implications for employment counselling focusing on the movement from unemployment to employment. In order to meet the goals of this

thesis a review of literature gathered from government sources, research articles and texts was conducted and discussed. Based on the information reviewed a study was proposed.

## **OUTLINE OF THESIS**

The primary objective of the research presented in this thesis is to assess the perceived factors which may help or hinder individuals, who are receiving income assistance, to secure employment. It is hoped that the findings of this research will both support and identify factors in addition to the prevalent factors discussed within the literature review. These findings will also offer the basis for the discussions of implications for counselling individuals who are long-term income assistance recipients. The manner in which counsellors support this population may be critical in terms of how these individuals view themselves and take action to change their current life situations.

The thesis is organized in the following manner. Chapter 2 provides a detailed literature review. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, procedures, and data analysis. A theoretical rationale for the chosen research method is presented along with a discussion of the data collection and analysis methods used for the study. Chapter 4 will outline the results of the study and Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the implications for counselling individuals who are long-term income assistance recipients.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

This study is based on the following broad research questions, (1) “What are the factors that affect (help or hinder) long-term income assistance recipients’ abilities to become employed and, based on the findings, (2) “What are the implications for counselling this group?” The focus of the thesis is on the northern British Columbia community of Prince George. This thesis will contribute to the theory and practice of counselling by addressing the issue that previous research has not been conducted outside of Vancouver, and by using individuals who have been in receipt of income assistance for ten months or more within the last twelve months. The program of research by Borgen and Amundson (1988), Borgen and Amundson (1982; 1984; 1987) and Klein, Amundson, and Borgen (1992) will inform this exploratory study of the potential factors affecting individuals who are long-term income assistance recipients.

## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Terminology and Target Population**

Individuals who access the income assistance system can become long-term recipients for a multitude of reasons. According to a National Council of Welfare (1998) study, lack of work is considered to be the primary reason for accessing and remaining on welfare in more than fifty percent of the situations. The presence of a disability is recognized as the primary factor in approximately twenty-five percent of the situations. Other contributing factors which may be associated with individuals remaining on income assistance for long periods of time include: the type of family structure, gender, levels of education, housing costs, loss of a spouse, multi-generational connection to income assistance, immigrant status, work activity, area of residency, type of work, and age (Fineman, 1983; Klein, Amundson & Borgen, 1992; Warr, 1983). There are generally a combination of reasons why individuals seek support from income assistance and these reasons may or may not remain static for the duration of time in which support is being provided.

### **The Income Assistance System in British Columbia**

The income assistance system is governed by the Ministry of Human Resources. With respect to employment, the focus of this Ministry is to move people off of income assistance and into employment as quickly as possible. If individuals who are in receipt of income assistance determine they must acquire more advanced education or specific skills in order to increase their employability, they must generally find alternate sources of financial support.

Alternative financial supports could include:

- a. Canada Student Loans for post secondary programs,
- b. Receipt of Employment Insurance from Human Resources Development Canada,
- c. Accessing funding support from aboriginal groups such as bands, United Native Nations, and Métis Associations,
- d. Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (MSDES), and
- e. Employment income.

The Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) does not support education unless there is an approved plan that focusses returning the individual to the workplace as quickly as possible. British Columbia has instituted a phase system based on the length of time an individual has accessed income assistance. The Youth Works and Welfare to Work programs, which are focussed on the age of individuals receiving income assistance, have also been implemented and operate using the phase system.

The phase system is an extremely controversial method for determining who can or cannot participate in specific training and/or supported job search activities based on the length of time one is in receipt of income assistance. Since recipients do not receive job search or educational support in a timely manner, this system has been met with opposition from the individuals who are accessing its support, as well as community service agencies, and a variety of government bodies. In fact, the income assistance system will be returning to a phase-less model on April 1, 2000.

There are three phases within the current income assistance system. Phase I recipients include all individuals who have received financial support for a period of one

to seven months. These individuals are required to conduct unsupported job search activities on a full time basis with limited support or access to individual and group employment training activities or job search support.

Phase II individuals have been accessing support for up to nine months and Phase III recipients have been receiving support for more than ten months. Phase III are then considered to be long-term income assistance recipients since they have been in receipt of income assistance for more than nine months. Note that Phase II and III recipients are not necessarily unemployed. Rather, they may be the working poor and hence unable to fully support themselves financially. Upon entering Phases II and III, any individuals who would like to access federal, provincial, or possibly private training or education programs are supposed to participate in a program currently called “Flashpoint” (in the Prince George region). The title for this program varies from contractor to contractor, however, the content remains very similar throughout the various regions. Flashpoint is provided by the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (MSDES) and consists of two half-days designed to assist participants in determining an employment goal and subsequent plan of action to achieve that goal. Upon completion of Flashpoint individuals must then attend one of the designated Assisted Job Search (AJS) programs also provided by MSDES. These programs vary in length from between two to five weeks and are designed to assist individuals to develop job search skills such as resume writing, networking, and the elements of doing an effective job search. Once individuals have participated in Flashpoint, an Assisted Job Search program, and have not been able to secure employment they may be deemed eligible to participate in other federally or

provincially funded programs, including upgrading or post secondary education. Training Consultants, who are MSDES employees, determine eligibility based on a number of criteria, including the ability of clients to clearly articulate a plan that is focussed on gaining entry into the workforce as quickly as possible, and the job search efforts that client has expended during the first nine months of receiving income assistance.

The Youth Works and Welfare to Work programs divide individuals in receipt of income assistance by two age categories. Youth Works participants range in age from nineteen to twenty four years. Individuals are generally considered to be capable and ready to work. Therefore, the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) expects these youths to acquire employment as a first priority. Unattached males, in particular, are encouraged to secure employment and do not easily gain support for furthering their level of skills or education. Women who have children under seven years of age are not expected to seek employment and may attend school if they have a well developed return to work plan. There is very little support for upgrading education within this program, although the federally and provincially funded programs offered within the phase structure may be accessed pending approval by Financial Assistance Workers and/or Training Consultants.

Welfare to Work recipients must be over twenty-five years of age. These individuals also follow the phase structure which means, regardless of age, they are expected to engage in seven months of job search unassisted by individual or group programs before being eligible for additional retraining, education, or job search assistance. There appears to be an increased level of support for these individuals to access training and education once they have entered into Phases II and III.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review focussed on information that had a Canadian context, though international sources were also explored. The literature review included the following sources: ERIC, Sociofiles, PsychlitINFO, theses at UNBC, an examination of reports from the National Council of Welfare, other related federal and provincial government documentation (POVNET), and a variety of texts.

After an extensive search of the literature it was concluded that only four studies and a textbook were directly applicable to the proposed study since they focussed on the Canadian income assistance system. Coincidentally, all four studies and the study used for the textbook were conducted in British Columbia and focussed on factors that assist and hinder unemployed individuals who would like to become re-employed. Since these four studies and the textbook were the basis of the literature review they were reviewed in detail.

## **Detailed Review of Articles**

**Borgen, W. & Amundson, N. (1987). The dynamics of unemployment. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 66, 180-184.**

Borgen and Amundson (1987) conducted this “descriptive study of the experience of unemployment with a purpose of examining the evolution of psychological reactions over time and to determine some of the actors that moderate or intensify the psychological impact of the experience ”(p. 180). The goal was to map out the experiences related to unemployment that may help to provide explanations for the identity issues, psychological reactions, and job search stressors identified by other

researchers.

Borgen and Amundson reviewed a number of theoretical models that they felt had particular relevance to the population they were studying. They focussed on the connection between their initial model (Amundson & Borgen, 1982), which suggested that individuals experiencing unemployment feel the effects of an “emotional roller coaster,” and the grieving cycle suggested by Kubler-Ross (1969). Kubler-Ross identified a number of stages involved in the grieving cycle including: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Borgen & Amundson, 1984; 1987). Her model suggested that, following the death of a loved one, most individuals experience the stages of grieving in varying levels of intensity and in a variety of sequences. Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987) have hypothesized that the grieving that occurs after a job loss is similar to Kubler-Ross’ model. Borgen and Amundson (1987) also stated that the connection between the job loss cycle and the grieving stages have been validated by a number of other researchers (e.g., Finely & Lee, 1981).

Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987) suggested an acceptance phase would be experienced once the grieving cycle had been completed and hypothesized that, since looking for a job is in itself a job without pay, this phase would likely begin with a great deal of enthusiasm, but would soon run into trouble as people faced the realities of repeated rejections and unsuccessful interviews. The job burnout model, which included enthusiasm, stagnation, frustration, and apathy, suggested by Edelwich and Brodsky (1980), was used as a possible explanation for the evolution and cycling of emotions in Borgen and Amundson’s (1984, 1987) acceptance phase. Borgen and Amundson (1984,

1987) suggested that people might initially begin with some enthusiasm towards job search, thinking that they had a chance at a new beginning and that they would be able to work in jobs that would be challenging and interesting. Given the economic climate of the time, however, the authors suggested that it would not take long for the harsh realities of job search to become evident and, under such conditions, people would likely stagnate in their job search activities and feel a sense of hopelessness and lack of progress. Within the stagnation phase, the sense of hopelessness could be accompanied by feelings of frustration and an increasing willingness to give up and do less in the job search area. These authors also suggest the end point of the burnout model was apathy, characterized by people having withdrawn from job search and having decided that the whole situation is hopeless.

The study was conducted in greater Vancouver with participants who were registered with Human Resources Development Canada. The final pool of 55 participants included 26 men and 29 women. Of the participants, 21 (11 men, 10 women) were under 25 years of age and thus classified as youth. The average previous yearly income for the participants was \$16,050.

The authors interviewed people who had been out of work for a minimum of three months so there would be a sufficient period of unemployment upon which to comment at the time that data were gathered. Subjects were asked to complete a demographic information questionnaire at the end of the interview regarding the participant's age, sex, marital status, previous occupation, and length of unemployment.

In using a phenomenological perspective to study the dynamics of unemployment,

Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987) attempted to set up interview situations that would allow each person the opportunity for self expression with a minimum of imposed structure or interruption. The interview procedure was designed to give participants the opportunity to talk freely about their experiences of unemployment and to focus on some of the high and low points.

The graduate research assistants who conducted the interviews were not familiar with Amundson and Borgen's (1982) dynamics of unemployment model, and they were trained to conduct interviews in a non-directive manner employing open-ended questions. At the end of each interview (approximately 45 minutes), participants were asked to focus on critical incidents and to depict their experience graphically, on a time line that charted their emotions (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; 1988). They then discussed the incidents and emotions on the time line to ensure that there was a correspondence between the information provided in the interview and the summary graph.

Following standard phenomenological procedure, Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987; Amundson & Borgen, 1987) began their analyses by transcribing the interviews and then having the graduate students who conducted the interviews summarize them using the concept of "meaning" units. Regular reliability checks (every 10<sup>th</sup> participant) were made to ensure that the same meaning units were being identified by each research assistant (Borgen & Amundson, 1984; 1987, Amundson & Borgen, 1987). The research assistants found that the percentage of agreement in making the reliability checks was 96%. Using the summaries, the research assistants then transposed the information onto rating sheets that focussed on the following components:

- (a) emotional shifts experienced,
- (b) time sequence involved with the occurrence of particular emotions,
- (c) events or behaviors accompanying specific emotions,
- (d) coping strategies employed,
- (e) job search strategies, and
- (f) future expectations (Borgen & Amundson, 1984; 1987).

Reliability checks were made on every fifth rating sheet and had an agreement of 88%.

Borgen and Amundson (1987) gathered the information in groups comprised of males, females and youth. The final phases of summarizing included a cross checking of information on the rating sheets with the graphic representations made by the participants and a summarization of the incidents that represented high or low points in the unemployment experience.

Next, in each group (men, women, youths), Borgen and Amundson (1987) examined people for similarities and by placing together those individuals who had described similar responses to unemployment. Two research assistants independently sorted participants' descriptions according to similarity of experience and the percentage agreement was 93% (Borgen & Amundson, 1987).

Borgen and Amundson (1987) found that, as a result of the sorting, a single pattern emerged for men and for young people, whereas two distinct patterns emerged for women. It was also found that one of the patterns for women was very similar for men, thus these patterns were grouped together (Borgen & Amundson, 1987).

Borgen and Amundson (1987) derived three patterns of experience during

unemployment which included Pattern A (16 men, 13 women), Pattern B (6 women), and Pattern C (21 young people; 10 men, 11 women).

Borgen and Amundson's (1984, 1987; Amundson & Borgen 1987) studies used a model that suggested that the experience of unemployment could be described as an emotional roller coaster. They suggested that the reactions to be expected initially in response to job loss could closely be aligned with the stages of grieving process described by Kubler-Ross (1969). It was also hypothesized that the stresses incurred in the job search would result in emotional reactions similar to those suggested by Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) in describing job burnout. The results of each study showed that for approximately 52% of the people interviewed, the original model was representative of their experiences. However, the results also supported the findings of Gurney and Taylor (1981), Rump (1983), and Warr (1983) who suggested that it is important to differentiate among groups when considering the experience of unemployment. Borgen and Amundson (1987) discerned three distinct patterns as described below.

***Pattern A: Men, Women I***

This pattern was composed of 52% of the participants involved in the study; containing all of the men over the age of 25 and women over 25 who were primary wage earners in their families (Borgen & Amundson, 1987). This group described shifts in emotion fairly closely aligned to the original roller coaster model. However, the grieving period was graphically represented to be over a time period that tended to be shorter than the job search phase.

Borgen and Amundson (1987) found a variation that occurred for eight of the 29

participants in relation to their reactions to job loss. They anticipated job loss and experienced a prolonged period of anxiety before losing their jobs and by the time they had left their jobs, they seemed to have gone through grieving reactions and were ready to begin a job search. It was found that these people were relieved with the termination of the job and took short vacations before beginning to search for new jobs. Once these participants began to search their reactions closely paralleled the other participants in Pattern A.

Borgen and Amundson (1987) noted that enthusiasm may have some negative side effects precipitated by the development of an unrealistic set of expectations about job prospects and, often, an overselling of self during job interviews. This overly optimistic attitude appeared to set some people up for a heightened sense of failure in their later job search efforts if their expectations for employment were not fulfilled.

Borgen and Amundson (1987) found that a “yo-yo” effect that occurred during the job search phase did not fall in line with the expected roller coaster effect. The “yo-yo” effect was created when individuals experienced erratic and rapid shifts in emotion as a result of repeated job rejections and the reliance upon friends and family to start thinking positively. The authors noted that the low points of the “yo-yo” would continue to become lower with less pronounced high points as the job rejections persisted. This process tended to lead people into a period of decreased job search and increased feelings of worthlessness.

People in Pattern A did move into the predicted apathy phase of Amundson and Borgen’s (1982) job loss model. However, this also “ushered in a phase of meaningful

reevaluation of their worth as people and a new consideration of changes in their career paths” (Borgen & Amundson, 1987). People found an increased acceptance of themselves and an acceptance of the need to set long-range career goals and to begin activities, such as retraining, that could result in reaching these goals.

### ***Pattern B: Women II***

This group included 11% of the sample and was composed of women who were secondary wage earners in their families or who had sufficient financial resources to cope with a prolonged period of unemployment. Borgen and Amundson (1987) found that this group expressed emotional reactions to job loss and job search were tied to a perceived loss of status and were described in less severe terms than those described in Pattern A.

Borgen and Amundson (1987) found that this group experienced a “time out” period lasting up to a year and, as the job search was unsuccessful, began a slow slide into feelings of worthlessness, boredom, and mild depression which could be reversed as they received support from others. As this group began a period of reassessment of themselves and their career options, considerable satisfaction was generated and there was a belief that the unemployment experience had provided them with an opportunity for additional growth and development (Borgen & Amundson, 1987).

### ***Pattern C: Young People***

The people in this group constituted 37% of the sample and were mostly secondary school graduates who had little or no post secondary education (Borgen & Amundson, 1987). This group expected to find employment easily and became frustrated when employment was not secured quickly. Because jobs did not seem to be readily

available, the participants expressed little interest in continuing with the job search and turned instead to other leisure activities that helped to reduce their boredom. Pressure from parents often became a problem for this group and they described situations in which they were still in the role of “child” e.g., being ordered to do things by parents, being unable to make decisions for themselves. Borgen and Amundson (1987) found that the reactions of this group seemed to reflect that of a 14 year old rather than those of young adults ranging in age from 18 to 24. These findings support the theory that work plays an important part in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and when young people cannot find employment there is a greater likelihood of a slowing down in psychosocial development (Gurney, 1980).

### **Summary of the Study**

Borgen and Amundson (1987) concluded that, in many cases, unemployment leads to shifts in emotions and cognitions which need to be assessed to determine intervention options that may range from enhancing job search techniques to renewing self-confidence. This research has also provided support for describing unemployment as an emotional roller coaster, which requires more research involving longitudinal studies.

These authors identified two problems inherent in the design of the study including:

(1) the use of volunteers as participants and (2) the reliance of participant recall. The first problem seems somewhat obviated by statements from the “referring participants” that members of the sample group seemed typical of their clients. A longitudinal or observational design would be required to address the second problem.

**Amundson, N. & Borgen, W. (1988). Factors that help and hinder in group employment counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 25, 104 - 114.**

Amundson and Borgen conducted this “descriptive study to investigate the factors that help and hinder members of job-search groups and the impact of these groups on the experience of unemployment”(p.104). They were investigating the components of job search support groups that make effective interventions and attempted to determine whether or not there are critical times for a group intervention within the unemployment experience. In two other studies (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Amundson & Borgen, 1987), Amundson & Borgen (1988) noted that about 25% of the participants had taken part in some type of group employment counselling, and all of them reported that the experience had been extremely positive. As stated in Amundson & Borgen’s (1988) article, group counselling has been well-documented to be effective with varied client populations facing many diverse issues (Corey, 1995; Fisher, 1974; Gulley & Leathers, 1977; Hare, 1976; Ohlsen, 1970; Trotzer, 1977).

Research has indicated that group counselling can be very beneficial for assisting individuals who are unemployed to cope more effectively with the situation and to develop the skills necessary to become re-employed (Azrin & Philip, 1979; Azrin, Besalel, Wistozek, McMorro, & Belchtel, 1982; Chandler, 1984; Hicks & Kelvin, 1983; Isaacson & Brown, 1997 Trimmer, 1984). Amundson & Borgen (1988) stated that the group approach is well suited to helping people:

- (a) understand other people’s points of view,
- (b) develop social interaction skills,

- (c) learn to share concerns and ideas with others who face similar problems,
- (d) obtain several reactions to problems expressed,
- (e) receive support and encouragement from others, and
- (f) obtain relevant information.

Amundson & Borgen (1988) designed the study to investigate the specific factors that perceived by group participants as helpful or hindering in coping with unemployment on the basis of:

- (a) the results of the Amundson and Borgen (1987) study, which indicated the positive influence of groups,
- (b) the corroboration of their results by other studies, and
- (c) the indication that the influence of group interventions needed to be investigated on a more specific level.

Some of the major positive or helpful factors were: support of family and friends, thinking positively, career counselling, and job search support groups (Amundson & Borgen, 1988).

Seventy-seven individuals participated in the research that was carried out in the Greater Vancouver area. The 41 men and 36 women participants had an average age of 34.6 years and were unemployed for an average of 8.5 months before entering a job search group. Their education levels varied with 42 individuals having high school completion or less and 35 individuals with some university or college education. The incomes ranged from less than \$15,000 to \$35,000. At the time of the interviews, 37 individuals were working full time and 40 individuals were unemployed.

Borgen & Amundson (1988) used an open ended interview approach at the beginning of the interview. The open ended method was used because it provides an excellent way of conducting in depth exploration and analysis ( Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Babbie, 1995; Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985; Colaizzi, 1978; Fischer, 1979). Trained graduate assistants acted as group leaders and made arrangements for the initial interviews. In order to allow the participant the opportunity for self-expression, with a minimum of imposed structure, the following open-ended questions were used to begin the interview:

Would you describe in as much detail as possible your experience of being unemployed? I would like you to include how you came to be out of work, what you thought about when it happened and your thoughts since, any feelings you have had during the time you have been out of work, and job-search activities that you have tried (Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; 1987).

Following the initial section of the interview (approximately 20 minutes) Amundson & Borgen (1988) used the critical-incident technique was developed by Flanagan (1954). As a final step in the interview, each person was asked to chart his or her experience using a “life line.” The life line was a graphic representation of the experience of unemployment for each person from the time of job loss to the time of the interview. Questions to the participants were focussed on gathering information regarding an overall assessment of the job search group and when this type of support would be most beneficial as an intervention.

### Critical Incidents

Trained graduate students summarized information from the interviews which primarily focussed on the helping or hindering incidents. Upon completion of the

summaries, the students checked the accuracy of the summaries by contacting the participants by telephone. Following this verification process the students then developed a classification system based on the first 20 interviews and explored the reliability and exhaustiveness of the system, using data from the remaining interviews.

Reliability. Reliability refers to the ability of independent observers to easily classify the incidents in the same categories as the original observers. A set of 19 categories was induced from the initial collection of 160 helping incidents (first 20 interviews) and the reliability was tested when two other graduate assistants independently attempted to re-categorize the same set of data according to the given system (Amundson & Borgen, 1988). Inter-rater reliability was 91% (73/80 incidents) and 94% (75/80 incidents) for the two respective assistants, with each other .

Exhaustiveness. Exhaustiveness refers to whether or not data collection has been sufficiently comprehensive to include all the varieties of behaviour and experience that the critical-incident technique may be expected to cover (Amundson & Borgen, 1988). In order to test exhaustiveness an “attempt was made to classify data from the remaining interviews (after the initial 20) according to the category system” (p. 107). With the exception of six hindering and two helping incidents, all of the incidents could be placed in the existing categories, which indicates strong evidence for the exhaustiveness of the category system.

#### Timing of the Job-Search Group Intervention

Amundson & Borgen (1988) analysed this focus of concern by gaining an

understanding of the experience of unemployment through interpretations generated through the interview process and the life line data. Stated shifts in emotion and precipitating incidents were charted over time and compared with the life line drawn by participants during their interviews. The authors noted common patterns and made composite drawings to illustrate the participants' reactions over time. This information was used to understand the point at which the group experience occurred in the individual's period of unemployment as well as the effect of the group on the individual's emotional reaction to unemployment. In order to determine at what point during the period of unemployment a group would be most beneficial, participants were asked to indicate on the life line where a job search group would make the most sense for them. Those individuals who were employed would naturally be responding retrospectively.

Amundson & Borgen (1988) stated that the 77 participants in the study were extremely satisfied with their group experience and reported 501 helping and only 44 hindering incidents. Nineteen helping categories were developed as a result of this analysis. Table 1 outlines the helping categories and the extent to which they were mentioned.

Upon completion of the analysis of the hindering incidents, Amundson & Borgen (1988) developed ten categories of which nine were the inverse of the positive categories. Some individuals had difficulties accessing transportation to the job search group. Therefore the one new category was focussed on the location of the job search group.

Table 1

Helping Categories

Categories	No. of times mentioned	No. of participants mentioning factor	% of participants mentioning factor
Mutual support	58	51	66
Job search	44	39	51
Instruction	44	36	47
Positive outlook	51	34	44
Interview	46	34	44
Telephone technique	40	34	44
Belonging	33	33	43
Job leads	26	24	31
Video feedback	24	23	30
Leadership	23	20	25
Routine	18	17	22
Supplies and services	15	15	19
Absorbing enthusiasm	12	12	16
Information	16	12	16
Follow-up	11	11	15
Goal setting	7	7	9
Social comparison	5	5	6
Contribution	3	3	4
Ventilation	2	2	3

Table 2 outlines the extent to which the hindering categories were mentioned.

Table 2

Hindering Categories

Categories	No. of times mentioned	No. of participants mentioning factor	% of participants mentioning factor
Leadership	8	8	10
Absorbing enthusiasm	8	8	10
Follow-up	5	5	6
Telephone technique	3	3	4
Supplies and services	3	3	4
Instruction	3	3	4
Information	3	3	4
Location	3	3	4
Job leads	2	2	3
Interview	2	2	3

Amundson & Borgen (1988) indicated that most of the helping and hindering factors reported by participants could be grouped into two major sections which included factors that promote support and self-esteem and factors that are more task oriented. The support and self-esteem category encompassed those factors that focussed on interpersonal relations and self-concept development. The task orientation category covers any factors that related directly to job search skill building. The follow up support and services factor was difficult to place because it seemed to apply to both task and support. Therefore it was not included. Amundson & Borgen (1988) determined that the remaining factor, enjoying the Job Club routine, seemed to stand on its own.

Table 3 outlines the two categories that combined seventeen of the factors.

Table 3

Task Orientation and Support or Self-Esteem Categories

<i>Task Orientation</i>	<i>Support or Self-Esteem</i>
Job search strategies	Belonging
Videotape feedback	Mutual support and encouragement
Job leads	Absorbing others' enthusiasm and success
Telephone techniques	Social comparison
Interview practice and preparation	Contribution
Instruction in resumes and correspondence	Ventilating
Supplies and services	A positive outlook
Information	Leadership
Goal setting	

Amundson & Borgen (1988) indicated that two patterns of the experience of unemployment were identified. The major difference in the patterns was the amount of time the participants remained positive and optimistic while engaged in the job search. It was noted that some individuals were able to maintain a positive outlook for up to six months while others moved more quickly into a negative cycle. This study yielded results that corresponded closely to the description of the unemployment experience as outlined by Borgen & Amundson (1987). The participants experienced an emotional roller coaster as they coped with the loss and the stress associated with job loss and the job search (Amundson & Borgen, 1988). The findings also indicated that the emotional downward slide associated with job search occurred between two and six months after the individual becomes unemployed.

It was also noted that involvement in a job-search group generally occurred between the eighth and ninth month of unemployment and this intervention resulted in a dramatic emotional upswing, whether or not a job was found.

Amundson & Borgen's (1988) study found that, as a group, the participants in the job search course had a striking power in halting the usual downward emotional slide, and moving people, instead, toward more positive emotional experiences. This positive effect was maintained for extended periods of time after the group had ended. Even in instances in which employment was not found, the unemployed people reported that they were able to maintain a more effective job search and positive self-image as a result of their participation in the group. The authors stated that early intervention may have alleviated some of the negative emotional states attributed to being unemployed for extended periods of time.

**Klein, H., Amundson, N., & Borgen, W. (1992). The dynamics of unemployment for income assistance recipients. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 29, 88 - 94.**

Klein, Amundson, & Borgen (1992) conducted this exploratory research study to examine the experience of unemployment and present the major factors identified by individuals in receipt of income assistance as helpful or hindering. The authors also discussed a number of counselling implications for working with individuals who are in receipt of income assistance. Klein et al.(1992) discussed research that supports their belief that "it is important to consider the full impact of unemployment on the lives of those who experience it"(p. 92). Kirsh (1983) indicated that individuals who are unemployed face myths and stereotypes that typify them as being too lazy to work, as too

unreliable to hold steady jobs, or as dishonest individuals who are cheating the system. Other authors have pointed out unemployment's negative influence on people's lives (Macky & Haines, 1982; McCarroll, 1984), family relationships (Brathwaite, 1983; Fagin & Little, 1984), mental health (Liem & Rayman, 1984), and self-concept (Bernstein, 1985; Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985; Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984).

According to Kelvin & Jarrett (1985), unemployed individuals are often defined in negative terms based on the fact that western society's socioeconomic structure is predominantly defined in terms of division of labour. This means that the unemployed are evaluated based on what they are not (which is working) as opposed to what they are (individuals seeking employment).

Authors such as Furnham (1983), Golding & Middleton (1982), and Waxman (1983) have indicated that this negative experience can be more pronounced for individuals receiving income assistance since they face a greater social stigma than the generally unemployed. In addition, this population often experiences more pronounced financial deprivation, loss of self-esteem, and isolation (Klein et al., 1992).

Klein et al.'s study involved 20 participants (11 men and 9 women) who were receiving income assistance and were participating in "Project Job Keep," a project co-funded by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission and the British Columbia Ministry of Social Services and Housing. They ranged in age from 25 - 44 with an average age of 34.6 years. The average education level was 11.3 years. Ten of the participants were divorced or separated, 5 were single, 3 were married, and 2 were widowed.

Klein et al. (1992) used in-depth, structured interviews derived from the work of Borgen and Amundson (1984). Their research methodology involved a combination of phenomenological and critical incident approaches.

The questions used in the interviews focused on the experience of unemployment with particular reference to the positive and negative critical incidents (Klein et al., 1992). The interviewers gathered information from participants who discussed their entire unemployment experiences in terms of thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Klein et al. (1992) identified 516 incidents from the transcripts of the taped interviews, with 423 (82%) of the incidents identified as negative in nature. The negative incidents were sorted into categories and the most frequently occurring category was that of stress over the lack of money. Nineteen participants mentioned stress with regard to money a total of 119 times. These authors outlined some of the other prominent negative categories (i.e. mentioned by at least one third of the sample) which included frustration with job search, depression and shame due to being on welfare, marital and family problems, feeling unmarketable, contact with the social service office, boredom, and disenchantment with the level of available jobs.

Ninety-three (18%) of the total reported positive critical incidents were mentioned, the most prominent category being that of joining an employment training program. Klein et al. (1992) stated that this category was mentioned 18 times by 11 participants. Other major positive categories mentioned by at least one third of the sample included fulfilment through raising a family, satisfaction from working, support from friends, and the relief that was experienced when leaving a job.

For the majority of respondents, the experience of unemployment was best described as a “flat” experience with relatively few highs and a continual, pervasive string of lows (Klein et al., 1992). Individuals were not found to have grieved a job loss or experienced a significant downward swing after job loss. Nor did they find that the majority of participants experienced a typical “job loss” experience. Instead, the participants had difficulty remembering their last “real” job, unlike those individuals who were laid off, were fired, or had quit. In many cases, respondents had long histories of temporary, part-time, or casual work that they had never expected to retain. The authors also found that some respondents were forced out of employment due to circumstances such as accidents or marital difficulties which occupied their time and attention.

The financial hardship, mentioned three times as frequently as any other category, was the most prominent aspect of the participants’ experience of stress and tension. In addition to being repeatedly expressed as a source of tension, it also was seen as a catalyst for other “downward pulls” such as family friction, loss of self-esteem, inability to provide for family, and feeling misunderstood by friends.

Although job search frustration was mentioned as a factor by those interviewed, job search did not seem to be a primary source of emotional swings. Instead, most respondents had, for all intents and purposes, given up on finding work and restricted their job search to occasionally responding to newspaper ads. With respect to positive critical incidents, findings indicated that none of the respondents reported promising job interviews or discovering good job leads.

Klein et al. (1992) stated most respondents reported an unemployment experience

marked by varying degrees of depression which was characterized by a continual struggle to financially meet survival needs, pessimism regarding being able to gain employment, low self-esteem, and negative feelings about being on welfare. Additionally, respondents experienced a lack of lasting positive emotional shifts, with the exception of participating in the job search group.

The results of the Klein et al. (1992) study supported Tiggeman and Winefield's (1984) findings which indicated a significant correlation between unemployment and low self-esteem and high depressive affect. However, Klein et al. (1992) found that the participants in their study did not experience the swings of emotion found in the "emotional roller coaster" reported by Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987). Instead, the most prominent and pervasive factor in the experience of unemployment for this group was financial pressure which encompassed great difficulties in meeting basic survival needs such as food, shelter, and clothing for themselves and their families. Such pressure was contrary to the pressure felt by displaced middle or high income earners who must adjust their standard of living and do without some of the luxuries to which they are accustomed.

Klein et al. (1992) discussed the unique financial pressures endured by individuals who received income assistance in the context of Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs. Maslow's model stipulated that physiological and safety needs must be met before higher level needs such as belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization could be fulfilled. It was apparent that individuals on income assistance may not have been able to address and cope with emotional and/or psychological issues. Unfortunately, if these individuals

wanted to meet their basic needs it was imperative that they maintained a level of self-confidence that moved them into a job search. Klein et al. (1992) reported that sporadic job search activities were probably evidence of low levels of self-esteem, because this was bound to adversely affect an individual's self-presentation to potential employers.

Amundson and Borgen's (1988) finding that group employment counselling was a particularly helpful factor in working with the unemployed was verified in the Klein et al. (1992) study which found the most prominent positive critical incident was joining an employment training course or program. It would be beneficial to offer a group experience that provides peer support and understanding to individuals who have reported feelings of low self-esteem, were ashamed of being on welfare, and had feelings of being discriminated against.

Klein et al. (1992) concluded:

1. Group interventions need to be designed with activities that go beyond the delivery of technical information and job finding techniques. Activities should foster a sense of group support and raise levels of self-esteem.
2. Respondents' negative experiences appeared to be long-term and chronic in nature. A follow-up component to programs in which the counsellor could maintain contact for a long period of time thereby providing continued support is recommended..
3. Income assistance recipients ages 25-44 are classified as a distinct group from other unemployed groups. Programs should build in components such as group support, affective as well as cognitive learning objectives, career planning, and

long-term follow-up support.

**Amundson, N. & Borgen, W. (1987). Coping with unemployment: What helps and what hinders. *Journal of Employment Counselling*, 24, 97-106.**

**Borgen, W. & Amundson, N. (1984). *The experience of unemployment*. Scarborough, ON: Nelson Canada.**

This section will combine the review of Borgen and Amundson's (1984) book, *The experience of unemployment*, and their 1987 article entitled "Coping with unemployment: what helps and what hinders" because both studies were conducted in the same manner and appear to have utilized the same subject group. The results for both pieces of literature are identical. Thus it was thought that the dual review would provide a more comprehensive and cohesive examination of Borgen and Amundson's work on this particular subject.

These studies focussed on the experience of unemployment with an emphasis on those factors that unemployed individuals found as being helpful or hindering during their period of unemployment. The authors describe the factors, the theoretical perspectives that assist in understanding the factors, and effective interventions.

It is a fact that unemployment has always influenced people's lives whether it comes from a direct experience of job loss or a fear of job loss in the future (Amundson & Borgen, 1987). Amundson and Borgen (1987; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; 1987) describe individuals who are currently out of work as being the "new unemployed"; those who have lost their jobs because of poor economic conditions, technological change, or other factors that are not connected with their motivation or ability to work. Amundson and Borgen (1987) claimed that, not only did they find in 1984 two negative results of

unemployment were erratic mood shifts and a progressive loss of optimism about finding employment, but several other studies have also documented the major ways in which unemployment negatively influences people's sense of well-being (Bratfisch, 1984; Brenner & Bartell, 1983; Finley & Lee, 1981; Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984).

Borgen and Amundson (1984) outlined the following factors that they considered as impinging on, and modifying, the emotional reactions to unemployment:

1. Attachment to the job. People who are extremely attached to their jobs, and who gain a sense of material or psychological fulfilment from their employment seem to experience more intensely negative emotional reaction to job loss.
2. Social status. Many people, particularly those in professional or higher paying positions, seem to experience a substantial drop in economic and community status through unemployment and this seems to intensify the emotional reactions.
3. Individual personality variables. Factors such as internal or external loci of control seem to play an important role in determining reactions to unemployment. For example, individuals who believe they have control over their employment situation may be motivated to look for employment opportunities but those who feel they have little control over securing employment may feel worthless and put little effort into searching for employment.
4. Financial situation. People who do not have financial security in the form of savings or support from friends/relatives often experience considerable stress. In this regard, absolute income levels often do not seem to be as important as previous spending patterns.

5. Social support system. This is a key factor in helping people to successfully survive the experience of unemployment. The type of supportive interaction that is possible on a daily basis from family and friends seems to be of major importance in helping people to cope successfully and to keep persisting in the frustrating process of continued job search within a shrinking job market.
6. Future expectations. People's notions regarding what to expect in the future are experienced as being under attack when they lose their jobs. If they have had high hopes for themselves including long range career plans, then expectations undergo a radical downward shift with accompanying emotional reactions.

Amundson and Borgen (1987) based their study on interviews of 93 unemployed volunteers (men, women, youths, immigrants) who were clients of the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission in the greater Vancouver area. The study was undertaken with two purposes: (a) to determine people's experience with unemployment and (b) to isolate factors perceived by unemployed people as being a help or a hindrance. The phenomenological and critical incident (Flanagan, 1954, 1978) approaches were the methodology used in this study. This is the same methodology used for a number of other subsequent studies conducted by the authors (Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Klein, Amundson, & Borgen, 1992).

They used the data analysis technique developed by Colaizzi (1978) which encompassed the verbatim transcription and summarization of the interviews. Three research assistants conducted the summarizing process and made reliability checks of the

summary of every 10th participant's story to help ensure that the essence of the original story had not been lost (Amundson & Borgen, 1987). The second phase of summarizing was to transfer information from the summaries to rating sheets, placing information into the following categories:

- (a) emotional shifts experienced,
- (b) time sequence involved in the occurrence of each emotional shift,
- (c) events or behavior that accompanied specific emotional shifts,
- (d) coping strategies used,
- (e) job search strategies, and
- (f) future expectations

(Amundson & Borgen, 1987; Borgen & Amundson, 1984; 1987)

The final phases of summarizing included a cross checking of information on the rating sheets with the graphic representations made by the participants and a summarization of the incidents that represented high or low points in the unemployment experience. Upon completion of the data summarization, participants were initially categorized into men over 25 years old, women over 25 years old, youths, and immigrants (those who had been in Canada for less than 2 years). Amundson and Borgen (1982; Borgen & Amundson, 1984) then looked for similarities and differences in experience within each of these categories and as a result derived 13 variations (subgroups) based on the experience of unemployment of the 93 participants: Men (Variations I, II, and III); Women (Variations I, II, III, and IV); Immigrants (Variations I, II, III, IV, and V); and Youths (I). After reviewing the variations across and within categories, the authors also

combined the experience of unemployment into six major groups (A-F).

The following paragraphs outline the six groups as identified by Amundson and Borgen (1982; 1987) and Borgen and Amundson (1984):

*Group A (Men I and III; Women I and IV; and Immigrants I).* These 30 people experienced unemployment similar to an emotional roller coaster (Amundson & Borgen, 1982). They experienced grief as an initial reaction to job loss, began their job search with enthusiasm, and became progressively more discouraged when they could not secure employment. This group also experienced emotional shifts that were extremely erratic and more likened to an emotional “yo-yo” than a roller coaster.

*Group B (Men II, Women III).* These eight people had anticipated job loss prior to termination. Therefore they went through a grieving process before layoff. The authors found a tendency of the participants to react with relief followed by a time out or vacation period and then job search. Over time, reactions to the job search were similar to those found in Group A.

*Group C (Women II).* This group of six women were secondary wage earners who perceived a loss of status and some sadness. They also took a vacation period before initiating a job search.

*Group D (Immigrants II and III).* The majority of the 16 people in this group were from China or Japan. They began seeking work immediately upon job loss. Their job search strategies were ineffective for finding work in Canada and there was a steady decline in their emotional health due to the lack of success in finding work.

*Group E (Immigrants IV and V).* There were 12 participants in this group who

came from diverse ethnic backgrounds. They maintained the same level of persistence as Group D. However Group E was better able to handle rejections. They were able to maintain a sense of control and avoid the negative emotional slide. Financial support, social support, and strong religious beliefs were key factors in enabling this group to maintain a positive attitude.

*Group F (Youth I).* This group consisted of 21 men and women aged 25 and under who had little or no post secondary education. Feelings of boredom and lack of purpose were expressed, along with a lack of knowledge about how to look for work effectively and extremely low levels of persistence in job search activities.

Amundson and Borgen (1982) derived themes that were significant in precipitating either positive or negative shifts in emotions by:

- (a) looking for factors in common by comparing factors in each of the six groups,
- (b) ranking the factors in order (must have been mentioned by at least 20% of the 93 participants), and
- (c) the identification and separate discussion of peculiar factors (had to be mentioned by at least 20% of the people in a specific group).

### General Factors

This section contains the major factors that led to positive or negative emotional shifts across groups. Those factors associated with emotional shifts from positive to negative (including the number of participants out of 93 who mentioned each) are:

- (a) job rejections, 60;
- (b) financial pressures, 56;

- (c) unproductive contacts with the government employment agency (no jobs listed, poor reception by counselors and other staff members), 34;
- (d) an unknown or negative future, 31;
- (e) ineffective job search activities (interviews, telephone calls, applications), 31;
- (f) negative thinking (negative self-messages), 27; and
- (g) spouse or family problems, 26

(Amundson & Borgen, 1982).

Based on the data examined, Amundson and Borgen (1982) found that searching for a job was clearly stressful and factors like job rejections and contact with the government employment agencies reflected the increased level of stress associated with job search activities. Stress was not only associated with job search activities but also with the new financial pressures, family discord, the loss of self-confidence, and a growing fear of the future. Amundson and Borgen (1982) hypothesized that these factors worked together to create a downward spiral in which the person's world slowly disintegrated and he or she became less able to take advantage of any job opportunities that emerged.

The positive factors that allowed people to slow or reverse the downward trend in response to the negative pressures were:

- (a) support from family, 54;
- (b) support from friends, 38;
- (c) positive thinking (positive self-messages), 34;

- (d) career changes or plans for retraining, 34;
- (e) part-time or temporary work, 28;
- (f) job search support groups or vocational counselling, 25;
- (g) the initial job search and making job contacts, 23; and
- (h) physical activity, 20.

The authors found that positive factors emphasized the social dimension and there was a need for personal strength. Emotional support from family and friends tended to alleviate some of the negative stresses associated with being unemployed. Some participants gathered personal strength by thinking positively and giving themselves a steady supply of positive self-messages. Amundson and Borgen (1982) found that this positive thought process could extend into other areas and could take the form of rethinking a career path and taking seriously the task of making job contacts. By re-framing their concepts of self-worth and the job search process, some participants were able to respond more positively to stress than they did before.

### Specific Factors

Amundson and Borgen (1982) outlined some factors that were mentioned by at least 20% of the people in one of the six subgroups, but the overlap with the other groups was insufficient to have them mentioned as a general factor. These specific factors that influenced a shift from positive to negative emotions are (by group):

- (a) additional job loss, A and E;
- (b) feeling they were not contributing to society or family, B and C;
- (c) excessively engaging in unproductive activities (i.e., watching television,

drinking), B and F;

(d) running out of job search ideas and activities, D and E;

( e) pressure from friends to find a job quickly, D;

(f) lack of proficiency in using English, D; and

(g) having training that is not recognized by employers, E.

Amundson and Borgen (1982) noted that the meaning in a person's life that was evident in specific factors (b) and (d) was particularly true for women who were secondary wage earners and youths. Specific factors (d), (e), (f), and (g) represented perceived barriers to employment including a lack of information on conducting a job search in Canada, the lack of proficiency in using English, difficulty in obtaining recognition for training received outside of North America, and coping with pressures from friends to find a job quickly due to its importance in their cultural heritage.

Amundson and Borgen (1982) found that factors that caused negative shifts in emotions were different from those that encouraged positive emotional shifts. Among the predominant negative factors were job rejections, financial pressures, nonproductive contacts with government agencies, ineffective job search activities, and the length of the job search process. Once individuals reached the apathy phase of unemployment there was a tendency to eliminate job search activities that were the primary precipitators of stress. However, this phase is counterproductive to the goal of getting a job.

Amundson and Borgen (1982) described the factors that led to negative emotional shifts (financial pressures and job rejections) as being remedial factors because the factors caused pain by their presence but did not provide energy for problem solving by

their absence. Instead, participants were led into dispositions of personal helplessness, negative thinking, and movement away from meaningful job search activities. One wonders whether these are, in fact, remedial or more properly described as destructive.

Conversely, Amundson and Borgen (1982) identified factors that led to positive shifts in emotion (support from family and friends) as being developmental factors that promoted constructive career planning and job search activities. The overall impression of an unemployed person influenced by positive factors was that of someone who endured a painful experience more successfully than others by gaining access to personal and institutional support, by maintaining a sense of personal power and control, and by engaging in meaningful activities connected with the goal of reemployment.

The identification and subsequent examination of the destructive and developmental factors illuminated the importance of not only addressing the former, but also incorporating opportunities to sustain and enhance the factors promoting development while engaging in an intervention. Interventions should incorporate the factors listed as positive or developmental if people are to move beyond reducing pain into the positive areas of problem redefinition, awareness of personal power and growth, and constructive action leading to the goal of re-employment. Amundson and Borgen (1982) listed the following important points regarding effective interventions with unemployed people:

1. In either an individual or group setting, help unemployed people assess the positive and negative factors that affect them. This can provide the atmosphere of supportive understanding, promote the awareness and use of natural support

systems, and give both the client and the counselor a more accurate awareness of the unemployed person's situation.

2. In addition to the more supportive client-centered counsellor activities needed in the assessment phase, the intervention should teach the unemployed person to do cognitive re-framing of his or her situation to promote positive thinking.
3. Group intervention appears to be appropriate and evidence from this study suggest that in addition to teaching skills, giving support for the job search and rejection processes the group should include client-centered emotional support through specific cognitive and other re-framing activities. Interventions also need to address long-range career reorientation and planning as well as specific job search activities connected with short-term goals.
4. To avoid the withdrawal associated with the negative factors, interventions need to be ongoing in order to promote a continuing positive and supportive involvement with others through the period of emotional turmoil.
5. If unemployment rates continue to be high and interventions with people result in no reemployment, counselors and their clients may need to seek additional goals for the intervention. The goals could be modified to include finding short-term survival jobs and long-term, personally satisfying volunteer activities.

With regard to points two and three above, in reference to the cognitive re-framing, it is important to note that changes in one's frame of mind is not sufficient for change. Instead, one would use cognitive re-framing as a basis from which to build, for example, stronger self-esteem.

## SUMMARY

Throughout the process of conducting the literature review one question was considered, “What are the clear overall messages being presented in the literature?” The following general conclusions which reflect the uniqueness of the experience of unemployment were drawn from the literature:

1. All results supported the theory that it is important to differentiate among groups (e.g., immigrant/non-immigrant, youth etc.) when considering the experience of unemployment (Gurney & Taylor, 1981; Rump, 1983; and Warr, 1983).
2. The experience of unemployment is traumatic and is characterized by dramatic shifts in economic power, personal support, and self-esteem.
3. Generally speaking, participants in the studies experienced emotional and cognitive shifts from positive to negative which were influenced by financial pressures, job rejections, and stress associated with job loss and the job search.
4. Amundson and Borgen’s (1982) original model describing the experience of unemployment as being like an emotional roller coaster was generally supported by the reviewed studies. However, it should be noted that many of the participants also experienced unemployment as a “yo-yo” effect which was characterized by erratic, rapid shifts in emotions. This “yo-yo” effect diminished the participants’ self-confidence and their ability to control their emotions.
5. For many unemployed people, the downward slide began within the first three months, although some individuals maintained a positive attitude for six months.
6. It was found that the negative effects could be slowed or reversed if participants

received support from family members and friends, maintained positive thinking, planned for a career change or retraining, found part-time or temporary work, and attended a job search group. For those individuals in receipt of income assistance, it was also important that long term follow up and continued support was part of attending an employment group or engaging in individual employment/career counselling.

In the author's opinion, the methodology used to conduct the research presented both strengths and weaknesses. In a sense, the strength of using the phenomenological approach is also its weakness. The fact that the researchers did not impose their personal views regarding the experience of unemployment upon the participants created an open forum for open discussions. Participants were permitted to present their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences of being unemployed and, in Klein, Amundson, and Borgen's 1992 study, in receipt of income assistance.

Due to the need to conduct in depth explorations of the participants' experiences, the researchers may be limited with respect to the sample size that can be utilized, particularly in Klein, Amundson, and Borgen's (1992) study that focussed on people in receipt of income assistance. This factor could create a situation whereby the sample may not be representative. This project will attempt to address this limitations by using a larger sample size.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Selection of Methodology**

In considering research approaches for this study, a structured phone survey was used. The reason for this selection was:

- (a) the desire to use a larger sample size than reported in the literature (Klein, Amundson, & Borgen (1992) had 20 participants),
- (b) response rates are better using the telephone,
- (c) a sensitivity to potentially low literacy levels of participants,
- (d) the ability of both the participants and the researcher to ask clarifying questions, and
- (e) there was an opportunity for the researcher to develop a rapport with the participants.

The survey methodology is similar to that used by statistical agencies like Statistics Canada for the census. That is, an interviewer follows a very scripted (i.e., structured) survey and in so doing completes the survey with the participant. This approach is particularly useful when literacy is a concern.

#### **Ethics**

It was of primary concern that the research conducted in this thesis was carried out with “respect for the people who participated and with concern for their dignity and welfare” (Palys, 1997, p. 91). To this end, a number of ethical issues were addressed and monitored throughout the course of the study. They included maintaining anonymity,

freedom to decline participation, giving informed consent, and the disclosure of potential consequences related to participation in the study.

Maintaining the anonymity of the participants and the data collected was strictly adhered to at all times. Participant confidentiality was maintained by the use of subject numbers instead of names. Access to this information was restricted to the researcher and data confidentiality was maintained by having it stored in a double-locked area that was accessed only by the researcher.

Participants were informed in writing and at various times throughout the course of the study that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point. They were also assured that there would not be any reprisals or negative consequences for declining to participate in this research. Participants were made aware that any data collected pertaining to them would be destroyed immediately upon their withdrawal from the study.

Potential participants were provided, both in writing and over the telephone, with information regarding the purpose of the research, how it was to be conducted, and the potential impact on them for participating in the study. Participants were encouraged to make any inquiries they felt would aid in making their decision to either participate or not in the proposed study.

The researcher informed participants that there would not be any negative consequences as a result of participating within the study. Due to the precautions being taken to maintain confidentiality and the fact that the researcher was working independently of government institutions and agencies that would have a vested interest

in the results of the study, participants were not placed in a situation that could have been harmful to them.

## **METHOD**

### **Participant Selection**

There were three criteria used for the selection of participants. Individuals had to:

- (a) be in receipt of income assistance for 10 out of the last 12 months (at the time of collecting potential participants' names),
- (b) reside in the Prince George area (local calls), and
- (c) be listed in the Institutional Based Training (IBT) database being maintained in the College Directions department at the College of New Caledonia (CNC).

College Directions is contracted by Ministry of Advanced Education, Training, and Technology (MAETT) to deliver the IBT Project to the community through CNC. The service assists community members who are on income assistance to access education and provides career and educational counselling. As a recent employee of this department and a continuing employee of CNC, I am very familiar with the database and the clientele who access the College Directions service. Thus, it was relatively easy for me to seek access to potential participants through the database at CNC.

The process for selecting participants was as follows. From the IBT paper files at College Directions, the author:

- (1) gathered names, addresses, and phone numbers of potential participants who had a start date of income assistance at least 10 months prior to the time of the search.

- (2) Assigned subject numbers to each of the chosen names.
- (3) Sent out an initial contact letter that indicated a general time frame for subsequent phone contact that would request participation in and the completion of the survey.
- (4) Made a note of any returned letters and tried to make contact by phone along with the other potential participants.
- (5) Phoned potential participants a maximum of three times. (If I was unsuccessful in making contact they were removed from the list of potential participants).
- (6) Upon successful telephone contact, introduced myself, answered any questions, and sought consent to participate in the study. If consent was given I immediately conducted the survey. The telephone survey took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

### **Structured Survey**

The initial part of the survey consisted of a number of demographic questions that allowed me to develop a rapport with participants, but more importantly, provided me with information that assisted in the development of a profile, or a number of profiles, of the participants in this study. Following the demographic information, a series of questions were posed that required participants to reflect on their experience of unemployment and the factors that they have found or would find helpful or hindering to their success in gaining employment.

During the survey I posed a question and awaited a response. If none was forthcoming, the list of potential responses were read out to the participant. Responses were placed in explicit pre-coded response categories. The survey contained both open and closed questions in order to give participants opportunities to elaborate on areas they may have felt required more extensive explanations. Appendix A outlines the survey including the demographic questions, the survey questions and the rationale for each question.

## CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

Forty individuals were interviewed, of which 17 were males and 23 were females. There was no significant difference between the ages of the males and females (males, mean = 33.4 years, SD = 7.9; females, mean = 34.4 years, SD = 34.4,  $t(38) = 0.329$ ,  $p = 0.744$ ). Of the 40 respondents, 18 were of aboriginal descent including status, non-status, and Métis.

Respondents were placed into the following categories according to their highest levels of education: 55% ( $n = 22$ ) some secondary school, 25% ( $n = 10$ ) some college, 17.5% ( $n = 7$ ) high school graduation, and 2.5% ( $n = 1$ ) university graduation. Of the respondents with some secondary level education, 59% of these individuals completed grade 10 level course work and 41% completed some or all of grade 11 level course work.

When examining the percentage of life span the participants had spent on income assistance, it was found that the mean was 13.8% (SD = 12.0). The minimum time spent on income assistance was 2.04% and the maximum was 48.57% of their life. A t-test of the difference between genders for the percentage of life spent on income assistance was statistically non-significant ( $t(38) = 1.33$ ,  $p = 0.190$ ).

With respect to the marital status of the participants, 16 respondents were single, 7 were divorced, 4 were separated, and 1 individual was widowed. Four individuals were married and 8 were involved in common law relationships.

Of the forty respondents, 13 did not have any dependents and 27 had dependents ranging in age from birth to 18 years of age. The average number of dependents per

respondent was 1.15. The maximum number of dependents was 4 and the minimum number was zero.

The balance of the results section will be organized according to two broad research questions and several related specific questions. The broad questions are: (1) “What do people who are long-term income assistance recipients find helpful or hindering when seeking employment?” and (2) “What are the implications for counselling them (income assistance recipients)?”

**Broad Research Question 1: What do people who are long-term income assistance recipients find helpful or hindering when seeking employment?**

1a. “What would you find most helpful in trying to become fully employed?”

The response options for this question were: support from family, support from friends, maintain positive thinking, attend a group, counselling support, or other.

Respondents were permitted to choose more than one response item and the total number of responses was sixty-eight. The frequency of responses are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Helpful Factors for Becoming Employed

Response Item	N	%
Maintain positive thinking	13	19
Support from family	10	15
Counselling support	9	13
Support from friends	8	12
Other	16	38
Education	8	11.7
Job search	7	10.3
Resources	6	8.7
Attitude	3	4.4
Personal	2	2.9
Attending a group	2	3
Total	68	100

The 26 responses given in the “other” response item were categorized as follows: resources, education, job search support, personal, and attitude. Focussing on the “other” category, the frequency of responses were recorded in the following rank order: 31% education (e.g., high school diploma and industry training), 28% job search (e.g., ability to market self, be given a chance by an employer), 24% resources (e.g., access to transportation, affordable child care, job search resources, more opportunities afforded by MSDES and MHR), 10% attitude (e.g., increased motivation), and 7% personal (e.g., shoulder operation, support with son who has a disability). Note that these percentages are with reference to the “other” category.

Cross tabulations and chi-square analysis for the response options were conducted on gender, age, education, and marital status, separately. None of the t-tests were significant except for the t-test conducted on age comparing those who did and did not select the counselling support factor ( $t(38) = 2.82, p = .008$ ). There was a ten year age difference between participants who found counselling support helpful ( $M = 41.0, SD = 6.5$ ) and those who did not identify it as such ( $M = 31.9, SD = 8.9$ ).

Overall, it was found that respondents believed that maintaining positive thinking, receiving support from family members and receiving counselling support would be most helpful when seeking employment. It was also found that older respondents indicated that counselling support would be helpful more often than younger respondents.

1b. “What has been preventing you from getting employed?”

The response options for this question were: transportation, education, lack of support from family/friends, don’t know what you want to do, childcare, money, experience, economy, disability, ethnic minority, and other. Factors that participants identified as preventing them from becoming employed are outlined in Table 5.

Twenty-five percent ( $N = 24$ ) of the respondents also chose “other” as a response either singularly or in conjunction with other responses. Within the “other” category, the responses were grouped into five categories and put into rank order according to selection by respondents. The results are as follows: 33% ( $n = 8$ ) attitude (e.g., laziness, motivation), 21% ( $n = 5$ ) lifestyle (e.g., choosing not to work in favour of being a full time mom), 21% ( $n = 5$ ) need for training, 13% ( $n = 3$ ) criminal record, and 13% ( $n = 3$ ) age/health related.

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Table 5

Factors that Prevent Employment

Response Item	N	%
Poor economy	20	28.2
Lack of support (family/friends)	10	14.1
Education	9	12.7
Money	7	9.9
Lack of experience	7	9.9
Disability	6	8.5
Don't know what I want to do	6	8.5
Other	24	25.4
Attitude	8	8.4
Lifestyle	5	5.3
Training	5	5.3
Criminal Record	3	3.2
Age/health	3	3.2
Transportation	2	2.8
Reasonable child care	2	2.8
Ethnic minority	2	2.8
Total	71	100

This study found that the highest percentage of respondents felt that the poor economy was a limiting factor in securing employment. The lowest percentage of responses related to factors preventing employment included: a lack of transportation, a lack of affordable childcare, and being an ethnic minority.

1c. “What is your biggest barrier to becoming employed?”

The response options for this question were: transportation, childcare, experience,

education, money, economy, lack of support from family/friends, disability, don't know what you want to do, ethnic minority, and other. Factors that participants identified as being the biggest barrier to becoming employed are listed in rank order in Table 6.

Table 6

Biggest Barriers to Acquiring Employment

Response Item	N	%
Lack of education	14	35
Other	114	27.51
Transportation		
Lack of experience	3	7.5
Disability	3	7.5
Child care	2	5
Economy	2	5
Money	1	2.5
Lack of support from family/friends	0	0
Ethnic minority	0	0
Don't know what to do	0	0
Total	40	100

For those who chose lack of education as being the biggest barrier to securing employment, 57% of respondents had some level of secondary education. Those who chose "other" as being the biggest barrier to gaining employment indicated issues such as: self-esteem, age, laziness, attending school full time, health, and having a criminal record.

Cross tabulations with level of education and age did not show any significant effects. A chi square test was not conducted because there were too many cells with either one or zero entries, which made the test inappropriate.

A self-perceived lack of education was identified as the biggest barrier for securing employment. Low self-esteem was also found to be a significant concern for the respondents. By having a low level of education and struggling with self-esteem issues respondents found it very difficult to perform the job search activities required in order to successfully secure employment.

1d. “When do you think job search support and career counselling should be provided to people who receive income assistance?”

The response options for this question were: immediately, 1-3 months, 4-7 months, 8-10 months, and 11 months or more. Table 7 outlines the time frames participants had identified.

The 28 respondents who chose “immediately” believed that support should be offered before individuals lose hope and motivation. Lack of self-confidence, training, and resource knowledge were cited as being negative factors that should be resolved as soon as an individual enters the social service system. The 10 respondents who chose “1-3 months” felt, in general, that individuals need a bit of time to regroup or, in other words, develop a plan for securing employment which may include retraining, relocating, or searching for a new career.

Table 7

Time Frames Desired for Receiving Job Search Support and Career Counselling

Response Item	N	%
Immediately	28	70
1 - 3 months	10	25
4 - 7 months	2	5
8 - 10 months	0	0
11 months or more	0	0
Total	40	100

Eighty-two percent of the surveyed males, versus 70% of the females, believed that job search support and career counselling should begin “immediately.” Eighteen percent of the males and 30% of the females felt support is essential after “1 - 3 months” of receiving income assistance. The majority of the female respondents cited the birth of a child or illness as being the reason for the desired delay in support. Further testing indicated that the relationship between the number of years respondents had spent on income assistance and the importance of receiving job search support and career counselling was not statistically significant.

The study found that respondents would like to have job search support and career counselling available to them immediately after they began to receive income assistance. All of the respondents said that, while waiting for assistance as regulated by the current system, there was a significant decline in self-esteem, motivation, and hope.

1e. “What type of training and education do you think would help you get a job?”

The response options for this question were: high school graduation, industry training, job search support, on-the-job training, certificate or diplomas, university degree, and other. Table 8 outlines the types of training and education respondents believed would assist them in securing employment in rank order.

Table 8

Education and Training

Response Item	N	%
Certificate or diplomas	28	30
High school graduation	20	21
On-the-job training	18	19
Industry training	15	16
University degree	8	8
Job search support	3	3
Other	3	3
Total	95	100

Post-secondary certificates and diplomas were cited as being most important because of high demand from employers for “pieces of paper” particularly in the trades (e.g., carpentry, auto mechanics) and mid-range technical fields (e.g., computer programmer or analysts). Respondents indicated that their poor financial situations made it possible to only access training that would allow for a fairly quick return to the workforce. Eighty-two percent of males compared to 61% of females chose this

response. Twenty-five percent of the respondents did have some college education but none had received trade or technical training.

Fifty-three percent of females and 47% of males believed that high school graduation would assist them in getting a job. Sixty-five percent of the respondents did not graduate from high school but the majority had attended secondary school through grade 10. Only 20% of respondents had graduated from high school.

Nearly equal percentages of males (42%) and females (48%) chose on-the-job training as being a helpful tool for securing employment. Twenty-two percent of respondents were high school graduates and 33% had some college education.

Industry training such as First Aid, log scaling and grading, and basic security training were cited as being helpful in finding work. Thirty-five percent of males and 39% of females chose this response option. Sixty percent of respondents had some high school education, 7% were high school graduates, and 27% had attended college.

Twenty-six percent of females and 12% of males chose having a university degree as being helpful in securing work. Generally speaking, the females who chose this response option wanted to become either Social Workers or Nurses, both fields that are not chosen by men as often. Of the respondents who chose this response option, 50% did not complete high school, 25% were high school graduates and 25% had some college education. All respondents indicated that they were either in the planning process or had already begun to attend school in order to achieve a university degree.

Of the three respondents who chose the response option “other,” two cited gaining more experience and 1 individual stated having a driver’s license as being helpful in order to gain employment.

The results indicated that the highest percentage of respondents felt post-secondary certificates and diplomas were the most helpful in terms of securing employment. A higher percentage of males than females felt that post-secondary education was important. The study also revealed that the respondents who felt that way generally had an education level with less than high school graduation. It was also found that more males felt post-secondary certificates/diplomas and on-the-job training would be helpful in securing employment. More females believed that having a university degree would be important and all of them had plans to attend or were attending school at the time of the survey.

**Broad Research Question 2: In light of this research, what are the implications for counselling individuals who are long-term income assistance recipients?**

2a. “Since becoming unemployed how would you describe changes, if any, in your overall thoughts and feelings?”

The response options for this question were: positive to negative, negative to positive, no change, and fluctuates between positive and negative. Table 9 lists the frequency of responses in rank order.

Table 9

Changes in Thoughts and Feelings

Response Item	N	%
Positive to negative	26	65
Fluctuating	7	17.5
No change	4	10
Negative to positive	3	7.5
Total	40	100

The response option “positive to negative” reflects the respondents’ perceptions that there was a downward trend towards more negative feelings and thoughts. These include feelings of helplessness, low motivation, anger, and despair. Thirty-five percent ( $n = 9$ ) of males and 65% ( $n = 17$ ) of females endorsed this question.

The response option “negative to positive” reflects the respondents’ perceptions that there was an increase in positive feelings and thoughts. Respondents indicated that they had more money for survival and the opportunity to go to school once they began to receive income assistance. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents who chose this option were females who were single parents with small children. Under the current income assistance system those parents with children under the age of seven years do have the option to attend school.

Of the respondents who chose “no change,” 75% ( $n = 3$ ) were males. These individuals indicated that they were making roughly the same amount on income assistance as they did while working. This was interpreted as meaning these individuals

were the working poor who were either not benefited or harmed by being connected to the income assistance system.

The response option that stated “fluctuates between positive and negative” was meant to reflect the feelings and thoughts of those respondents who went through phases in which they felt hope and confidence overshadowed at other periods of time by despair, anger, and hopelessness. Fifty-seven percent of these respondents were males and 43% were females. Seventy-one percent of these respondents also had dependents between the ages of seven and eighteen years.

This study found the majority of respondents felt there was a negative change in their thoughts and feelings since becoming unemployed. A significantly higher number of females identified a change in thoughts and emotions from being positive to being negative. The majority of respondents who identified the negative change were single parents with small children.

2b. “If there has been a change, how would you describe these shifts in emotion as being?”

This question was used to elaborate on the previous question and determine if emotional shifts were severe, moderate, or low in intensity. The response options were: like a roller coaster, like a yo-yo, and flat. The frequency of responses to this question were, in rank order: 47.5% (n = 19) indicated like a roller coaster, 30% (n = 12) flat, and 22.5% (n = 9) like a yo-yo.

The roller coaster effect was described as a phenomena in which respondents would make gradual positive and negative emotional shifts between feelings such as

anger, anxiety, determination, hope, and loneliness. Of the respondents who chose this option, 42% were males and 58% were females. Forty-two percent of respondents did not have any children, 26% had children under the age of seven years, and 32% had children between the age of eight and eighteen years. Fifty-eight percent of respondents had only some secondary education.

The “flat” response option was used to describe little change in emotions. The respondent generally felt sad or despondent. Two respondents indicated that they “take life as it comes, so their financial situation did not impact them emotionally.” As a result they felt generally happy and positive. Fifty-eight percent of these respondents were male and 42% were female. Forty-two percent of the individuals did not have children and 42% had children under the age of seven years.

The “yo-yo” response option was used to describe sudden, rapid shifts in emotion such as feeling fine to being furious, or bursting into tears without warning. Respondents who chose this option felt they had little or no control over their emotions. Twenty-two percent of the respondents were male and 78% were female. All of these individuals had children between the ages of newborn to eighteen years. Fifty-six percent of the respondents had some secondary and 22% had graduated from high school.

The results indicated that the majority of respondents described the changes in thoughts and emotions as being much like a roller coaster. Gradual positive and negative emotional shifts were made with a downward trend being most prevalent. Individuals who chose this response option were generally females, did not have any children, and possessed some secondary education.

2c. “On a scale from 1 to 5, 5 meaning you are very good at it and 1 meaning you are very poor at it, how good are you at doing the following job search activities?”

The job search activities that the respondents were to rate themselves on included: writing a resume, knowing how to search for employment, contacting employers, marketing your skills and abilities, doing an interview, doing labor market research, and knowing what type of job you want to do. Table 10 below outlines the frequency of responses for each job search activity listed in the survey.

Table 10

Frequency of Responses for Self-rating Scale on Job Search Activities

Title	PERCENTAGE CHOSEN					MEAN	S
	very poor 1	2	3	4	very good 5		
Writing resume	12.5	20	30	17.5	20	3.13	1.
Knowing how to search for jobs	2.5	10	30	32.5	25	3.68	1.0
Contacting employers	7.5	20	12.5	35	25	3.5	1.2
Marketing skills & abilities	5	17.5	32.5	27.5	17.5	3.35	1.1
Doing an interview	5	17.5	22.5	35	20	3.48	1.1
Doing labour market research	22.5	22.5	20	27.5	7.5	2.75	1.
Knowing type of job wanted	2.5	5	12.5	22.5	57.5	4.28	1.0

As is evidenced by Table 10, respondents felt that they were quite poor at doing labour market research. Sixty-five percent of the respondents believed that their ability to conduct labour market research was at a mean of 2.75. Writing a resume was also considered to be a skill that was rated “poor” or “very poor” by 62.5% of the respondents.

As Table 10 also shows, the mean score for “knowing what type of job I want” was 4.28 out of a possible 5. Eighty percent of respondents rated themselves as good to very good on this item. The respondents also identified the types of jobs that they were trying to secure including Auto-mechanic, Teacher, Social Worker, and Disc Jockey.

In summary, respondents rated themselves lowest on conducting labour market research ( $M = 2.75$ ) and highest on knowing what type of job they wanted ( $M = 4.28$ ). The mean scores for the remaining job search activities ranged from 3.13 to 3.68. These results may reflect the perception of respondents that their abilities to conduct job search activities is, on average alright, but they do not possess a tremendous amount of confidence in participating in these activities.

2d. “For your poorest skill, why do you think you are poor at it?”

This was an open ended question designed to define the most prominent problem areas for this population in relation to the previously discussed job search activities. The intent was to utilize this information to develop new or reaffirm current counselling approaches when working with this client group. The responses were categorized into four distinct groups which included: poor communication skills, don't do it, lack of knowledge and/or skills, and low self-confidence. A frequency of responses was then calculated and reported in percentages for the 40 responses to this question. The frequency of responses were, in rank order: 52.5% ( $n = 21$ ) lack of knowledge and/or skills, 22.5% ( $n = 9$ ) low self-confidence, 17.5% ( $n = 7$ ) don't do it, and 5% ( $n = 2$ ) poor communication skills.

Respondents indicated that job search activities such as conducting labour market research and writing a resume were areas in which they either had never had practice or did not have any idea as to how to go about each activity. For those individuals who indicated they had low self-confidence, words such as being shy, uncomfortable, nervous, or having low self-esteem were commonly used to describe themselves. Responses that

were placed into the “don’t do it” category included those in which individuals indicated they had the knowledge and skills for the job search activities but did not choose to perform the activities. Lack of motivation or a dislike for the activity were cited as reasons for not following through on specified job search activities. The “poor communication skills” category included deficits in both written and oral skills.

The results indicated that respondents believed a lack of knowledge and/or skills led to their poor performances when conducting job search activities. Thus, further training and opportunities to practice the required skills was suggested by the respondents. It was also found that low self-confidence, lack of motivation, and a dislike for job search activities were the main contributing factors for why, even with the knowledge and skills, respondents did not carry out job search activities.

2e. “For your best skill, why do you think you are good at it?”

This was an open ended question designed to define the most prominent areas of self-perceived strength for this population in relation to the previously discussed job search activities. The intent was to utilize this information to develop or reaffirm current counselling approaches when working with this client group. The responses were categorized into six distinct groups which included: good communication skills, confidence, training/education, good knowledge and/or skills, experience in the field, and knowing the job I want . A frequency of responses was then calculated and reported in percentages for the 48 responses to this question. The frequency of responses were, in rank order: 22.9% (n = 11) knowing the type of job I want, 20.8% (n = 10) experience in the field, 20.8% ( n = 10) good knowledge and/or skills, 16.7% (n = 8) good

communication skills, 12.5% (n = 6) training/education, and 6.3% (n = 3) confidence.

Responses that were categorized into “knowing what type of job I want” were occupations the respondents identified as being desirable for them. The occupations cited included: Disc jockey, Sheriff, Long Term Care Aid, Social Worker, Auto-mechanic, Pharmacy Technician, and Teacher. Except for the Disc Jockey, all other types of occupations required post-secondary education with the minimum level of education being a one year certificate to a maximum of five years.

For those individuals who indicated that they had experience in their field of choice it was found they consistently were also seeking further education that would formally qualify them to continue in the occupation for which they had experience. Respondents indicated they had experience in the following fields: computer repair, social work, and auto-mechanics. Other respondents who chose “experience in the field” cited experiences related to job search activities such as resume development, labour market research, and participating in interviews.

When respondents described themselves as having good skills and/or knowledge they were generally referring to the development of a resume and knowledge or resources available to assist in the job search process. These resources included institutions that offered job search skills workshops, academic upgrading, and post-secondary programming.

Good communication skills were cited when individuals believed that they were comfortable talking to others in order to ask questions and network with employers. These respondents found it easy to talk to other people and felt they were able to sell

themselves in a positive manner. A number of these individuals believed they had been successful in the work force due to their ability to convince an employer they should be hired on the spot. Some of these respondents had never found the need to hand in a resume or fill out an application form for a job.

It was found that respondents who believed that training and education was a strength had either recently completed a job search training course or were currently attending some type of academic programme (e.g., attending college towards a degree in teaching and social work). For those who were not currently attending a training or education program, they were in the planning process with the hope of beginning school within the next year.

Respondents who cited having confidence as being their best skill (actually this is a personal characteristic and not a skill, per se), believed that they were the type of individual who made a decision about what they wanted and then pursued the goal. They also reflected that they knew confidence was a strength because of the positive feedback received from other individuals including employers and coworkers.

The results indicated that respondents felt they were good at job search activities because they knew what types of jobs they wanted, had experience in the field, and maintained good knowledge and/or skills. The education requirement for the types of jobs listed by respondents required a minimum one year certificate and it was found that respondents were seeking to upgrade their level of education in order to become formally qualified for the job in which they had experience.

- 2f. A. “Describe the amount of control you believe you have over your employment situation.” B. “Has this always been the case?” C. “How much control do you think you have over the other areas in your life?” D. “Can you describe what areas you are thinking of?”

This was a four part question that was intended to provide information to be used as points of reference when discussing counselling implications. The premise was, if individuals feel they have a certain degree of control over their situation, they will be better able to handle it in an effective and positive manner. Parts A, B, and C were questions with structured responses. Part D was open ended so that it allowed respondents to freely identify answers specific to their own situation.

In part A, the respondent was asked to describe the amount of control they believed they had over their employment situation. The four response options were: none, very little, some, and total. Part B, which asked if the respondents' level of control had always been as it currently was, had the following response options: no, sometimes, and yes. Part C asked about the degree of control the respondents felt they had over other areas in their lives. It had the following four response options: none, very little, some, and total. Part D asked respondents to describe the areas of their lives to which they were referring when they responded to Part C of the question. The responses for this section were categorized into the following eight areas: behaviour/thoughts/emotions, relationships, daily activities, leisure, school, location of residence, health, and finances. Table 11 outlines the frequency of responses for parts A, B, C, and D.

Table 11

Frequency of Responses Related to Personal Control Over Employment Situations

<u>Response Item</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Part A - Over employment		
Some	17	42.5
Very little	10	25
Total	9	22.5
None	4	10
Total	40	100
Part B - Always this way		
No	16	40
Yes	15	37.5
Sometimes	9	22.5
Total	40	100
Part C - Other areas		
Some	18	45
Total	14	35
Very little	7	17.5
None	1	2.5
Total	40	100
Part D - Describe areas		
Relationships	21	33.9
Daily activities	9	14.5
Behaviour/thoughts	8	12.9
Leisure	7	11.3
School	7	11.3
Health	4	6.5
Location of residence	3	4.8
Finances	3	4.8
Total	62	100

The most frequently listed area in which respondents felt they had control was within relationships. These relationships most often involved children and significant others such as spouses or girlfriends/boyfriends. Respondents also stated that they had total control over whether or not they chose to develop a personal relationship with another individual. They had little control, however, when it came to engaging in a relationship forced by financial need (e.g., individuals who were connected to support services such as the Ministry of Human Resources).

Daily activities such as grocery shopping, cleaning the house, making appointments with professionals, and doing laundry were cited as areas in which the respondents had total control. Other activities such as leisure and attending school were reported as areas in which the respondents generally had some control, except for barriers such as finances and contingencies placed on them by the Ministry of Human Resources. Some respondents indicated that they would circumvent some barriers if they felt there was a greater likelihood of getting what they wanted by doing so.

The individuals who chose “behaviours/thoughts/emotions” as an area they were considering when answering Part C felt strongly that they had total control over this area. They also felt that their behaviours/thoughts/emotions were impacted by the fact that they were unemployed and receiving income assistance. So, although they had total control over how these behaviours/thoughts/emotions were experienced and demonstrated, the respondents felt that much of the negativity in their lives was due to being financially destitute and unable to secure employment. These individuals also indicated that they felt devalued and humiliated by being tied to the income assistance system.

Of the three remaining categories which included health, location of residence, and finances, respondents felt that they had some control but expressed frustration at not being in total control due to financial struggles exacerbated by the lack of employment.

As indicated by the results, respondents generally felt they had some control over their employment situations, which may or may not have always been the case for them. Respondents also felt they had some control over other areas in their lives. The most often considered aspect was relationships. These relationships included that with their spouses, their children, and their friends.

2g. “What is your primary goal for this year?”

The response options for this question were: employment, school, have a child, get married, get off income assistance, health, and other. Of the forty respondents, 28 chose only one primary goal and 12 chose two primary goals for the year. Table 12 presents the frequency of responses for the two sets of data.

Table 12

Primary Goals for Upcoming Year

Response Item	Primary A		Primary B	
	N	%	N	%
Employment	14	35	0	0
Attend school	19	47.5	8	66.7
Have a child	0	0	0	0
Get married	0	0	0	0
Get off IA	3	7.5	1	8.3
Health	0	0	1	8.3
Other	4	10	2	16.7
Total	40	100	12	100

For those respondents who chose one primary goal, 47% of males and 26% of females stated that securing employment was most important to them. Twenty-nine percent of males and 61% of females chose going to school as their primary goal for the year. The respondents who chose two goals had the following results according to gender: 80% of males and 57% of females chose “going to school”; 14% of females and no males chose “getting off of income assistance”; 20% of males and no females chose “health”; and 29% of females and no males chose “other”.

A cross tabulation conducted between the respondents’ levels of education and their primary goals revealed that those individuals with some high school education were the most interested in attending school as either their first or second primary goal. Forty-two percent ( $n = 8$ ) of the respondents who chose attending school as the only goal for the year had some high school education. For those respondents who chose attending school as their second primary goal, 75% ( $n = 6$ ) had some high school education.

The results clearly indicated that attaining a higher level of education was the number one goal for the respondents. For those individuals who chose employment as the primary goal, they also indicated that attending school would be occurring simultaneously. It was found that the number of females was double the number of males who indicated that attending school was the primary goal for the upcoming year.

- 2h. “Describe the type of counselling you would find most helpful while you are trying to secure employment.”

The response options for this item were personal, educational, and career counselling. Each type of counselling was accompanied with a brief definition in order to ensure all respondents had the same perception of the listed counselling types. The definitions were as follows:

- A. Personal - addresses issues such as relationships, stress, and health,
- B. Educational - program planning, upgrading, course selection, and funding, and
- C. Career - interest inventories, skill assessment, job training, and job search.

Sixty-seven and a one-half percent of the respondents chose only one of the three counselling categories, but 32.5% chose multiple categories which may have included two or three counselling types. Table 13 presents the frequency of responses for each category and the various combinations that were chosen by respondents.

The results indicated that there was an almost even split between the number of respondents who chose just personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling, and a combination of the three types of counselling. These choices were made dependent on the individual's current circumstance, emotional status, and past experiences with counselling. These results lead to the conclusion that there is no single type of counselling that is better or worse, only that the type of counselling must fit the self-perceived needs of the client.

Table 13

Frequency of Responses for Counselling Types Found to be Most Helpful.

Counselling Type	Frequency	Percentage
Personal	9	22.5
Educational	9	22.5
Career	8	20
Personal + Educational	2	5
Personal + Career	2	5
Educational + Career	1	2.5
Personal + Educ. + Career	9	22.5
Total	40	100

2i. “How has your personal life been affected by being unemployed and receiving income assistance?”

The response options for this question were: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, poor self-esteem, relationship problems, health, financial difficulties, and other. Respondents were permitted to choose any items that they felt were appropriate, resulting in 94 responses recorded. Table 14 outlines the frequency of responses to the questioned posed regarding the effects on the respondents' personal lives by being unemployed and receiving income assistance. The “other” response item had 19 respondents and was categorized into the following groups and percentages: 63% (n = 12) negative emotions, 16% (n = 3) no change, 10.5% (n = 2) increased stress, and 10.5% (n = 2) being on income assistance has been helpful.

Cross tabulations between the response items and gender, education levels, and aboriginal status were also conducted. Table 15 presents the results of the cross tabulation between gender and the response items. Table 16 outlines the results of the cross tabulation between the level of education of the respondents and the response items. Table 17 presents the results of the cross tabulation between aboriginal status and the response items.

Table 14

Frequency of Responses for Effects of Being Unemployed and Receiving Income

Assistance

<u>Response Item</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Financial difficulties	26	27.6
Poor self-esteem	19	20.2
Other	19	20.2
Relationship difficulties	14	14.9
Health	8	8.5
Alcohol abuse	4	4.3
Drug abuse	4	4.3
Total	94	100

Table 15

Cross tabulation for Gender and Response Items

Item	Gender		Gender	
	Male N=17	%	Female N=23	%
Drug abuse	2	12	2	9
Alcohol abuse	2	12	2	9
Poor self-esteem	9	53	10	44
Relationship	5	29	9	39
Health	2	12	6	26
Financial issues	9	53	17	74

As the results in Table 15 indicate, 53% of males and 74% of females chose financial difficulties as being most affected by being unemployed and receiving income assistance. Poor self-esteem was also cited as being a side-effect of being unemployed and receiving income assistance by 53% of males and 44% of females. Similarly, the least chosen responses by both genders included drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and health issues. Females (26%) reported an impact on health double the number of the males (12%).

Table 16 outlines the results of the cross tabulation between the education levels of respondents and the affects of being unemployed and receiving income assistance has had on their personal lives. As shown by the results in Table 16, all three groups identified having financial difficulties and poor self-esteem as having the greatest impact on their personal lives. Respondents with some high school or some college education

identified “financial difficulties” as having the most effect on their personal lives.

Respondents with high school graduation identified having “poor self-esteem” as having the greatest effect on their lives. Fifty percent ( $n = 11$ ) of the individuals who were placed in the “secondary” category identified issues with relationships as being the second most prevalent affect within their personal lives.

Table 16 indicates that respondents felt that abuse of alcohol had the least impact on their lives. Respondents within the “high school graduate” and “college” categories did not identify drug abuse as being an issue but 22% ( $n = 3$ ) of respondents from the “secondary” category indicated that drug abuse did have an impact on their personal lives.

Table 16  
Cross tabulation for Level of Education and Response Items

	N = 22		N = 7		N = 10	
Response Item	Secondary	%	High school grad	%	College	%
Drug abuse	4	22	0	0	0	0
Alcohol abuse	3	14	0	0	1	10
Poor self-esteem	8	36	5	71	6	60
Relationship	11	50	1	14	2	20
Health	4	18	1	14	3	30
Financial issues	14	64	4	57	8	80

Table 17 outlines the results of the cross tabulation conducted between aboriginal status and the response items. These results indicate the aboriginal respondents chose

response items that were similar to those of the other survey respondents. Sixty-one percent of the aboriginal respondents felt that financial hardship was most prevalent in their lives, in addition, 56% of aboriginal respondents believed their self-esteem had been affected by being unemployed and receiving income assistance.

Table 17

Cross tabulation between Aboriginal Status and Response Items

	Aboriginal Status	
Response Item	Selected N = 18	Percentage
Drug abuse	4	10
Alcohol abuse	2	11
Poor self-esteem	10	56
Relationship	7	39
Health	5	28
Financial issues	11	61

Two final cross tabulations were conducted in order to examine the relationship between any changes that may have occurred in the respondents' thoughts and feelings and how the respondents' described these shifts in emotion since becoming unemployed and in receipt of income assistance. Table 18 presents the results of the cross tabulation between the changes in the respondents' thoughts or feelings and the response items. Table 19 outlines the results of the cross tabulation between the respondents' descriptions of the shifts in emotion and the response items.

Table 18

Cross tabulation for Changes in Thoughts and Feelings

Item	Positive to negative N = 26	Negative to positive N = 3	No change N = 4	Fluctuating N = 7	Total
Drug abuse	3 11.5%	0	0	1 14.3%	4
Alcohol abuse	2 7.7%	1 33.3%	1 25.0%	0	4
Poor self-esteem	14 53.8%	2 66.7%	0	3 42.9%	19
Relationships	10 38.5%	1 33.3%	2 50.0%	1 14.3%	14
Health	6 23.1%	0	0	2 28.6%	8
Financial problems	18 69.2%	0	2 50.0%	6 85.7%	26

As Table 18 indicates, except for those respondents who felt there were positive changes since becoming unemployed and receiving income assistance, respondents in the other three change categories felt financial difficulties and poor self-esteem were the primary ways in which their lives had been affected. These results coincide with the cross tabulations between the response items and gender, levels of education, and aboriginal status.

The results also indicated that the least influence on the respondents' lives for all four "change" categories were drug and alcohol abuse. Although it is difficult to determine whether or not respondents were willing to disclose drug and/or alcohol abuse, these findings oppose a stereotype sometimes applied to those individuals who are either

unemployed or receiving income assistance, or both. The respondents do not perceive themselves as having difficulties with the consumption of alcohol or drug usage partially due to the fact that they do not have any money to spend on it. Basic survival takes precedence over luxuries such as drinking alcohol or maintaining expensive drug habits. Additionally, respondents who have children stated that they used whatever money they had to feed and clothe their children.

As Table 19 indicates, the primary effect of being unemployed and receiving income assistance remained to be financial difficulties regardless of which “shift of emotions” category the respondents have chosen. The second major effect identified by the respondents within the “roller coaster” and “flat” categories was poor self-esteem. This was consistent with the other cross tabulations previously outlined. However, the “yo-yo” category respondents maintained that relationship difficulties were more prevalent. Since the sample size was so small, there were not any significant statistical differences found between the three categories.

Table 19

Cross tabulation for Shifts in Emotions

Item	Roller coaster N = 19	Yo-yo N = 9	Flat N = 12
Drug abuse	<sup>3</sup> 15.8%	0	<sup>1</sup> 8.3%
Alcohol abuse	<sup>3</sup> 15.8%	0	<sup>1</sup> 8.3%
Poor self-esteem	<sup>12</sup> 63.2%	<sup>4</sup> 44.4%	<sup>3</sup> 25.0%
Relationships	<sup>6</sup> 31.6%	<sup>5</sup> 55.6%	<sup>3</sup> 25.0%
Health	<sup>3</sup> 15.8%	<sup>4</sup> 44.4%	<sup>1</sup> 8.3%
Financial problems	<sup>14</sup> 73.7%	<sup>6</sup> 66.7%	<sup>6</sup> 50.0%

A number of statements can be made regarding the results in this section. In general, all of the results indicated that experiencing financial difficulties and struggling with poor self-esteem were the major problems of being unemployed and in receipt of long-term income assistance. More specifically, it was found that between genders, levels of education, aboriginal status, and changes in thoughts and feelings, the most common affects were financial difficulties and poor self-esteem. Exceptions to these findings included those respondents who just had some secondary level of education and those respondents who had identified the “yo-yo” category when describing their shifts in emotions. These two groups identified having relationship difficulties as being the second major result of being unemployed and in receipt of income assistance.

2j. “If you went to see a counsellor, what would you expect him or her to do?”

This open ended question was designed to gather information regarding the respondents’ perceptions of the roles of the counsellor. The 102 responses were categorized into 5 areas that are listed in the following rank order: 41% (n = 42) supportive, 20% (n = 20) respectful, 17% (n = 17) provide direction and guidance, 12% (n = 12) knowledgeable, and 11% (n = 11) good listener.

Respondents identified items such as being encouraging, friendly, kind, and providing positive feedback as being elements of a counsellor who was supportive. The responses that were placed into the “respectful” category included statements such as: “treat me like a person and not a number,” “don’t treat me like I’m defrauding the system,” “honesty,” and “treat me with dignity.” Respondents who expected a counsellor to provide them with direction and guidance identified the following items for

consideration: help to explore career and educational options, give suggestions for good resumes and cover letters, and give directions on how to access community resources.

For those respondents whose responses were placed in the “knowledgeable” category, they expected counsellors to be knowledgeable about resources regarding job search strategies, education options, and how to meet the Ministry of Human Resources expectations. The “good listener” category included the expectations a counsellor would listen to a client’s story without bias and be empathetic to his/her situation. Sometimes respondents would identify their experiences with other counsellors which always included either Social Workers or Financial Assistance Workers. The most common statements regarding this group of service providers involved around not being afforded basic respect or support.

The study has found that respondents expect counsellors, including Ministry personnel such as Financial Assistance Workers and Social Workers, to be first and foremost, supportive. Supportive was a term used to accompany behaviours that included active listening, compassion, and honesty. Respondents wished to be treated as human beings who are trying to make adjustments in their personal lives and careers. They adamantly challenged the idea that they were trying to stay on income assistance instead of going to work. “We don’t receive enough money to survive as it is!”

## **CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter contains a discussion of implications of the research findings and recommendations for further research. The information will be presented within the context of other studies that have been conducted on the impacts of being unemployed. Klein, Amundson, & Borgen's (1992) study will be the primary context for the discussion relating to individuals who are not only unemployed but also receiving income assistance.

### **Discussion**

Klein, Amundson, and Borgen's (1992) study using participants who were receiving income assistance found that, for the majority of respondents, there was not any evidence of an "emotional roller coaster" as described in their earlier studies. This study does not support Klein et al.'s (1992) findings. Conversely, it has found that there is strong evidence of an "emotional roller coaster" as described by Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987), which demonstrated the phenomena of respondents gradual positive and negative emotional shifts. Respondents for this study almost matched the mean age and education level of Klein et al.'s (1992) study. However they were dissimilar in the fact that they were not participating in any formal job find program at the time the survey was conducted and the participants were from the Prince George area.

The participants in this study do experience the swings of emotion categorized as an "emotional roller coaster" as reported by Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987) even though the respondents are not of the same subgroup. The "yo-yo" effect findings are also supported by this study and found to be consistent with the findings of Borgen and Amundson (1984, 1987) showing that respondents had little control over their emotions.

It should be emphasized that the majority of these respondents are females who indicated they are struggling with relationships and the frustration of trying over and over to find work. These respondents report that a lack of education and support are the key factors in the rapid shifts of emotions.

This study does support Klein et al.'s (1992) findings that a "flat" experience of unemployment is described by some individuals. It is found to be the second most prevalent response within this study and is generally reported by respondents who state that there has been little emotional change since becoming unemployed and receiving income assistance. Such participants feel generally sad or despondent and exhibit behaviours consistent with Peterson, Seligman, and Vaillant's (1988) findings that after extended periods of time of unemployment and sustained unproductive job search people experience a loss of personal power and develop pervasive feelings of helplessness.

A number of studies (Amundson and Borgen, 1987, 1988; Borgen and Amundson, 1987; Klein, Amundson, and Borgen, 1992) reported that the respondents' experiences of being unemployed and receiving income assistance were negative and appeared to be long-term and chronic in nature. This study found an extremely high percentage of respondents feel that their overall thoughts and feelings experienced a downward trend from being positive to negative.

Respondents state that financial difficulties have the most negative affect on their lives since the time they became unemployed and began to receive income assistance. Poor self-esteem and the increase in negative emotions also have had a significant impact on their lives. These effects perpetuate the downward cycle of emotions and negatively

affect the respondents' abilities to take positive action with respect to seeking employment and successfully attaining a position.

The consequences for individuals who have had to struggle with these types of negative impacts include the need to have fairly long-term interventions and supports put into place beyond what just being employed can do for an individual. The long-term effects of despair, low self-esteem, and helplessness create the need for support that entails addressing the entire person, not just compartmentalizing segments of an individual's life.

In three other studies (Amundson and Borgen, 1987, 1988; Borgen and Amundson, 1987) it was found that about 25% of participants had taken part in some type of group counselling and all of them reported that the experience had been extremely positive. In this study, only 3% of the participants indicate that attending a group would be helpful. Instead, participants prefer individual counselling primarily for personal and educational issues. Career counselling can be done on either an individual basis or in a group depending on the level of self-confidence of the individuals.

Of group counselling, Klein et al. (1992) stated "it is essential that the activities go beyond the delivery of technical information and job finding techniques...there should be a number of activities designed to foster a sense of group support and to assist clients in raising their levels of self-esteem and hopefulness." The findings of this study support that statement based on the perceived need of the respondents who identify support from family and friends, and maintaining a positive attitude, as being important to successfully finding employment. Additionally, it has been found that respondents rate their ability to

perform labour market research and developing resumes as being very poor. The primary reason for rating themselves poorly is a lack of knowledge and/or skills. Fortunately, these activities can be adequately addressed within a group setting with the added bonus of making connections with others and developing a support network for job search activities.

Although group counselling has had proven positive effects on participants, this population must be approached with a number of factors in mind. The most notable factor was that all of the respondents have already been mandated to attend at least two groups which focussed on goal setting and job search activities. The majority of the respondents do not feel the groups help them to secure employment and have a negative view of them which, in turn, creates a lack of interest in attending other group sessions. It is also felt that the mandated nature of the groups are disrespectful and humiliating. Thus, respondents do not wish to be put in such a situation again. As found by Kirsh (1983), these individuals are faced with myths and stereotypes that typify them as been too lazy to work, too unreliable to maintain a steady job, or as dishonest individuals who are trying to defraud the income assistance system.

Respondents also want to sort out issues which affect their self-confidence before feeling comfortable within a group setting. It has been clearly established that by being a long-term income assistance recipient much of an individual's sense of self-worth and pride is stripped away the longer one remains unemployed and on income assistance. Forty-two and one-half percent of respondents feel they only have some control over their lives, mostly in relationships. The strain of financial difficulties and the impact it has on

all facets of an individual and family tends to increase the loss of a sense of control. It has been found that people who were struggling to buy food and clothing, pay for utilities and rent, feel they have little control over how to make ends meet from month to month.

The most frequently mentioned factor that would assist people to become employed and be self-sustaining is education. The majority of respondents feel that upgrading their education including high school graduation, post secondary certificates or diplomas, industry training, and on-the-job training are most helpful in securing employment. Respondents state that their primary goal for the upcoming year is to attend school, followed by gaining employment. Overall, the males want to secure employment and the females are interested in completing some level of education (usually a high school diploma) in order to better meet the needs of employers.

It has been found that the higher the level of education of the respondents the more likely it is that they want to attend school. There is a sense that the female respondents want to gain the skills and knowledge required to secure employment that provides opportunities for advancement and increased earnings. The male respondents are concerned with earning money immediately in order to support themselves and their families. They do recognize that receiving additional training is critical but lack the funds to do so. If financial and emotional support were available all respondents would like to attend school or training in order to make themselves more marketable. So, even though the primary focus by MHR for individuals who are in receipt of income assistance is to secure employment, it is felt by the recipients that steady work can only be acquired due, in large part, to increasing their level of education. This is where the system and its

clients have a difference of opinion which could be inadvertently tying people to the income assistance system for indefinite periods of time. The mandate for MHR is for individuals to secure employment, not to attend school. Thus, often there is a conflict between what the client feels is needed to become employable and the policies of the system which do not necessarily recognize the importance of advancing one's level of education.

These results contradict the document *Profiles of Welfare: Myths and Realities (1998)* which indicate that lack of work is the primary reason for remaining on income assistance in more than fifty percent of the situations. In this study, twenty five percent of respondents cite a poor economy as being an impacting factor and fifty percent of the respondents state lack of an adequate level of education is causing them to remain on income assistance. *Profiles of Welfare: Myths and Realities (1998)*, did not have any information on the current level of education for individuals receiving income assistance in British Columbia. This study found that the majority of participants have a grade 10 or 11 level of education which makes it very difficult for them to secure employment. Employers within the Prince George area are demanding that applicants and current employees have the minimum of a high school diploma in order to be considered for an interview, promotion, or in some cases, to maintain current employment. Thus, it is very difficult for individuals who have not graduated to even have an opportunity to discuss employment possibilities with potential employers. This perpetuates the feelings of frustration, low self-esteem, and hopelessness which typically accompany being unemployed and receiving income assistance.

This study has found that eighty percent of respondents know exactly what type of job they want to do and are in the process of seeking out ways to access the education and training they desire. Respondents state they are confident in their employment choices based primarily on past experience either in the field or one closely related to it. Once again, financial constraints often hinder the individual's ability to access education. Issues such as the lack of transportation and access to affordable day care are commonly discussed. Respondents are concerned that these issues are not adequately addressed by the current system since the focus has been on employment, not access to training and education.

Amundson and Borgen (1988) found that the downward emotional slide associated with job search occurred between 2 and 6 months after the individual became unemployed, and job search support would be most effective in curtailing the downward trend if provided between 1 and 3 months after becoming unemployed. The results of this study support the idea that job search support should be offered almost immediately. This study found that the vast majority of respondents want to receive job search support and career counselling immediately upon being in receipt of income assistance. It should be noted that individuals who apply for income assistance must have exhausted all of their financial options and have spent a period of time looking for work already. Income assistance is not granted to people who have accumulated assets. They must be destitute before any ongoing assistance is provided. Respondents believe they would be more effective with their job search if support was provided more quickly. By the time assistance is offered respondents already are suffering from low self-esteem, helplessness,

and are in extreme financial difficulties. If individuals are to have increased chances in securing employment they must be in a frame of mind and have the resources available to effectively market and present themselves in a manner that will encourage employers to hire them. When an individual is maintaining negative and self-defeating feelings and thoughts, there is little likelihood that they will be able to market themselves to an employer. This rejection, in turn, not only continues but also reinforces the negative downward cycle of the individual.

Within the current system, individuals must be in Phase II (7 to 9 months on income assistance) in order to access any type of job search support. This study, along with Amundson and Borgen (1988) and others, has found that immediate intervention is critical if the pervasive negative effect of being unemployed and on income assistance is to be minimized. The longer individuals are left on their own to struggle through job search activities, coping with the emotional upheaval that accompanies job loss and subsequent financial difficulties that lead to receiving income assistance, and the career planning that needs to be an integral part of becoming employable again, the more difficult it becomes for their currently existing supports to be effective and the greater the cost to them financially and emotionally. It becomes a vicious circle in which some people cannot separate themselves and may require support from professionals such as personal, career, and educational counsellors.

This study has found that all respondents believe that receiving either personal, educational, career counselling, or a combination of all three, is helpful. There is an even split between the four categories which indicates that their belief is dependent on the

length of time a person was receiving income assistance, personal issues, and the level of education of an individual. A number of studies (Amundson & Borgen, 1987, 1988; Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Furnham, 1983; Klein, Amundson, & Borgen, 1992; Waxman, 1983), have reported that group and individual counselling in these areas can slow down and even reverse the negative effects of being on income assistance and increase an individual's self-perception as well as their ability to conduct job search activities. This study has confirmed the findings of the other studies which stated that people who receive income assistance face a greater social stigma than individuals who are just unemployed. The perception that these individuals are "defrauding the system", are "too lazy to get a job", and are "just another number" reflect the type of treatment which has been reported by respondents. This treatment further ostracizes individuals and reinforces their sense of worthlessness. It also is not conducive to developing a supportive relationship between the service provider and the individual which, in turn, nullifies any positive effects from receiving personal, educational, or career counselling.

In this study, respondents frequently refer to the negative experiences they encounter when dealing with government workers or counsellors within the public sector. If individuals are to work with a counsellor on any issue, they expect the counsellor to be supportive and respectful. They want to be treated with dignity while being given guidance with respect to educational planning and career exploration. Respondents are adamant that they do not choose to be in receipt of income assistance and ask for help in working within a system that they feel is not addressing their best interests.

Respondents have a plan that they feel will lead to employment but can not secure either the emotional or financial support to carry it out. For many, they also have to deal with deeply entrenched personal issues before they can feasibly carry out either an educational plan or effectively conduct job search activities. Unfortunately, people who are emotionally destitute appear to fall between the cracks within the current income assistance system. These individuals are incapable of seeking or maintaining employment due to their emotional fragility, yet they are in a situation in which they must continue to try to gain employment. Allowances can be made for individuals who are able to prove they are mentally or physically incapable of working but this is for a limited period of time. Sometimes it takes longer than a few months to sort out and deal with potentially years of poor self-esteem and negative beliefs about oneself.

### **Responses to the Research Questions**

This study was conducted in order to answer two broad research questions: (1) What do people who are long-term income assistance recipients find helpful and hindering when seeking employment? and (2) What are the implications for counselling income assistance recipients? The results of the structured survey have created a framework within which responses to each of the research questions can be organized as follows.

The overwhelming answer to what respondents find most helpful is education. Access to a higher level of education has been deemed to be most helpful and the lack of education has been identified as being the greatest hindering factor when trying to secure employment. It has been found that attaining post-secondary certificates and diplomas

are the most helpful types of education when looking for employment. The majority of respondents have completed some secondary school, usually around a grade 10 level, and this has proven to be a limiting factor that is not easily corrected.

Poor self-esteem has also been found to be a very powerful hindering factor that impacts the respondents' ability to conduct effective job search activities which, consequently, impedes their successful acquisition of employment. Respondents feel that low self-confidence is a product of being chronically unemployed and struggling financially for a long period of time. Further, they see themselves as worthless human beings who can not compete with the working people of society.

Respondents feel strongly that job search support and career counselling should start immediately after an individual has begun to receive income assistance. Currently, individuals receiving income assistance must wait for a specified period of time before such aid is approved. Respondents feel this is a hindering factor that increases the degree with which poor self-esteem, low motivation and depression occurs in their lives. Respondents believe that immediate job search support and career counselling helps provide them with the skills and planning required to successfully secure employment more quickly than if they have to struggle on their own. Thus, securing employment is not just a matter of being at the right place at the right time. It is a matter of receiving the type of support necessary to break down the barricades such as a lack of education and poor self-esteem fostered by being unsuccessful in securing stable employment.

The results indicate a number of implications for counselling individuals who are long-term social assistance recipients. The findings show that a vast majority of

respondents describe changes in their thoughts and feelings from being positive to negative and that these changes are much like a roller coaster. This information gives counsellors an understanding of the general attitudes and the nature of the severity with which the experience of being chronically unemployed and being in receipt of income assistance might have on an individual.

The results that show respondents perceive that they only have some control over their employment situations and other areas of their lives also have counselling implications. A counsellor will be able to take the perception that clients may feel like they do not have control over their employment situation and teach them how to take command of their job search activities.

It has been found that respondents have the most difficulty completing job search activities such as conducting labour market research, writing a resume, and marketing themselves. Having this knowledge suggests that counsellors should investigate a client's job search skills and be able to provide access to resources that will increase the client's ability to conduct an effective job search. Additionally, the information gathered in this study encourages counsellors to examine an individual's level of self-confidence and assist in improving the client's view of themselves and their abilities.

The results also clearly indicate that the respondents' primary goal for the year is to increase their level of education. Counsellors working with this population need to be able to either gain access to educational information or be able to refer clients to the appropriate resources so that this option can be explored.

In summary, this study has successfully gathered information that answers both research questions and allows for recommendations to be formulated in relation to counselling individuals who are unemployed and have been receiving income assistance for a long period of time. The following section will discuss the implications for counselling and offer recommendations in a more specific manner

### **Implications and Recommendations**

This research has provided information for working with individuals who have been on income assistance for a long period of time. It has confirmed some findings of specific studies and contradicted others. In conclusion, the following is a presentation of some implications and recommendations for counselling individuals who have been chronically unemployed and in receipt of long-term income assistance.

It is important to recognize the diversity of individuals' experiences of being unemployed and receiving income assistance for a long period of time. These individuals may be dealing with multiple issues on financial, personal, and emotional levels. Affording them emotional support and respect will lay the foundation for further development of self-esteem and an ability to not only create a career/educational plan but also to follow through with it. A variety of approaches will need to be used to address negative self-statements, lack of self-confidence, and a new sense of hope. Counsellors who focus on the needs of the client and provide guidance, not directives, will encourage them to try new ideas and focus on trying to expand positive experiences within their lives.

In the author's opinion, if counsellors wish to be able to address the needs of the client, it is critical for them to be familiar with counselling theories that are applicable to their roles with clients and are consistent with their personal beliefs and style of counselling. A counsellor's theoretical stance reflects his/her conceptual framework for understanding and examining factors which influence career choice(s) and career development, how and why people make the choices they do, how and why they react to changes, as well as when and how to provide meaningful interventions (Crozier, Dobbs, Douglas, & Hung; 1999). The same concept applies to those counsellors who are also addressing personal and educational issues.

The provision of job search support and career counselling may be an invaluable tool but the readiness of participants must be assessed prior to their involvement. If an individual is overly reticent or emotionally unprepared to function within a group setting it will be another negative experience that will cause an increased feeling of despair. Sometimes individuals will require one-one work with a counsellor prior to being introduced to a group process. It should be acknowledged that, depending on the individual, continued one-one support should also be offered and maintained if it is deemed necessary.

Job search support and counselling should be introduced to individuals as soon as possible after beginning to receive income assistance. The counselling may include personal, career, and educational components. These components are interrelated and will most likely be part of the counselling process. It is important to address personal issues either prior to, depending on the degree of severity for the individual, or during the

job search, educational planning, and/or implementation stages.

Due to the pervasiveness of personal problems associated with the unemployment experience and receiving income assistance, counsellors should receive training in addressing specific issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and negative self-thoughts. An integral part of the training should be communication skills, primarily effective listening practices. Clients need to be allowed to describe their experiences to someone who will listen and respect their situation.

Counsellors should consider themselves to be advocates for the individuals with whom they are involved. Issues such as: access to education and training, transportation, and affordable daycare for students are critical for those individuals who require additional education and training in order to be more marketable in the workforce. Counsellors should assist potential students with choosing career paths, identify appropriate training, alternate funding sources, and other resources that will encourage academic and personal success.

In order to ensure an individual is taught the necessary job search skills, the counsellor needs to either possess sufficient knowledge and skills or at least be knowledgeable regarding community resources. Having the ability to conduct labour market research, develop a strong resume, and market one's skills and abilities during an interview are imperative if an individual is to successfully secure employment. The counsellor must stay current, especially when attempting to assist clients in developing a resume. The resume must suit the job and present the skills of the individual in the most comprehensive and appealing manner.

## Limitations

A number of limitations have been noted within this study. Although the sample size in this study is larger than the study done by Klein et al. (1992), interviewing more individuals would allow for a more representative sample.

A second limitation lies in the type of population being targeted. It is often difficult to contact individuals due to the lack of access to a telephone and the possible frequent movement from one location to another. It has been noted that individuals who are in receipt of income assistance will choose to not have a telephone due to the inability to pay the bills. For this population, having a telephone is often considered to be a luxury.

This study was interested in people who were both unemployed and receiving income assistance on a long-term basis. Due to the population being studied and the design of the survey questions, it was not possible to separate individuals into those who were just unemployed and those who were just receiving income assistance.

There could have been an effect of methodology because this study was comparing across methodologies. The literature reviewed utilized a phenomenological and critical incident methodology which were largely qualitative. This study used a structured survey that was quantitative in nature. A limited number of open-ended questions were included in order to allow the respondents the opportunity to elaborate on responses or discuss issues that were specific to their circumstance. The answers were then categorized according to themes and quantified from that point.

## **Future Research**

Within this field of research there are an unlimited number of questions that can be answered. The following is a list of questions that may be posed in other research related to individuals who are long-term income assistance recipients:

- a) How old were you when you had your first child?
- b) How has being on long-term income assistance affected your success in training/educational settings?
- c) What is the relationship between the initial effect of job loss and prolonged periods of unemployment?
- d) What makes it easier for an individual to stay on income assistance instead of securing employment? What are the implications for an individual's self-perception and feelings about society?
- e) There is a need to conduct a study that is able to separate impacts of unemployment from receiving income assistance. Perhaps a study on just those individuals who are unemployed would provide some helpful information for career counsellors.
- f) Is there a gender effect on unemployment? Do women and men experience unemployment differently? What does employment mean to each individual?

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### **Appendix A - Structured Survey .**

The following demographic information was obtained:

1. Date of birth: month, day, year
2. Gender: Male, Female
3. Marital status: single, married, separated, divorced, common law, widowed
4. Number of dependents (18 years and under): 0, 1, 2, 3, 4+
5. Ages of dependents: 1 - 7 years, 8 - 18 years (Parents who have children under 7 years. can go to school if they have an acceptable plan).
6. Highest level of education: elementary, secondary, high school graduate, college, trade/technical, university
7. Start date of receiving income assistance
8. Disability (describe)
9. Type of work done (open ended)
10. Aboriginal: Metis, non-status, status
11. Activities in the past year: employed (part time, full time), school (part time, full time), seeking employment, other (describe)

The following questions were posed.

1. Since becoming unemployed and receiving income assistance, how would you describe changes, if any, in your overall thoughts and feelings?  
- positive to negative, negative to positive, no change, fluctuates between positive and negative

Rationale: To see if there has been a downward slide as identified in literature and to gain an understanding of the general attitude about being unemployed.

2. If there has been a change, how would you describe these shifts in emotion? Were they:

- like a roller coaster - shifting between anger, anxiety, determination, hope, loneliness?

- like a yo-yo - sudden, rapid shifts in emotion like feeling fine to being furious, or bursting into tears, no control of your emotions?

- flat - little change in emotions, feel sad or upset as a general rule?

Rationale: To find out if participant can identify feelings in terms of language used within the literature and determine if emotional shifts are severe, moderate, or low in intensity.

3. What would you find most helpful in trying to become employed?

- support from family, support from friends, maintain positive thinking, attending a group, counselling support, other

Rationale: A pointed way of answering the “helpful” part of my research question, get a sense of what is important to the participant.

4. What are factors that have been preventing you from getting employed?

-transportation, childcare, experience, education, money, economy, lack of support from family/friends, don't know what you want to do, disability, ethnic minority, other (describe)

Rationale: Answered, in a basic way, the “hindering” part of the research question, become aware of sources of stress for participant and set the stage for additional questioning.

5. What is your biggest barrier to becoming employed?

- transportation, child care, experience, education, money, economy, lack of support from family/friends, disability, don't know what you want to do, ethnic minority, other (describe)

Rationale: Pinpointed participant's largest barrier and point of contention; informed my recommendations in the discussion section (counselling implications).

6a. On a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being very confident and 5 being very unsure, how confident do you feel about doing the following job search activities:

- writing a resume
- how to search for employment
- contacting employers
- marketing your skills and abilities
- doing an interview
- doing labour market research
- knowing what type of job you want to do

6b. For your poorest skill, why do you think that you are poor at it?

6c. For your best skill, why do you think you are good at it?

Rationale: Literature indicated there were difficulties in this area for specific groups such as immigrants, youth, and women entering the workforce. Therefore I wanted to identify patterns for this group which are more complicated due to being long-term income assistance recipients. I also wanted to know where participants feel they have difficulties in seeking employment so I could discuss this situation with respect to counselling this group.

7a. Describe the amount of control you believe you have over your employment situation.

- none, very little, some, a lot, total

7b. Has this always been the case?

- no, yes, sometimes

7c. How much control do you think you have over other areas in you life?

- none, very little, some, total

7d. Can you describe the areas you are thinking of ? (List them)

Rationale: If I know how much control they believe they have it will give a point of reference when discussing the results and counselling implications. Feeling like you have control over a situation tends to enable you to handle it in a more effective and positive manner.

8. What is your primary goal for this year?

- employment, school, have a child, get married, get off of income assistance, health, other

Rationale: I wanted to know if they are even able to see into the future and how related the goal was to securing employment. This, in conjunction with the question about the best timing for support, feelings of confidence in job search etc. allowed me to make observations on how being on long-term IA effects one's ability to plan for the future.

9. When do you think job search support and career counselling should start to be provided to people who receive income assistance?

- immediately, 1 - 3 months, 4 - 7 months, 8 - 10 months, 11 months or more

Rationale: How well have the participants' job search and career development needs been met by the current system? Do their perceptions match the literature's view that support should be put into place within the first three months?

10. What type of training and education do you think would be most helpful to you?

- high school graduation, industry training, job search support, on-the-job training, certificate or diplomas, university degree, other (describe)

Rationale: What do participants think they need to become employable? Their experience in looking for work will inform them so it will be helpful for me to know what is experienced when this group seeks employment. I wanted to know if their perceptions are the same as what I perceive is needed (from an employment counsellor's perspective).

11. Describe the type of counselling you would find the most helpful while you are trying to secure employment.

- personal, educational, career

Rationale: Is there one type of counselling this group acknowledges as being helpful for seeking employment? I was curious to see if participants perceived there was a connection with a particular type of counselling and employment.

12. How has your personal life been effected by being unemployed and on income assistance?

- drug abuse, alcohol abuse, poor self-esteem, relationship problems, health, financial difficulties, other (describe)

Rationale: What personal factors effect participants' ability to seek and secure employment? Which factors appear most often in responses? This may indicate "flags" to watch for when counselling. In order to successfully secure and maintain employment some of these issues must be addressed prior to or simultaneously with employment.

13. If you went to see a counsellor, what would you expect them to do? (open ended)

Rationale: I wanted to know their expectations in order to discuss what may be expected of counsellors. I wanted a clarification on these expectations so I could identify realistic roles of the counsellor when working with this population. Does what the client wants match up with what the counsellor actually does?