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Work ready: an occupational therapy response to the experience of graduate unemployment

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Work Ready: An Occupational Therapy
Response to the Experience of Graduate
Unemployment

By Maeve Lynch

A thesis submitted to the fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Science at the University of Limerick

Supervised by Dr. Katie Robinson and Mairead Cahill

Submitted to the University of Limerick, 16th December 2013

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. I am the author of this thesis and the principle author of the three papers which form the core of the thesis

Maeve Lynch (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Abstract

The overall aim of this thesis is to augment the evidence available to Occupational Therapists working with unemployed people. Unemployment is a pressing and growing social issue and throughout this thesis the important contribution Occupational Therapy can make to address the wide ranging consequences of unemployment and supporting re-entry to the labour market is considered.

This thesis consists of three papers taking a sequential approach to addressing the social issue of unemployment. Although a body of research on interventions for the unemployed is available, it is spread across many disciplines. Paper I synthesises this dispersed evidence base in order to draw implications and recommendations for Occupational Therapy practice with this population. A narrative literature review is presented that aimed to qualitatively appraise research on the topic of prevention or assistance-focused interventions to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed. The review findings support a number of programme elements that should be considered in the design and development of future interventions; a CBT approach, a focus on job search skills and coping resources and a group forum. The paper concludes that unemployment research should be considered as an emerging area of concern and theory development for the Occupational Therapy profession.

In response to the findings of paper I, and building on previous research completed at the University of Limerick, a study was designed to develop and explore an Occupational Therapy programme for unemployed third level graduates; Work Ready. In order to inform the development of the programme and enhance understanding of the occupational consequences of graduate unemployment a qualitative study was conducted. In paper II, the experience of graduate unemployment was qualitatively explored through a conceptual model of Occupational Therapy practice, the Kawa (River) model. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with eleven unemployed graduates and data was analysed using a deductive approach to thematic analysis. The themes that emerged from the data are based on the four concepts of the Kawa model and provide a rich description of graduate unemployment: life flow; obstruction caused

by rocks (finance, negativity and routine); resources that form driftwood (family, friends and personal characteristics); the environment has a multi-faceted influence on participants. In response to these findings Occupational therapists are urged to increase their awareness and consider their role in relation to those vulnerable to the effects of graduate unemployment.

Building on the findings of paper I and II and previous research conducted at the University of Limerick an intervention programme for unemployed graduates was developed; Work Ready. In paper III, a qualitative phenomenological research approach was taken to gain an understanding of the lived experience of participation in this Occupational Therapy intervention, Work Ready. In total nine unemployed graduates engaged in the programme. Data was collected via focus groups and interviews and analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Three themes emerged from the analysis describing how participants changed their perspective, developed new skills, made changes to behaviour and were positively influenced by the group environment. The findings identify many positive benefits of the Work Ready programme for both mediating the unemployment experience and supporting re-entry to the labour market. Conclusions drawn from this study recommend for the development and rigorous empirical evaluation of preventative occupation-focused programmes with unemployed individuals, and specifically unemployed graduates.

The thesis concludes with a discussion where methodological considerations and the thesis findings are deliberated, and implications for practice and research are drawn.

Key words: Occupational Therapy, Unemployment, Graduates, Intervention, Health Promotion, Kawa (River) Model, Qualitative.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Katie Robinson and Mairead Cahill whose expertise, guidance and support excelled beyond the requirements of the role. I could not have asked for better. Katie, thank you especially for taking me on in the beginning and for your commitment, patience, feedback and general encouragement over the last year; your work ethic is something to aspire to! I wish you both the best in the future.

To Mom, Dad, Ciara, Eoin and Murphy – for your endless support and generosity in all I do, for the drives, the walks, the laughs, the food and an endless list of other silly things, I appreciate them all and wouldn't be where I am now without the love and support of you lot.

Friendship is not a big thing, it's a million little things. To all my friends near and far, especially Steve, Michael, Niamh and Siobhan, for their listening skills, words of wisdom, cups of tea and bed space, thank you! Lisa and Eva, my fellow researchers, best of luck in finishing up soon too, we've been a long way together and I'm sure there are only great things to come.

Finally, to all the participants of Work Ready, you gave meaning to this project and I can only hope I did your story justice. You were all a pleasure to work with.

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List of Conference Presentations

Lynch, M. (2013) 'Work Ready: An Occupational Therapy group intervention for unemployed graduates' (accepted for oral presentation), 2nd Annual Limerick Postgraduate Research Conference, University of Limerick, 6th June 2013.

Lynch, M., Robinson, K., (2014). Work Ready: Responding to the unemployment crisis in Ireland. Accepted for (oral presentation), World Congress of Occupational Therapy (Yokohama, Japan).

List of Abbreviations

<i>AOTA</i>	American Occupational Therapy Association
<i>CBT</i>	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
<i>FÁS</i>	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
<i>JOBS</i>	Job Search Workshop
<i>JSD</i>	Job Seekers Diary programme
<i>LGO</i>	Learning Goal Orientation programme
<i>RCT</i>	Randomised Control Trial
<i>UL</i>	University of Limerick
<i>WFOT</i>	World Federation of Occupational Therapists

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Introduction

Background and Context

The overall aim of this thesis is to augment the evidence available to Occupational Therapists working with unemployed people and to explore the role of the profession in the theory and programme development with this client group.

In the 1990's, Ireland saw rapid economic growth in a period that notoriously became known as the Celtic Tiger years. There was a dramatic boost in job creation, foreign investment, immigration and growth in industrial wages. Notably, this period led to the unemployment rate dropping to 4.5% by the end of 2007 (Central Statistics Office 2007). However, September 2008 saw Ireland become the first Eurozone country to officially enter the economic recession, an event that became a part of a global economic downturn.

In 2013, five years after the Celtic Tiger era, Ireland is seen to be emerging from the recession with slight economic growth occurring in the second quarter of this year (Central Statistics Office 2013). A booming economy and record low unemployment rates existed less than a decade ago, but the consequences of the recession that followed impact on a concerning number of people in our society. More specifically, unemployment statistics are receiving much media attention as a growing social problem on a global scale. In the United Kingdom, there has been a fall of 43,000 people in employment, in January to March 2013, compared with the end of 2012 (Office for National Statistics 2013). In the Eurozone, unemployment has reached a record high with statistics increasing in eighteen European member states in the year 2013 (European Commission 2013). In the United States of America, 11.3 million people are unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013).

This thesis focuses primarily on the unemployment crisis in Ireland. The standardised unemployment rate grew from 4.5% in 2007, to 14.7% in 2011. It currently stands at 13.3 % as of September 2013 (Central Statistics Office 2013) but many factors are to be considered in this slight decrease and in the factors that create one statistic; this fall in unemployment can be attributed to the increase in those partaking in part time jobs or the unprecedented numbers of Irish people emigrating. Since 2007, the number of people under the age of thirty five working on the labour force has reduced by 350,000. A substantial outflow of people emigrating from Ireland is still occurring and is to be held accountable for 87, 100 people leaving the country in 2012 (Behan *et al* 2012).

In Ireland 'third level education' refers to post-secondary school/post high school education that is provided by a range of institutions including Universities, Colleges of Education and Institutes of Technology. A note of concern among these statistics is that third level graduates make up almost a quarter of the unemployed population (Behan *et al* 2013). This is despite the fact that Ireland has the highest level in the European Union of 25 to 34 year olds that have completed third level education, and so the lack of advancement from education to work is alarming (Donnelly 2013).

Work is the most important means of obtaining economic resources, which leads to family well-being, participation in society, meets important psychosocial needs and is central to identity, social roles and social status (Waddell and Burton 2006). Awareness is growing of the broad effects of being out of work. The diversity of the detrimental consequences on psychological and physical well-being have been documented through publications of a high calibre (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005; Waddell and Burton 2006; Wanberg 2012). The psychological effects identified in the literature encompass depression, anxiety, distress, somatisation, decreased self-esteem and an increased risk of suicide (Bolton and Oatley 1987; Corcoran

and Arensman 2011; Heubeck *et al* 1995; Linn *et al* 1985; Voss *et al* 2004; Waters and Moore 2002). The risk of social exclusion is demonstrated through studies such as Kilpatrick and Trews' (1985), who found that unemployed men in Northern Ireland decreased their activity levels and withdrew into the home, which then related to a progressive decline in mental health. Unemployment may also lead to diminished social status, disturbed social role patterns, financial debt, reduced self-esteem and feelings of guilt (Audhoe *et al* 2010). This relates to the findings that unemployed people experience a disturbance to routine, engage less in meaningful activities and overall display poorer time use than employed people. (Scanlon *et al* 2011; Waters and Moore 2002; Winefield *et al* 1992). Research demonstrates that unemployment has a relationship with decreased physical health that includes a greater risk of morbidity, cardiovascular disorders, bronchitis and obstructive lung disease, which are not accounted for by factors such as socioeconomic status, poverty, risk factors, or prior ill health (Beale and Nethercott 1988; Cook *et al* 1982; Jin *et al* 1995; Linn *et al* 1985; Mathers and Schofield 1998; Waddell and Burton 2006). Therefore, the literature on unemployment concurs that this social situation results in expansive negative health consequences. Across multiple disciplines there has been greater research attention on describing the experiences of people who are unemployed rather than interventions and preventive trials to study the effect of different measures to counter unemployment or its consequences (Hammarström and Janlert 2005).

Occupational Therapy is a client-centered health profession concerned with promoting health and well-being through engagement in meaningful occupations that allow for participation in the home, workplace and community (Roley *et al* 2008, WFOT 2012). Occupational Therapists are well-placed to address the deleterious effects of unemployment on health and well-being due to their sophisticated understanding of occupation and

occupational performance, their expertise in physical and mental health, their experiences with task and routine analysis, community health promotion, a history of group based therapy and an awareness of the influence of the context on an individual. Research has also demonstrated positive outcomes from vocational rehabilitation with various populations, for example, with school children, with people experiencing long term health conditions such as Parkinson's, with people with mental illnesses and people who are homeless (Benharoch and Wiseman 2004; Cahill *et al* 2009; Henry 2005; Munoz *et al* 2006). Despite pronouncements about the potential of Occupational Therapy for unemployed well populations from a number of authors (AOTA 2009; Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002; McFeely 2012) no published evidence exists to date of Occupational Therapy intervention with people who are unemployed and not out of work due to an illness or disability. Given the numbers of people currently unemployed and the very significant health and well-being consequences of unemployment exploring the role of Occupational Therapy with this group is vital.

'Work Ready'; an Occupational Therapy group based intervention for unemployed people was developed by staff of the Occupational Therapy Department, University of Limerick in response to dramatically escalating unemployment locally. In 2010 K. Robinson facilitated an eight week group for redundant Dell employees (Fahy 2011; O'Sullivan 2011). In 2011 staff of the Occupational Therapy Department refined the intervention and titled it 'Work Ready'. A list of all staff members and their respective roles in the groups facilitated in 2011 is listed in Appendix A. In the groups facilitated in 2010 and 2011 participants were primarily people from the Limerick region who had become unemployed through industrial plant closures. A number of qualitative and quantitative studies were completed by University of Limerick students (to date unpublished) to evaluate the outcomes of the program in 2011 (Dunne 2012; Farrell 2012; Morgan 2012; O' Mahony

2012; Quirke 2012). A poster was presented at the 9th COTEC Congress of Occupational Therapy describing the Work Ready intervention (Gallagher et al 2012). Findings suggested a positive effect on mental health, improved confidence and knowledge of self, improved job searching and the establishment of a balanced day through engagement in meaningful activities and a focus on lifestyle change for participants. Recommendations for the future of this programme were that it would be paramount to take a multi-faceted approach, to include a focus on well-being, mental health, job seeking skills and the formation of a group (Dunne 2012; Farrell 2012; Morgan 2012; O' Mahony 2012; Quirke 2012). All strands of research on this project had low levels of evidence, and so recommended further in-depth research. Findings from these small scale evaluations also supported the hypothesis that Occupational Therapy and its unique skillset and philosophies, should be regarded as a suitable and appropriate discipline for working with unemployed people.

This thesis builds on the previous research completed on the Work Ready programme, however, it extends this programme by reviewing the available evidence on efficacious interventions for unemployed people and explores the specific experiences and needs of a sub-set of the unemployed population; unemployed graduates.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is presented in a research paper-based format. Papers I, II and III are papers that have been prepared for publication in Occupational Therapy related research journals. References, figures, tables and appendices are presented throughout the three papers. These are included in the papers as they would be for publication with minor structural and formatting changes as per University of Limerick guidelines. The lead researcher in all publications is Maeve Lynch with second and third investigators, Dr. Katie Robinson and Mairead Cahill. An outline of the researchers' contribution is located in Appendix B.

Thesis aims

The overall aim of this thesis is to augment the evidence available to Occupational Therapists working with unemployed people and to explore the role of the profession in the theory and service development with this client group. The specific aims of each research paper were:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| <i>Paper I</i> | To qualitatively appraise published research on the topic of prevention or assistance-focused interventions to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed. |
| <i>Paper II</i> | To qualitatively explore the experience of graduate unemployment through a conceptual model of Occupational Therapy practice; the Kawa (River) model. |
| <i>Paper III</i> | To describe an Occupational Therapy group programme for unemployed graduates, Work Ready, and to qualitatively evaluate the lived experience of participation in the programme. |

Paper I is a narrative literature review that aimed to qualitatively appraise published research on the topic of prevention or assistance-focused interventions to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed. The review findings indicate that the evidence for interventions to counter unemployment or its consequences is sparse. However the review supports the effectiveness of interventions with this population and a number of programme elements that should be considered in the design and development of future interventions; a CBT approach, a focus on job search skills and coping resources and a group forum.

Paper II qualitatively explores the experience of graduate unemployment through a conceptual model of Occupational Therapy practice, the Kawa (River) model. The themes that emerged from the data are based on the four concepts of the Kawa model and provide a rich description of graduate unemployment. Outlined is the overall impact of the unemployment experience on the lives of unemployed graduates with reference to the obstructions that they face, the supports available to them and the multifaceted influence of the environment.

Paper III takes a qualitative phenomenological research approach to gain an understanding of the lived experience of participation in an Occupational Therapy intervention, Work Ready. Three themes emerged from the analysis describing how participants changed their perspective, developed new skills, made changes to behaviour and were positively influenced by the group environment. The findings identify many positive benefits of the Work ready programme for both mediating the unemployment experience and supporting re-entry to the labour market.

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Paper I:

‘Interventions for
unemployed people: a
narrative review’

Abstract

Background: Unemployment is a global social issue and best evidence concludes that unemployed individuals have lower psychological and physical well-being than their employed counterparts. Research conducted on interventions for individuals to find work and maintain well-being has been sparse.

Method: This is a narrative literature review. The aim was to conduct a wide ranging search with the purpose of identifying research on the topic of prevention or assistance-focused interventions to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed. Fourteen papers were included and synthesised according to the nine categories of intervention identified. A qualitative appraisal of these interventions was completed.

Results: Nine categories of intervention were identified; JOBS intervention, Jobs Club, Expressive writing, Stress management, Career Transition programme (Imagery programme), Job Seeker Diary (JSD) programme Verbal Self Guidance, Goal Orientation Theory programme, Vocationally Oriented CBT Group Training programme. The programmes present significant evidence of improved psychological well-being and an improved employment rate among participants. Data from this review suggest a CBT approach, a focus on job search skills and coping resources and a group forum, form the basis of a successful intervention.

Conclusion: This review concludes that Occupational Therapists should consider theory development and their role in service delivery with this population. Overall, continued research on interventions for this population is urgently required as the current evidence base is insufficient.

Key words: Narrative review, Unemployment, Programmes, Interventions, Return to work, Occupational Therapy.

Introduction

Unemployment is the state of being without a paid job but being available for work (The Oxford English Dictionary 2013). In Ireland, unemployment statistics have received much media attention in recent years. In March 2011, the standardised unemployment rose to 14.7%; over a year on from this recessionary low point, the rate has subsequently fallen to 13.3 % (Central Statistics Office September 2013). A single statistic is not to be taken as wholly representative; the quarterly national household survey demonstrates for example that this fall in unemployment can be attributed to the increase in those partaking in part time jobs (Central Statistics Office 2013). One must also take into account that since 2007, the number of people under the age of thirty five working on the labour force has reduced by 350,000. Emigration is to be held accountable in part; 87, 100 people left Ireland in 2012, almost 2% of the population (Behan *et al* 2012). The rate of returning Irish emigrants averages at approximately 20,000 per year (Glynn 2013) indicating a substantial outflow from the country. Ireland has the highest rate of people graduating from university within the EU (33%). Despite the fact that unemployment rates fall with a higher level of education, it remains that 17% of third level graduates under the age of twenty five are unemployed in Ireland (Behan *et al* 2012). Ireland is not unique in this situation, in the UK there has been a fall of 43,000 people in employment, in January to March 2013, compared with the end of 2012 (Office for National Statistics 2013). In the European Union unemployment has reached a record high and youth unemployment is particularly concerning; 5.7 million people under the age of twenty five are out of work (European Commission 2013). In 2013, the unemployment rate increased in eighteen European member states, Greece being the highest at 27%. In the United States of America, 11.3 million people are unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). This figure did not account for people not in employment, who had not searched for work, in the 4 weeks preceding the

survey that provided this statistic. Thus, unemployment is an Irish, European and global predicament that impacts on a concerning number of people in our society.

Employment itself is a concept that began when people began to purchase rather than produce the goods they needed and so maintaining a wage became crucial – people in modern society cannot provide for themselves but must depend on employment to survive (Hanisch 1999). Contributing to society through work is highly valued and the importance of employment is generally not appreciated until it is taken away (Yerxa 1998). Work is the most important means of obtaining economic resources, which leads to family well-being, participation in society, meets important psychosocial needs, is central to identity, social roles and social status (Waddell and Burton 2006). It is not surprising therefore, that the adverse effects of unemployment have been well documented in the health and social science literature for many years (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005; Waddell and Burton 2006; Wanberg 2012). Across multiple disciplines there has been greater research attention on describing the experiences of people who are unemployed rather than interventions and preventive trials to study the effect of different measures to counter unemployment or its consequences (Hammarström and Janlert 2005). The aim of this paper is to conduct a narrative literature review of published research on the topic of prevention or assistance-focused interventions that aimed to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed.

Consequences of Unemployment

Waddell and Burton (2006) highlight that research has focused on the risk of work to health but the benefits of employment are shown to outweigh the risks of working, especially in comparison to unemployment. The

epidemiologic evidence for the adverse effects of unemployment on health suggest that it is unemployment that causes illness and not illness that causes unemployment (Jin *et al* 1995), through factors such as poverty and financial anxiety, stigma and social isolation (Bartley 1994). Also, the difference in psychological well-being of the employed and unemployed can be attributed to workforce experience rather than predisposing factors (Winefield *et al* 1992).

A meta-analysis by McKee Ryan *et al* (2005), a best evidence synthesis review by Waddell and Burton (2006) and more recently a meta-analysis by Wanberg (2012) concluded that overall, unemployed individuals have lower psychological and physical well-being than their employed counterparts. Studies have found a greater incidence among the unemployed of adverse psychological symptoms of depression, anxiety, distress, somatisation and decreased self-esteem (Bolton and Oatley 1987; Heubeck *et al* 1995; Linn *et al* 1985; Waters and Moore 2002). Unemployment is also associated with a risk of social exclusion (Kieselbach 2003) and an increased risk of suicide (Corcoran and Arensman 2011; Voss *et al* 2004). Kilpatrick and Trew (1985) in a study of unemployed men in Northern Ireland found that decreasing activity and withdrawal into the home took place, which then related to a progressive decline in mental health. 15 out of 18 articles published after 2000 reported findings that suicide and unemployment are related (Wanberg 2012). Unemployment has a significant effect on socialising; a systematic review found that unemployment may lead to diminished social status, disturbed social role patterns, financial debt, reduced self-esteem and feelings of guilt (Audhoe *et al* 2010). This relates to the findings that unemployed people engage in solitary leisure activities more so than meaningful and social leisure activities and so have lower psychological well-being due to poor time use (Scanlon *et al* 2011; Waters and Moore 2002; Winefield *et al* 1992). McKee Ryan *et al* (2005) concluded that the effect on mental health is the most widely studied outcome of unemployment in the published literature. Most recently, Herbig *et al* (2013) following a selective literature search,

concluded that long term unemployed people have at least a two-fold risk of developing a mental illness, particularly depression and anxiety disorders, in comparison to their employed counterparts. Psychological effects may manifest physiologically and greater reporting of health complaints and engagement in high risk health behaviours thus occurs, which then effects re-employment (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005; Waddell and Burton 2006).

Physical health consequences of unemployment have received considerably less research attention than the psychological effects of unemployment (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005). However, research demonstrates that unemployment has a negative impact on well-being and a relationship with decreased physical health. Physical consequences of unemployment include a greater risk of morbidity, for example, cardiovascular disorders, bronchitis and obstructive lung disease, and mortality which are not accounted for by factors such as socioeconomic status, poverty, risk factors, or prior ill health (Beale and Nethercott 1988; Cook *et al* 1982; Jin *et al* 1995; Linn *et al* 1985; Mathers and Schofield 1998; Waddell and Burton 2006).

Theorising Unemployment and the role of Occupational Therapy

Many attempts have been made to theorise the experience of unemployment. Most apparent throughout the literature is Jahoda's Deprivational Model. Jahoda (1982) asked why is work such a fundamental condition of the human life and differentiated the 'latent consequences' or significant by-products of employment from the 'manifest consequence' i.e. earning a living. Five latent consequences of employment relevant to health, the absence of which lead to psychological distress, were proposed; 1) time structure imposed on a person's day; 2) regularly shared experiences and social contacts with individuals who are not relatives; 3) linked to goals and purposes exceeding their own; 4) important aspects of

personal status and identity defined; 5) activity enforced, a demand for action provided (Jahoda 1982). The latent deprivation theory and the disruption and devastating consequences on structure, routine and social contacts described, reflects core Occupational Therapy beliefs and existing evidence that engagement in an occupation has an effect on health and well-being (Creek and Hughes 2008; Law *et al* 1998). Although Occupational Therapy has not theorised the experience of unemployment, enforced changes in occupational performance have been considered by Occupational Therapists and Occupational Scientists. Occupational disruption is a temporary disturbance to occupational participation. In contrast, occupational deprivation is originally defined as being unable to participate in meaningful occupations due to external circumstances that are beyond a persons' control (Wilcock 1998). Whiteford (2000) described how for people who are occupationally deprived, such as the unemployed population, difficulties are created in the legitimate participation in mainstream society. Occupational deprivation is also a risk factor for health problems that may result from or lead to the development of other risk factors. This in turn can result in larger health and social problems (Scaffa *et al* 2008). Unemployed people are particularly vulnerable to occupational deprivation and this experience has primarily been explained through Social Psychology theory (Jahoda 1982).

Unemployment should be considered as an emerging area of concern and theory development for both Occupational Therapy practitioners and Occupational Scientists. Occupational Therapy has been criticized for overlooking the social and political environments that enable engagement in occupation (Hammell and Iwama 2012); the profession generally intervenes when a potential client presents with an illness, rather than taking preventive measures that target potentially vulnerable groups. Hammell and Iwama (2012) consider the issue of occupational rights - *'the right of people to engage in meaningful occupations that contribute positively to*

their own well-being and the well-being of their communities' and propose that as a profession Occupational Therapy should focus on rights, on what enables or constrains actions. Research is limited on interventions and preventive trials to study the effect of different measures to counter unemployment or its consequences (Hammarström and Janlert 2005). Coupled with the neglect of attention to the social and political context of occupational performance, a review of the unemployment intervention literature is warranted with consideration of the role of Occupational Therapy. This paper will conduct that literature review, focusing on published research on prevention or assistance-focused interventions that aimed to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed.

Method

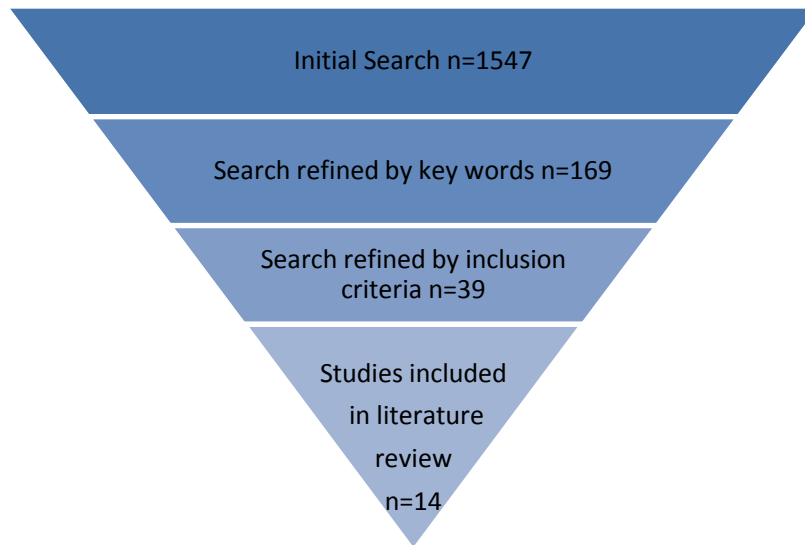
This is a narrative style review, the intention of which is to provide insight into the dynamics underlying the findings of individual studies (Slavin 1995). The aim is to conduct a wide ranging search with the purpose of identifying research on the topic of prevention or assistance-focused interventions to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed. The first review that took place on this topic focused on interventions evaluated between 1994 and 1998 (Hanisch 1999). More recently a meta-analysis (Wanberg 2012) was published on this topic and therefore repeating this process was not warranted. A meta-analysis is a quantitative aggregation of data across individual studies on a similar topic. This combination of individual studies increases the overall sample size and allows for the generation of new hypotheses; thus the power and precision of findings are greatly improved (Abate 2006; Green *et al* 2011). A narrative review approach will instead allow for consideration of unemployment interventions with greater attention to discussing the theories guiding interventions, the delivery methods, professionals involved and the included intervention elements rather than focusing on outcomes and results alone (Slavin 1995).

Search Strategy

A review of the literature was undertaken using the UL electronic library. To ensure broad coverage of the literature a comprehensive search of the following databases was employed: CINAHL, Psychinfo, Cochrane, AMED, Medline, OT seeker, using the following key words in various combinations: *'employment', 'labour force', 'unemployment', 'job loss', 're-employment', 'return to work', 'interventions', 'measures countering unemployment', 'groups', 'programmes', 'health promotion', 'out of work'*. References of selected articles were screened for additional relevant publications. Figure 1 below outlines the results of the initial search, the publications identified

through refinement by key words and inclusion criteria and the final publications included in the narrative review.

Figure 1: Publications found at each stage of search process



The author screened 169 abstracts that were deemed potentially relevant to the topic that were identified from the initial search based on key words. Publications were excluded if they did not meet the inclusion criteria which are detailed in figure 2:

- Participants were unemployed
- Participants were available for work
- Unemployment not due to an illness or disability
- Published in a peer reviewed journal
- Intervention aimed to maintaining well-being or return to work or both
- Published in English between 1994-2013
- Intervention targeted unemployed people of all working ages who were well

Following this stage 39 full publications were examined in detail and fourteen studies were deemed applicable to this review. These individual studies reviewed are outlined in Table 1 in the findings section of this paper. This is then followed by a quality appraisal of the interventions found.

Findings

Table 1: Papers yielded in narrative literature review

Author	Type	Sample	Gender/ Age	Results	Cited in Wanberg (2012)	Cited in Hanisch (1999)
Borland and Tseng (2007) Australia	Quasi experimental matching approach Job Seekers Diary (JSD) programme	JSD programme participants - 10% sample of LDS job seekers payment recipients (July 1997 - June 1998)	Experimental (67% male, 33% female) Control (69% male, 31% female) Age Range = (18 – 49)	Increase in percentage off payment spells at three months (+6.6%) and at six months (+6.4%)	Yes	No
Breninkmeijer and Blonk (2011) The Netherlands	Randomised Control Trial Examining the effectiveness of the JOBS programme	N = 118 Experimental (n = 47), Voucher (n = 33), Control (n = 38)	Gender = Male (30%), Female (70%). Age Range = 19-54	In first six months: no significant increase in job search behaviour; significant increase (p<0.05) in job search efficacy; marginally significant difference in employment status	No	No
Joseph and Greenberg (2001) USA	Randomised experimental study Career Transition programme for laid off professionals	N = 52 Control (n = 26), Experimental (n = 26)	Gender = Male (60%), female (40%) Age Range = 29-64	Re-employment rate in the career transition programme group more than five times that of the control group at two month follow up	Yes	No
Maysent and Spera (1995) USA	Randomised Control Trial Stress Management	N = 113 Experimental (n = 76), Control (n = 37)	Treatment group (70 male, 6 female) Control (33 male, 4 female) Age range = 27-67	Treatment group showed lower levels of stress and higher maintenance of ability to use coping resources post intervention.	No	Yes

Rife and Belcher (1994) USA	Experimental pre-post control group design Job Club Intervention	N = 42 Experimental (n = 26), Control (n = 26)	All participants > 50 years of age	65% of experimental group obtained new jobs 27% of control group obtained new jobs following participation	No	Yes
Rose et al (2012) Australia	Pre-test post-test design Vocationally orientated CBT group training programme	N = 27	Gender = Male (78%), female (22%) Age Range = 18-64	Level of optimism improved post-training (p <0.01) and at 12 weeks (p <0.01); improved attitude to work at 12 weeks (p <0.05); 63% more involved in paid work at follow up	No	No
Spera et al (1994) USA	Randomised Control Trial Disclosive Writing	N = 63 Control (n = 21), Experimental (n = 20), Did not participate in writing aspect (n = 22)	Gender = Male (62), female (1) Age Range = 40-68	Experimental group more likely to gain employment following participation in the programme (p = 0.018)	No	Yes
Van Hooft and Noordzij (2009) The Netherlands	Randomised Control Trial Learning goal orientation	N = 109 LGO (n = 35), Performance goal orientation (n = 32), Control (n = 42)	Gender = Male (48%), female (52%) Mean Age = 45.9	Goal setting participants demonstrated more job search behaviours. Also significantly more likely to become reemployed eight months following participation (p <0.05)	Yes	No
Vinokur et al (1995) USA	Randomised Control Trial JOBS II programme	N = 1801. Experimental (n = 1249, 671 participated), Control (n = 552)	Gender = Male (45%), female (55%) Median age = 34.7 years	Primarily benefited re-employment (p = 0.05) and lower distress symptoms (p = 0.01)	Yes	No

Vinokur et al (2000) USA	Two year follow up of JOBS programme	N = 1801 Experimental (n = 1249, 671 participated), Control (n = 552)	Gender = Male (45%), female (55%) Median age = 34.7 years	Significant impact on all re-employment outcomes except wage rate (p <0.01)	Yes	No
Vuori et al (2002) Finland	Randomised Control Trial. The 'Työhön' Programme	N = 1230 Experimental (n = 629), Control (n = 632)	Gender = Male (22%), female (78%) Age Range = 18 – 61	Difference between groups in labour market status not significant. Psychological distress decreased significantly in experimental more than the control group (p <0.05)	Yes	No
Vuori and Silvonen (2005) Finland	Two year follow up of the 'Työhön' Programme	N = 1230 Experimental (n = 629), Control (n = 632)	Gender = Male (22%), female (78%) Age Range = 18 – 61	No statistically significant results but participants more engaged in labour than non-participants	Yes	No
Yanar et al (2009) Turkey	Randomised Control Trial Verbal Self Guidance Study	N = 55 Experimental (n = 27), Placebo (n = 15), Control (n = 13)	Gender = Female (100%) Mean age = 48 years	Significant increase in self-efficacy following participation (p <0.05)	Yes	No

Based on a meta-analysis Wanberg (2012) concluded that research conducted on interventions for individuals to find work and maintain well-being has been sparse. This paper reiterates the availability of high quality research, with 14 articles included in the final review. The primary focus of intervention studies included in this narrative review was on coping and psychological resources of those unemployed and improvement of job search strategy and method. In the following section papers reviewed are synthesised according to the category of intervention and the categories are presented according to the timeline by year that they were initially implemented. Nine categories of intervention were identified; JOBS

intervention, Jobs Club, Expressive writing, Stress management, Career Transition programme, Job Seeker Diary (JSD) programme, Verbal Self Guidance, Goal Orientation Theory programme, Vocationally Oriented CBT Group Training programme.

The JOBS Intervention

The JOBS intervention was initially developed in 1984 at the Michigan Prevention Research Centre (Caplan *et al* 1989). According to Hanisch (1999) this programme commanded continued attention and built evidence for its efficacy between 1994 and 1998. It was designed by researchers to prevent deterioration in mental health and to promote high quality re-employment. The JOBS II programme was developed from the initial version and evaluated in a Randomised Control Trial (Vinokur *et al* 1995). The intervention consisted of teaching strategies to find positions, identifying skills, enhance job search skills, self-esteem, sense of control, self-efficacy, practising for interviews and inoculation against setbacks. Participants were screened from four offices of Michigan Employment Security Commission and had all been less than 13 weeks unemployed. The average age was 36.2 years and 45% of the samples were male. The intervention consisted of five, four hour group morning sessions run over the course of a week. Training was implemented by three pairs of male and female co-trainers who were social workers, educational counsellors and unemployed high school teachers. Primary results indicated that re-employment was significantly higher in the experimental versus the control group ($p = 0.05$). Also a significant result ($p = 0.01$) demonstrated lower distress symptoms in the high risk experimental group than in the control group.

Vinokur *et al* (2000) demonstrated that on a two year follow up the experimental participants in the JOBS programme had significantly higher levels of employment ($p = 0.01$) and worked significantly more hours a week ($p = 0.01$) but there was no significant impact on the participants wage rate. Vuori *et al* (2002) demonstrated the effectiveness of the JOBS programme

outside of the US, in Finland, with the 'Työhön Programme'. A heterogeneous sample of the Finish unemployed population was recruited, with a ten month average length of unemployment. Five four hour group morning sessions took place over a week. The job search training involved workshops based on theories of active learning process, social modelling, gradual exposure to acquiring skills, practice through role playing and preparedness against setbacks. There were again three pairs of male and female co-trainers from the unemployed population. Findings reported that the labour market status difference between the control and experimental groups was not significant. However, psychological distress decreased significantly in the experimental group ($p < 0.05$). There was also significant evidence for those reemployed in stable jobs ($p = 0.05$). The positive effects were maintained on a two year follow up as demonstrated by Vuori and Silvonen (2005). Although the results were not statistically significant, participants were found to be more engaged in labour than non-participants. Most recently in 2011, Brenninkmeijer and Blonk conducted a randomised control trial on the effectiveness of the JOBS programme in the Netherlands. 47 participants in the experimental JOBS programme attended five half day classes in one week. In the employment voucher intervention, 33 participants engaged in individual consults every two weeks. Finally, 38 participants in the control group had two appointments with a social welfare employee, with a period of six months in between. In the first six months there was no recorded significant increase in job search behaviour. However, a significant increase ($p < 0.05$) in job search efficacy and a marginally significant difference in employment status occurred. After 12 months, 28% of the experimental group had found a job compared with 15% of the control participants. The authors concluded that their study added the evidence for the effectiveness of the JOBS programme with long term unemployed people as well as short term unemployed people and hypothesised that participation in the programme may result in beneficial physical and mental health consequences and also in positive behavioural changes.

In conclusion, the evidence demonstrates that the JOBS programme, evaluated in both the USA and Europe, is significantly effective in improving employment status and in lowering symptoms of distress. In two cases these results have maintained over a two year period, strengthening the effectiveness of the programme.

The Jobs Club

Rife and Belcher (1994) reported the findings of a Randomised Control Trial of the Jobs Club which is an intervention strategy that focuses on helping people over the age of fifty seek re-employment. This programme took a behavioural approach and was conducted by social workers to teach and reinforce job search skills and competence in a supportive group environment. The group met for four hours daily over two weeks, every month, over a four month period. In evaluating the effectiveness of the programme on re-employment and depression it was found to be more effective than traditional job search assistance strategies in helping participants obtain employment (new jobs were obtained by 65% of the experimental group and 27% of the control group) with additional reports of significantly lower depression in the experimental group than in the control group. The authors concluded that focusing specifically on challenging clients' perceptions of their barriers to unemployment is the best way of improving the impact of job finding clubs (Rife and Belcher 1994).

Expressive writing

A Randomised Control Trial (Spera *et al* 1994) examined the effect of writing activity on re-employment and coping with job loss. Professionals were voluntary recruited from an outplacement firm after a layoff from a single company and were unemployed for at least five months (n = 41) and were randomly assigned to the control group (n = 21) or the experimental group (n = 20). A third group who did not sign up for the writing phase were included as non-writing controls (n = 22). All participants were

required to write for twenty minutes each day, for five consecutive days and a self-report questionnaire was filled out each day following the session. Experimental participants were required to write about deep thoughts and feelings concerning their job loss and how their lives had been affected by this event. Those in the control group wrote about mundane thoughts on plans for the day and their activities in job search. Experimental participants were more likely to gain full-time employment than either of the control groups ($p = 0.018$) with findings that 68%, 48%, and 27% of the individuals in the experimental, writing controls, and non-writing controls, respectively, gained employment. There was no reported significant difference between the groups on level of job search activities in terms of making contacts, sending letters sent, or calls received. The authors suggest in their discussion that dealing with the psychological issues of unemployment such as in this case, writing about the experience of job loss, is important to re-employment and should be done prior to extensive job search strategies.

Stress management

In a Randomised Control Trial reported by Maysent and Spera (1995) an intervention was evaluated that focused on managing stress during the job search process through effectively using coping resources and to challenge perceptions of stress. The stress management programme was developed for clients of an outplacement firm, white collar workers holding mid and upper level management positions. This programme involved training, counselling, and coaching in various stress management strategies and techniques. Participants took part in two, three hours workshops over the space of a week, with the group sizes ranging from three to twelve participants. The control group ($n=37$) were randomly selected from the outplacement client population and the experimental group ($n=76$) were made up of past professionals. Participants from both groups were initially experiencing similar levels of stress but gradually the control groups stress levels rose as the experimental groups stress levels remained the same.

The treatment group was also better able to maintain its ability to use effective coping resources to challenge their perceptions of stress and strain in comparison to the control group. The authors concluded that effective use of coping resources to challenge perceptions of stress and also having a group forum to share personal frustrations during the job search process was beneficial (Maysent and Spera 1995).

Career Transition Programme (Imagery programme)

An RCT of a career transition programme for laid off professionals was evaluated by Joseph and Greenberg (2001). The programme was delivered through a medium of self-generated imagery and mental rehearsal and exploration of the following: exploring thoughts and emotions around job loss; construction of a valued and successful possible self; mental rehearsal of a competent performance at a job and job acquisition; construction of psychological and spiritual growth opportunities. Fifty two people were equally divided to the control and experimental group. The findings indicated that the re-employment rate in the career transition programme group was more than five times that of the control group at a two month follow up, with three quarters of participants being reemployed after four months. The study establishes evidence of an imagery programme in aiding unemployed individuals deal effectively with a major life stressor.

Job Seeker Diary (JSD) program

Using a quasi-experimental matching approach, Borland and Tseng (2007) conducted research on the success of the Job Seeker Diary (JSD) programme in Australia between 1997 and 1998, as a government initiative to promote re-employment. Participants in the intervention were job seekers who were required to apply for a specified number of jobs, approximately eight jobs every two weeks, and record the application details in a diary. The Longitudinal Administrative Data Set (LDS) unemployed payment file was used as a population for the study, which was a 10% random sample of unemployed payment recipients. The results

showed that an increase occurred in the percentage of participants off unemployed payment at three months (+6.6%) and at six months (+6.4%)

Verbal Self Guidance

A trial of verbal self-guidance (Yanar *et al* 2009) aimed to enhance perceptions of self-confidence and efficacy, through coaching to reverse negative self-statements. Training took place in four 90 minute sessions over four consecutive days. The study involved three groups; the experimental group (n = 27), the placebo group that were not trained in verbal self-guidance (n = 15) and the control group that did not receive training of any kind (n = 13). The programme involved discussion on being unemployed, environment barriers and how negative statements effected job searching. Participants were encouraged to be aware of negative statements and develop positive statements. Exploration then took place of job search channels and strategies as well as rehearsal of the interview process. The study significantly increased ($p < 0.01$) the self-efficacy of unemployed Turkish women, enabling them to overcome discrimination and barriers found in society in relation to finding employment. Additionally, self-efficacy at the end of the training programme correlated significantly with active job search behaviour ($p < .001$) assessed at a six month follow up.

Goal Orientation Theory

Learning goal orientation is a concept that Van Hooft and Noordzij (2009) aimed to incorporate as a job search intervention, focusing on the person being more able to cope with challenges and so to become more easily reemployed. In a Randomised Control Trial, participants were separated into a learning goal orientation (LGO) group (n = 35), performance goal orientation (PGO) group (n = 32) and a control group (n = 42). All workshops were delivered by the researcher, G. Noordzij. The LGO workshop involved exploring past job search experiences and gaining information about learning goals in job seeking where they were invited to

practice with setting learning goals. Feedback was given on goals, obstacles were identified and participants were encouraged on methods to improve job search skills. The PGO group did not focus on learning but solely on positive experiences and positive feedback. The control group solely focused on exploration of their personalities. Participants of the LGO group demonstrated more job search behaviours and were also significantly more likely to become reemployed eight months following participation ($p < 0.05$).

Vocationally Oriented CBT Group Training program

A pilot study with a pre/post-test design took place to examine the effects of a Vocationally Oriented CBT Group Training programme on psychological health and vocational outcomes among a group of very long term unemployed in Australia (Rose *et al* 2012). The programme was delivered by registered psychologists in four sessions of four hours each. The programme employed strategies of practical activities, peer learning and facilitated in-depth discussion of job seeking experiences. The aim was to provide participants with strategies to manage thoughts, feelings and behaviours related to unemployment and to develop new perspectives and skills associated with successful re-employment. Significant statistical evidence demonstrated that optimism improved immediately at post-training testing ($p < 0.01$) and maintained high twelve weeks following the programme ($p < 0.01$). Optimism was an important characteristic to evaluate as it may stimulate improvement in other areas of health and work functioning (Rose *et al* 2012). There was also an improved attitude to work at 12 weeks ($p < 0.05$) and 63% more involved in paid work at follow up. The authors concluded that such programmes must be complimented with broader labour market policy in regards to unemployment.

Discussion

Overall, the expanse and quality of research into interventions for unemployed individuals has been found to be relatively sparse and inadequate, despite the well-documented impact of unemployment on health. Regardless, a number of elements of interventions for job seekers, that were successful, were highlighted through the interventions explored in this literature review. Wanbergs' meta-analysis (2012) emphasised the necessity of the group forum, a self-efficacy and coping methods focus, emphasis on job search strategies and social cognitive theory. This narrative review reiterates such an emphasis and also adds further programme elements that were found to be essential. Six interventions provided statistically significant evidence to support a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approach that included a component of the following: stress management; self-esteem; self-efficacy; personal control; preparedness against set-backs; thought management; coping resources (Borland and Tseng 2007; Brenninkmeijer and Blonk 2011; Joseph and Greenberg 2001; Maysent and Spera 1995; Rose *et al* 2012; Spera *et al* 1994; Vinokur *et al* 1995; Vuori *et al* 2002; Yanar *et al* 2009). Spera *et al* (1994) emphasised that it is necessary to deal with psychological issues of unemployment before commencing a job search. The JOBS programme demonstrated the benefits of active learning of job search skills and this behavioural element was also an essential component in three other studies, focusing on interview skills, job search efficacy and goal setting (Borland and Tseng 2007; Rife and Belcher 1994; Van Hooft and Noordzij 2009).

Unemployed people have clearly established needs. A meta-analysis by McKee Ryan *et al* (2005), a best evidence synthesis review by Waddell and Burton (2006) and more recently a meta-analysis by Wanberg (2012)

illustrates that unemployment negatively impacts on psychological and physical well-being. The studies described in this literature review reiterate the negative effects of unemployment through demonstration of how interventions significantly improved or alleviated these effects in comparison to control groups. Studies have found a greater incidence among the unemployed of adverse psychological symptoms of depression, anxiety, distress and decreased self-esteem (Bolton and Oatley 1987; Heubeck *et al* 1995; Linn *et al* 1985; Waters and Moore 2002). Decreased levels of stress and distress were reported following participation in the stress management programme and also the JOBS programme (Brenninkmeijer and Blonk 2011; Maysent and Spera 1995; Vinokur *et al* 1995; Vuori *et al* 2002). Brenninkmeijer and Blonk (2011) concluded that participation in the JOBS programme may result in beneficial physical and mental health consequences and also in positive behavioural changes. Correspondingly, a significant improvement in self-efficacy occurred following participation in a Verbal Self-guidance programme (Yanar *et al* 2009) and a significant increase in optimism and positive attitude towards work occurred for participants of the Vocationally Oriented CBT Group Training programme (Rose *et al* 2012). In addition to psychological improvements, five programmes demonstrated an improved employment rate following participation in the Disclosive Writing programme, the Job Club intervention, the JOBS programme, the Career Transition programme, Learning Goal Orientation programme and the Vocationally Oriented CBT Group Training programme. Furthermore, Borland and Tseng (2007) found that participation in the Job Seekers Diary programme reduced for participants, the receipt of unemployment payments. Although the evidence reviewed is not conclusive, this review indicates that a number of interventions have been developed to successfully combat some of the deleterious effects of unemployment.

Unemployed people are particularly vulnerable to occupational deprivation in addition to detrimental health yet it is found that many health-related services do not address occupational needs (Bassett and Lloyd 2000). Occupational deprivation is defined as being unable to participate in meaningful occupations due to external circumstances that are beyond a persons' control (Whiteford 2000; Wilcock 1998) which leads to the possibility of developing larger health and social problems (Scaffa *et al* 2008). Correspondingly, unemployed people engage in solitary leisure activities more so than meaningful and social leisure activities and so have lower psychological well-being due to poor time use (Scanlon *et al* 2011; Waters and Moore 2002; Winefield *et al* 1992). Occupational Therapists understand the disruption and devastating consequences that the unemployment experience has on daily routines and through specific education and training, have the appropriate skills to collaborate with unemployed populations to promote well-being during unemployment (AOTA 2009; Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002). The occupation of work was a focus of all interventions found in this review; however, time use and a balanced routine were not explicitly addressed. Scanlon *et al* (2011) concluded that to effectively provide services to the unemployed population, a key focus of intervention must be the development of more meaningful patterns of time and exploration of activities that the individual considers meaningful and valuable. Returning to the occupation of work has been a key focus throughout all studies found in this review. An Occupational Therapy approach to intervention would particularly enhance the targeting of meaningful engagement in occupation and time use issues.

Occupational Therapy has a long history of addressing work within therapy. Research has been conducted on the necessity and success of vocational rehabilitation with various populations, for example, with school children, Musculoskeletal injuries, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's, Mental Health, Autism and with homeless people (Benharoch and Wiseman 2004; Cahill *et al* 2009; Capo 2001; Henry 2005; Joss 2002; Munoz *et al* 2006; Townsend 2008). McFeely (2012) responded to the report 'Health at Work

– An Independent Review of Sickness Absence’ (Black and Frost 2011) and suggests that the OT profession is instead well placed in this field, ‘...few predicate their profession on work so centrally as the Occupational Therapy profession has done traditionally. The clue is in our title’ (McFeely 2012; p.345).

In a statement on the promotion of health and prevention of disease and disability, Brownson and Scaffa (2001) noted that Occupational Therapists are in a crucial position to recognize occupational health problems, unemployment given as an example, and to offer interventions to alleviate them. ‘Occupational Therapy has a unique role in health promotion and disease/disability prevention due to its focus on the health effects of purposeful, productive, and meaningful occupation’ (Brownson and Scaffa 2001; p.659). Three critical roles for Occupational Therapy in this area are the promotion of healthy lifestyles, emphasis of occupation and provision of intervention (Scaffa *et al* 2008). We have an obligation and a responsibility to advocate for disease prevention through health promotion, education and encouraging the awareness of meaningful occupation (Barnes *et al* 2008; Schmid *et al* 2008). This obligation implies a responsibility to ensure that all health diminishing experiences are addressed (Scanlon *et al* 2011). The community setting is a common area of practice and evidence specifically supports the success of Occupational Therapy intervention targeting the well population through primary health promotion (Hoffman 2010; Wilson *et al* 2012). This has been particularly demonstrated in the case of health Promotion with older individuals. ‘Lifestyle redesign’ is a trademarked occupational science approach to health promotion and has been successfully implemented with various populations (Clark *et al* 1997; Mountain *et al* 2008; Snyder *et al* 1998). The largest randomised control trial in Occupational Therapy demonstrated that a lifestyle redesign intervention with well elderly people had significant positive effects on physical and mental health, occupational functioning and life satisfaction (Clark *et al* 1997). This method of health promotion would directly benefit

unemployed people, particularly in relation to achieving similar results in the achievement of greater insight into their occupations and identifying how to bring about lasting changes to their own life situation (Jackson *et al* 1998; McLoughlin *et al* 1996).

Limitations

The recent publication of a meta-analysis (Wanberg 2012) meant that repetition of this process was not warranted. The nature of a narrative review according to Slavin (1995) will inevitably involve encountering key study limitations. Reviewer bias in the selection of studies to be included may have occurred in this review as the methodological approach is not as rigorous as a meta-analysis or systematic review. However, the narrative review approach is discursive in nature and allowed for a quality appraisal of each study and exploration of the methods of delivery and essential intervention elements included, rather than focusing on outcomes and results alone. Also a systematic method for deciding the significance of each piece of evidence was not included. The author attempted to enhance the validity of this review through the specification of a search strategy as outlined in the methodology. Following an initial search using specified key words, abstracts were reviewed and excluded or included based on key inclusion criteria. This was then followed by detailed examination of each publication before finalising the studies that were included in the review. Interventions included in this review took place in a variety of settings across different countries. The environment and context in which occupational engagement occurs is shaped by culture (Kielhofner 2002). Cultural differences as well as varying social policies and legislative approaches to unemployment may have influenced the findings and also may make generalisation difficult. This includes government policy, social attitude to unemployment and the opportunities and supports available to unemployed people.

Recommendations

It is apparent from this review that evidence supports a number of programme elements that should be considered in the design and development of future interventions with the unemployed population. Cognitive behavioural therapy interventions addressing; stress management, self-efficacy, personal control, thought control and preparedness against set-backs are essential. It appears that the implementation of cognitive behavioural interventions prior to job search skill development would be more efficient. Secondly it is essential to develop job search skills that include interview skills, search strategies and engagement in goal setting. Thirdly, the significant positive impact of social resources when transitioning to unemployment and the coping resources available to a person, are a recommended area to focus on during intervention. Finally the group forum forms an essential component of a successful programme.

In light of Occupational Therapy theory and what is known about the unemployment experience, an Occupational Therapy approach to intervention with a focus on time use and routines and meaningful engagement would be justified to develop and to test for efficacy. This could be achieved through the development and evaluation of a programme for unemployed people delivered by Occupational Therapists. Occupational Therapists have the appropriate skills to focus on cognitive behavioural elements, behavioural change in terms of job search skills, identification of coping resources and the analysis of occupation and time use. The profession also has invaluable experience of group facilitation and health promotion in the community.

Unemployed people clearly have many needs and being unemployed long-term will potentially lead to detrimental effects on physical, mental and occupational well-being. Overall, continued research on interventions for

this population is urgently required as the current evidence base is insufficient.

Conclusion

Unemployment is a growing global issue the detrimental effects of which are well documented throughout health and social science literature. It has been identified that a gap exists where interventions are concerned, that target return to work and maintenance of health and well-being whilst unemployed. This narrative review aimed to generate a qualitative synthesis of current research on these interventions. Provided is an insight into the best evidence that exists on the topic and a description of their implementation, findings and overall recommendations for future research. Overall it is recommended that continued research is imperative.

It emerged that a focus on Cognitive Behavioural therapy, skill development and coping resources in the format of a group forum form the basis of a successful intervention. Also to be considered is the associated importance of meaningful engagement in occupation and the impact of time use and daily routines. Therefore, an opportunity exists for Occupational Therapy to enhance this pertinent area of research through possessing the required skills and experience to successfully implement such interventions. The profession should be focusing on the extension of traditional practice, on the potential consumer of Occupational Therapy services and on the taking of preventative measures in relation to community health and well-being. As Mackey (2007) stated, we need to open a space for innovation and creativity and become the flexible, market orientated, lifelong learners we are expected to be. Increasing our understanding of the unemployed population is a critical move forward.

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Paper II:

‘Gaining a holistic
perspective on graduate
unemployment through
application of the Kawa
(River) model’

Abstract

Background: Graduate unemployment is a significant social problem in Ireland and across Europe. Primarily quantitative methodologies have dominated the expansive research base on unemployment, clearly demonstrating the deleterious effects of unemployment on physical and mental health.

Method: This paper aims to qualitatively explore the graduate unemployment experience through the use of the Kawa (River) model. This Occupational Therapy model is a natural and holistic model where the concept of a river is used as a metaphor of one's life journey or flow. This study employed a qualitative research approach through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with eleven participants. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach availing of deductive measures.

Results: The themes that emerged from the data are based on the four concepts of the Kawa (River) model. Overall participants reported blockage and uncertainty in their life flow. The rocks impeding life flow included finance, a disrupted routine, and an increase in stress and negative thinking. Family, friends and personal characteristic were identified as resources that form driftwood in the rivers of these graduates. Finally, from the recession to supports in the community, the environment had multi-faceted influence on the participants. A rich description of graduate unemployment thus emerged, demonstrating that this population is vulnerable to detrimental health and occupational deprivation.

Conclusion: The findings of this study illustrate the experience of graduate unemployment and suggest a potential focus for intervention with the unemployed graduate population.

Key Words: Qualitative research, Consequences of unemployment, Occupational Therapy, Graduate unemployment, The Kawa (River) model.

Introduction

Unemployment is a significant social problem in Ireland and across Europe. The standardised unemployment rate has dramatically increased in the past six years, currently standing at 13.3% as of September 2013 (Central Statistics Office 2013). This statistic has decreased in the past two years from 14.7% in 2011. However, there are factors to be taken into consideration other than an emergence from the recession. There has been an increase in those in part-time jobs and there is a substantial outflow of people emigrating, which was accountable for 87,100 people leaving Ireland in 2012 (Behan *et al* 2012). It impacts on a significant number of people in our society across the social gradient. Irish third level graduates, the participants of this study, comprised 23% of those unemployed at the end of 2012 (Behan *et al* 2013). This is despite the fact that Ireland has the highest level in the European Union of 25 to 34 year olds that have completed third level education, and so the lack of advancement from education to work is a serious concern (Donnelly 2013). 67% of emigrants have a third level education of three years or more thus suggesting that graduates are over-represented in the population of those emigrating (Glynn *et al* 2013).

The Experience of Unemployment

A significant level of high quality evidence has demonstrated the negative effects of unemployment on physical and mental health and most recently has been illustrated in a meta-analysis (Wanberg 2012). In the meta-analysis, psychological consequences of unemployment were identified as a prime focus of research with 15 of 18 articles published after 2000 determining a relationship between unemployment and suicide (Wanberg 2012). An association was identified with stress related consequences that

include anxiety, depression, distress and lowered self-esteem (Bolton and Oatley 1987; Heubeck *et al* 1995; Linn *et al* 1985; Waters and Moore 2002). Financial strain has shown to be a powerful predictor of psychological distress; those experiencing significant financial difficulties are more at risk of developing stress related symptoms (Price *et al* 2002; Rowley and Feather 1987; Vuori and Silvonen 2005). A best evidence synthesis review (Waddell and Burton 2006) concluded that a strong association exists between worklessness and poorer general physical health, long standing illnesses and morbidity. Unemployment may also lead to diminished social status and disturbed social role patterns (Audhoe *et al* 2010) as unemployment is associated with a disruption to routine and poor time use due to the engagement in solitary leisure activities more so than meaningful and social leisure activities (Burda and Hammermesh 2009; Scanlon *et al* 2011; Waters and Moore 2002; Winefield *et al* 1992). Diminished social contact can be detrimental to health, as social support is linked to higher levels of psychological well-being (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005). Also in relation to the social context is the impact of the stigma of unemployment, which reflects the negative social and personal image of being in this social situation (Kulik 2000). Blau *et al* (2013) demonstrated in a cross section self-report study, that participants experienced partially significant high levels of stigma which had a negative relationship with job searching, problem focused coping and lower networking comfort.

Despite the high level of research clearly identifying the effects of unemployment on health, it is primarily quantitative methodologies that have dominated the research base (Blustein *et al* 2013; Pernice 1996). Qualitative studies are still lacking yet a qualitative approach would successfully explore the subjective meanings individuals attribute to the unemployment experience and explore how this experience is socially constructed, complex, and unique (Christiansen and Townsend 2011; Miller and Brewer 2003). Johnson and Jackson (2012) qualitatively evaluated managers' experience of transition to unemployment in the UK. The authors supported that career transition support, financial compensation

and social resources protected the study participants from psychological strain on becoming unemployed. Also, a focus on enhancing personal control and regulating emotions enabled this protection. Blustein (2013) conducted a narrative inquiry in the USA and provided a detailed description of the diverse way in which people understand and cope with unemployment and job loss, reaffirming the complex role that work plays in people lives. Unemployment can be understood as occurring along a continuum; for some the loss of a job can create a major life transforming crisis and for others it evokes multi-faceted experiences such as seeing the opportunity for growth. Blustein (2013) also discusses the themes of contextual factors, social resources and coping resources, and how they influence the unemployment experience. At a macro level, lack of government support and inadequate political leadership for example, was reported to influence participants in constricting their access to dignified work (Blustein *et al* 2013). In contrast to quantitative studies, the rich description presented in these qualitative studies illuminates the lived experience of unemployment and relevant contextual factors.

Unemployed graduates

Contributing to society through work is a highly valued occupation (Yerxa 1998) that is not solely an issue related to health but is also intertwined with society and culture. The literature is inconclusive in terms of the effect of unemployment on graduates and two opposing hypothesis have found support (Cassidy 1994; Feather and Bond 1983; Kaufman 1982; Schaufeli and Van Yperen 1992). On one hand graduates who are unemployed are more likely to obtain their identity or self-concept from their work and so are more prone to identity loss. On the other hand, the literature would also describe graduates as having more access to coping resources than other unemployed populations to cope with the consequences of unemployment. A longitudinal study identified a relationship between

unemployment and psychological distress of college graduates and also that less distressed long term unemployed graduates were more likely to find a job (Schaufeli and Van Yperen 1992). Cassidy (1994) compared the psychological distress levels of employed and unemployed graduates and found that the employed were worse off than the unemployed overall. Interestingly, it was concluded that being unemployed would be psychologically more ideal for a graduate than being in a job that does not match their aspirations or skill level, due to the demoralising experience of an unsatisfactory position. Cassidy and Wright (2008) conducted a longitudinal, quasi-experimental, survey design to assess the psychological factors involved in the employment status of recent graduates. The author demonstrated that graduates are not exempt from the effects of unemployment as deleterious consequences were found to have occurred on psychological health, physical health, social support, optimism and achievement motivation.

Evidenced Based Practice

Unemployed graduates are vulnerable to occupational deprivation (Wilcock 1998), which is defined as being unable to participate in meaningful occupations due to external circumstances that are beyond a persons' control. Occupational Therapists have a deep understanding of this concept, the challenges to occupational performance and of the disruption and devastating consequences that circumstances of occupational deprivation, such as the unemployment experience, can have on daily routines; it is a risk factor for health problems that may result from or lead to the development of other risk factors. This in turn can result in larger health and social problems (Scaffa *et al* 2008). Krefling (1985) found that throughout history, Occupational Therapy has made a major contribution to healthcare through a focus on enabling people to work or return to work. Occupational Therapists are well placed to collaborate with

unemployed populations to promote well-being during unemployment (AOTA 2009; Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002). Despite this, to date, little is published in Occupational Therapy about the experiences of people who are unemployed and little evidence exists for the efficacy of Occupational Therapy in intervening with unemployed people.

Evidence-based practice is widely accepted as essential in Occupational Therapy; one quarter of Slagle lectures over the past fifteen years focus on the need for continued research in Occupational Therapy, now and in the future (Cole and Tufano 2008). The profession applies theories to how practice is approached, and bases these approaches on evidence, in order for therapists to justify what they do and how they do it (Holm 2000); they are needed to conceptualise a persons' difficulties, shape intervention and evaluate outcomes (Duncan 2011). The use of theory in Occupational Therapy is not static. Paradigm shifts have occurred in Occupational Therapy since its foundation and these paradigms represent the professions consensus on its core and fundamental beliefs. In the 1940's a shift occurred from an occupational paradigm to a mechanistic medical model approach and again back to the centrality of occupation and a focus on the whole person as the 1980's approached (Duncan 2011), which has led to the production in the 1990's of the majority of theoretical models used in practice today.

Cole and Tufano (2008) highlighted the significance of accounting for the contexts or environments in which occupational engagement takes place and how the dynamics of these environments effect engagement. Kielhofner (2002) defines the environment as the physical and social features in which a person does something that are shaped by culture. It provides opportunities, resources, demands and constraints. In an exploration of the how engagement in occupation is a human right, as it is fundamental to well-being, Hammell and Iwama (2012) identify that many people have little choice, control or opportunity to exercise will over their own life situations. It is thus essential to recognise and value that people are inseparable from the environment and culture surrounding them

(Hammell and Iwama 2012). Occupational Therapy is a client-centered health profession concerned with promoting health and well-being through occupation (WFOT 2012). To ensure this aim is achieved it is important to be aware of the influence of culture on Occupational Therapy practice. Promotion of healthy living, occupational justice and healthy communities should take place with respect for cross cultural issues and concerns (Scaffa *et al* 2008), as without this consideration, the profession may become oppressive and counterproductive (Chiang and Carlson 2003; Gray and McPherson 2005; Iwama 2003). These strategies include identifying therapy processes and outcomes that are relevant and meaningful to a person's culture, home and community (Iwama 2003). Conceptual models in Occupational Therapy at present have been found to be socio-culturally situated in Western society and privilege the norms of this context which in practice, may exclude and disadvantage many (Carmody *et al* 2007; Hammell and Iwama 2012; Iwama *et al* 2009).

The Kawa (River) Model

In 1999, Michael Iwama started a project to assist practising Japanese Occupational Therapists to develop a model of practice that would be responsive and specific to Japanese culture, and so the Kawa (River) model emerged to adequately address the fundamental issue of client's diverse cultures and belief systems (Lim and Iwama 2006). This first non-Western Occupational Therapy model is a natural and holistic model that focuses on the individual as part of the larger whole, inclusive of family, community, socio-cultural, economic and political environments, where the concept of a river is a metaphor of one's life journey (Lim 2008). Since its development its applicability to people beyond Asian society has been established (Lim and Iwama 2011). It focuses on a persons' dynamic with their unique surrounding contexts, which creates particular conditions in which a particular occupation or action takes place and thus has a significant

influence in determining ones state of being (Iwama 2006). The river is a metaphor for a person’s life. Life is like a river and the aim of Occupational Therapy is to enhance life flow through understanding the concepts that form the model, which are detailed as follows in table below:

Table 1: The four concepts of the Kawa (River) Model

<i>Rocks (Iwa)</i>	Life circumstances or problems that are considered to impede ones’ life flow.
<i>Driftwood (Ryuboku)</i>	Personal attributes and resources that can both positively and negatively influence life flow.
<i>Riverbed (Torimaki)</i>	The clients’ environment such as the social, physical and institutional contexts; influences life flow both positively and negatively.
<i>Life flow (Mizu)</i>	The river is a metaphor representing life. This model takes a cross section of the river at a particular moment in time, taking into account where the river was born, its journey so far and hopes for its destination.
<i>Spaces (Sukima)</i>	Spaces through which life flows and where occupation exists; an important focus for Occupational Therapy.

The Kawa (River) model seeks to empower the client as it *‘encourages exploration, debate and discussion, and does not prescribe a fixed and predominant view or way of understanding the situation in hand’* (Lim and Iwama 2006; p.173). Although limited literature is available due to the youth of this model, it has been described as a beneficial tool throughout available research.

Carmody *et al* (2007) conducted a qualitative pilot study on the effectiveness of the model in an Irish context, when guiding intervention with two clients with Multiple Sclerosis. It was found that the model was useful and effective in facilitating an occupation-based and client-centered Occupational Therapy process that allowed participants to evaluate their own lives in relation to context. Challenges of the model identified were Therapist’s preconceptions of the model and participant uncertainty. In 2008, Fieldhouse reported on use of the Kawa (River) model as both a

mental health practitioner and educator. Findings support the metaphor in conceptualising elements of mental health practice and also that the language and imagery are easily comprehensible to students and practitioners. A pilot study (Paxson *et al* 2012) also completed in a mental health setting, found through qualitative inquiry, that the model was easily applicable and increased interaction between client and therapist, while also pushing boundaries on therapeutic practice. The Kawa (River) model's value of both the service user and therapist was again demonstrated in a practice report by Richardson *et al* (2010), as was the value of the model itself as a method of gaining insight into the clients' situation and engaging them in therapy. Most recently Higman (2013) found that the model enabled clients with chronic pain to see their circumstances from a new perspective with the therapist and client both gaining a better view on how to best approach therapy. In a Canadian review of the Kawa (River) model, areas in which it could be strengthened were identified as; amending how occupation and its relationship to belonging are represented and that the 'inner self' is a component that could be included in the river to increase the understanding of belonging for both the client and therapist (Wada 2011). However, the overall emphasis in the literature is that the model is occupation-based, client-centered, easily applicable and promotes client and therapist interaction with each other and the therapy process.

Essentially, the Kawa (River) model moves towards the fundamental concepts of service user empowerment, involvement, cultural appreciation and the clients' personal experience. *'Health may be influenced by discovering or developing new capacities, changing the environment, nurturing ambition, improving performance and modifying mood, all in ways appreciated by one's culture and acceptable to oneself'* (Yerxa 1998; p.414). In order for the profession to remain client-centered we need to be constantly engaging with clients in their perspective and understanding (Sumsion 2004) which implies a need to be culturally sensitive in practice.

Unemployment has detrimental consequences on psychological and physical well-being that are complex and subjective in nature. Unemployed graduates experience these consequences and the statistics available on this population are a concerning social problem. Occupational Therapy is a holistic health care profession concerned with occupational performance and meaningful engagement, that avails of theories and models of practices to guide the process of evidence based practice. The Kawa model in particular, despite its youthfulness, has a number of identified strengths in the facilitation of client-centered therapy with the consideration of the person and context. This paper aims to explore the graduate unemployment experience through the use of the Kawa (River) model.

Methodology

Research Aim

A qualitative research approach was taken in this paper utilising the Kawa (River) model to describe the experience of unemployment, to explore any associated occupational disruption experienced by unemployed graduates and to consider the influence of context.

Research Design

The overall research design was qualitative which was appropriate for this study as the focus was exploratory in nature (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Qualitative research intertwines with Occupational Therapy philosophy in that it is based on the assumption that meanings individuals attribute to experiences are subjective, socially constructed, complex, and unique (Christiansen and Townsend 2011; Miller and Brewer 2003) and thus highlights important concepts to consider in regards to the unemployed population. The strengths of qualitative research also lie in how data is emergent rather than prefigured and is grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall and Rossman 2011). Data was collected via semi-structured interviews and focus groups with eleven participants. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach availing of deductive measures (Crabtree and Miller 1999). This deductive process of analysis was guided by the theoretical constructs of the Kawa (River) model. Thematic analysis is an accessible and theoretically flexible method (Braun and Clark 2006).

Participants

Unemployed graduates were recruited by purposeful sampling to take part in the Work Ready programme, the experience of which is evaluated in a separate strand of research (See page 87). Work Ready is an Occupational Therapy group intervention to support unemployed people return to work and maintain health and well-being while unemployed. The programme included six sessions which were both activity and discussion based with a focus on occupation throughout. Topics covered included CV preparation, interview skills, job search strategies, lifestyle balance and routine and keeping mentally healthy. The programme took place in the Health Science building in the University of Limerick. Participants simultaneously consented to take part in this strand of research focusing on collecting data in relation to their experience of unemployment. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are detailed as follows:

Inclusion - Individuals who are unemployed; who have completed a certificate level/diploma/undergraduate/postgraduate degree from a university/college/institute of technology/community college; who graduated in 2011, 2012, 2013 or will graduate in the year 2013.

Exclusion - Individuals under the age of 18; individuals who had been employed in an area related to their degree for three months or more.

Prior to recruitment ethical approval was obtained from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSREC), University of Limerick. Recruitment spanned across four months in the spring, 2013. Emails were sent to graduates of five third level institutions, posters were placed in Department of Social Protection offices and advertisement was sought through newspapers, radio stations and websites. A detailed recruitment process is outlined on page 97. The first point of contact was the researcher (M. Lynch); all interested participants were provided with a written information sheet (Appendix D). Those who made contact but were not eligible to participate in the Work Ready programme or attend an

interview were provided with a list of resources that they could access. Individuals could participate in the Work Ready programme without participating in the study described here. Informed consent in writing was obtained prior to programme commencement (See Appendix E). Following this stage, eleven people took part in a pre-programme interview. Two Work Ready programmes ran in total, following the pre-programme interviews. Nine interviewees took part in Work Ready; five in group one and four in group two. Seven were male and four were female. All participants were Irish. In table 2 participant demographic information is presented, pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities.

Table 2: Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age Range	Most recent Qualification	Completed pre-programme interview	Completed focus group in session one
<i>Group One</i>				
Aisling	20-25	Graduated with a Bachelor of Science	Yes	No
William	20-25	Graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering	Yes	Yes
Michael	45-55	Graduated with a Masters of Arts	Yes	Yes
Brenda	45-55	Graduated with a Postgraduate degree in Business	Yes	Yes
Eric	25-35	Graduated with a Masters in Science	Yes	Yes
Catherine	45-55	Graduated with a Postgraduate degree in Business	Yes	No
George	20-25	Graduated with a Masters In Arts	Yes	Yes
<i>Group Two</i>				
Patrick	35-45	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Yes	No
Mary	35-45	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Yes	Yes
Stephen	45-55	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Yes	Yes
Connor	25-35	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Yes	Yes

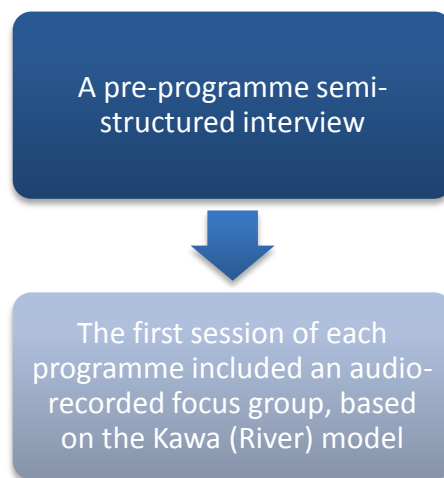
Ethical Considerations

Prior to recruitment ethical approval was obtained from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSREC), University of Limerick. Although the following circumstances did not develop, the

researcher was prepared for the following situations; interview questions may have caused potential discomfort or embarrassment to participants, so the researcher carefully attended to both verbal and non-verbal indicators of dissent; if a participant appeared distressed or uncomfortable the researcher would remind participants that they could choose not to respond to a question and stop participating at any time; if the participant became distraught, counselling services would be recommended (Appendix F). Because all participants would have been involved in group intervention anonymity could not be guaranteed. The need for group members to maintain confidentiality regarding information disclosed by peers was discussed in the first session of each programme prior to the focus group taking place. To protect identities and privacy of participants pseudonyms were assigned and identifiable information was changed when analysing the data, writing up and publishing the research findings. Participants were free to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Data Collection

Data on the unemployed experience was collected via two means for each group: *Figure 1: Two means of data collection*



Pre-programme semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews are recognised as an effective data collection method in gathering rich unique responses about individuals' experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge (French *et al* 2001; Patton 1990). The researchers' aim was to assemble a representation of the interviewee's experience of unemployment since graduation. The interview schedule was also designed to provide information about potential participants in relation to forming focus group questions, forming individual specific goals and to inform a structure of the programme. The interview was guided by questions around a number of themes; occupational performance as a student, occupational performance now, the environment and social supports/networks, job search activity to date, expectations of the programme and goals for the future. A copy of the interview script is located in Appendix G. This script was generated from a comprehensive review of literature on the experience of unemployment and also based on scripts used in previous Work Ready programmes. Eleven pre-programme interviews were conducted in total.

Focus group during session one of Work Ready

Strengths of a focus group lie in the creation of a natural atmosphere, allowing the researcher to explore unanticipated issues that may arise in the discussion and to gain multiple viewpoints on the issue (Letts *et al* 2007; Marshall and Rossman 2011). The aim of the initial focus group was to enhance understanding of the unemployment experience. Both focus groups were approximately sixty minutes in duration and were completed with each group in the second hour of the first session of Work Ready. Prior to its commencement, introductions to the group members and researchers took place through ice-breakers, to increase familiarity among participants. The programme and overview of sessions were also discussed. The focus group was structured on the Kawa (River) model. The researchers gave examples of the four different concepts of the model and

an overall example through a case study of an individual, to demonstrate its concepts. Each participant was then encouraged to individually draw their personal 'river' from their perspective, identifying their own life journey. A flexible script with prompts and questions guiding exploration of each concept was used for each focus group (See Appendix H); it was generated based on a literature review, including a review of studies of the Kawa (River) model and from the in-depth one to one interviews completed with participants prior to commencement of the programme. The researcher of this project facilitated all interviews and the two focus groups while the researchers' supervisor co-facilitated three interviews and co-facilitated one focus group.

Data Analysis

The eleven pre-programme interviews and two focus groups were transcribed in full and entered into QSR NVivo 9© Software Programme (QSR International Pty Ltd 2010). The process of analysis was deductive; where a template pre-existed as a means of organising the data before commencement of in-depth analysis (Crabtree and Miller 1999). The pre-existing template was the theoretical framework of the Kawa (River) model. The model was used to extract data relating to the models core concepts. Four main themes were thus named and defined based on the four core elements of the model. The six stages of thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2006) then took place. The first stage involved the researcher immersing themselves in and becoming familiar with the data through repeated reading and note taking of the transcripts. Secondly, a list of 174 initial codes was generated from the data paying attention to all aspects of the data. The third stage involved searching for themes by condensing codes down into the categories of the Kawa models four concepts, where 41 codes remained. The fourth stage involved reviewing and discussing the codes generated and their validity in order to make identifiable distinctions

between each. In stage five, the four overarching concepts of the Kawa (River) model were defined, determining what aspect of unemployment each encapsulated. Finally, a coherent and logical account of the data was created that reflected the research question.

Trustworthiness

'Trustworthiness in qualitative research is crucial since the primary contribution of qualitative research is to capture and convey the experiences, meanings and events encountered in the field' (Lysack *et al* 2006; p.352). The researcher engaged in a process of reflexivity throughout the study design, data collection and data analysis, to analyse her own roles and attitudes. The researcher maintained a reflexive diary throughout the research process accounting for all interactions with the participants and the data and also reflected on preconceptions that existed prior to beginning data collection. Finlay (2002) refers to this phenomenological process as 'hermeneutic reflection' which refers to being aware and continuously reflecting on the emergence of our own presuppositions and assumptions. Member checking took place through provision of summaries of both the pre-programme interviews and focus groups, which were sent to participants via e-mail within 7-10 days of their occurrence; however no changes were sought by participants. A peer review of the findings took place with the supervisors of this researcher project. The use of the same script for all interviews and focus group involved in data collection aimed to maintain consistency and allow participants the opportunity to explore what they considered significant issues (Minichiello *et al* 2003).

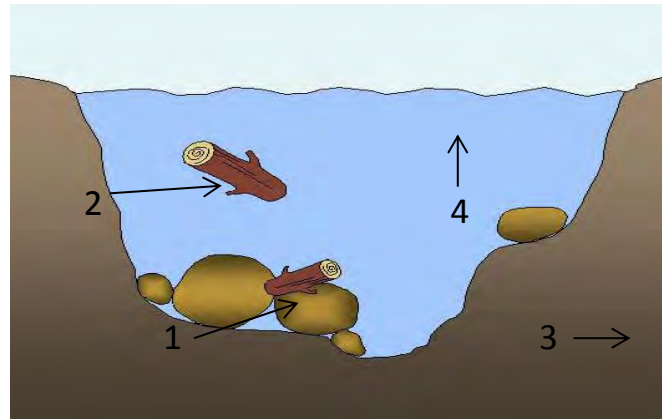
Provided in this paper is a detailed description of the data collection, analysis process and in-depth findings, supported by direct quotes from participants, to increase transferability. Adequate descriptions of the sample and setting will allow for further comparison and investigation with the population in this study. Close monitoring and documentation of all procedures and processes took place. This included all of the data generated within the study, a detailed description of data

collection and analysis, personal notes, reflections, copy of the interview and focus group scripts and an explanation of the research model chosen to shape the study. This also encouraged reflexivity for the researcher. This study is open to being scrutinised and audited; an audit trail functioned as a means of reliability, checking on both the procedures and conclusions of the study (Lysack *et al* 2006).

Findings

The four themes, identified from the Kawa (River) model can be visualised in the figure below (1 = Rocks; 2 = Driftwood; 3 = Riverbed; 4 = Life Flow).

Figure 2: Kawa (River) Model image



Rocks

Rocks in the Kawa (River) model refer to problems or life circumstances impeding life flow. Challenges reported by participants included; loss of structure and routine, financial difficulties, difficulty planning ahead, uncertainty, negative thoughts and negative emotions. All participants reported a negative change in their routines since leaving education and becoming unemployed. Most participants reported decreased engagement in productive and social activities and loss of structure; as Catherine described - *'time is less productive, and I want my time to be more productive'*. Two participants reported that alongside loss of structure, tasks take longer to complete when unemployed.

Michael 'what I have taken like six weeks to do so far, you know you could have done in three days or something like that, or banged it out in a night'

Disruption to daily structure and routine in conjunction with uncertainty about the future and financial difficulties were described as creating difficulties in planning ahead.

George 'if you want to do a course ... say an eight week course well I don't want to pay the money for an eight week course and then you never know next week you'll get a job and not, all that money gone, you can't plan, well I think I can't plan to do things because I just don't know what's going to happen tomorrow'

Another rock described by all was negative thinking and negative emotional experiences that developed on becoming unemployed. It was reported that thinking negatively about their situation and self, included cognitive preoccupation with being unemployed, lost sense of identity, lowered self-esteem, decreased motivation and altered confidence. Participants reported that negative thinking was exasperated by boredom and having too much 'time to think'.

Connor 'you're sitting around thinking, it's time off but you don't feel you deserve it sometimes.'

Eric 'Well I mean for me, my motivation is kind of been overtaken by how dispirited I've been.'

Two participants reported that that a personal trait of being critical had been motivating before unemployment but while unemployed this tendency compounded their negative thinking, as experienced by Brenda - *'For me it turns into anger at myself, so it's not positive, I don't think there's anything negative in being harsh on yourself, but for me it ends up that I, you know I turn in on myself.'*

Most participants questioned the choices they have made in the past and choices they were considering for the future, in regards to employment and education.

Stephen 'you'd always question well I am now especially, I picked the wrong course at the wrong time you just wonder should I have done something else, should I go and do something else now or change direction again or just stick to the one thing and see it out you know, there's so many thoughts going through the head'

The negative emotions reported by all participants were worry and stress, referred to by one participant as the 'ups and downs'. Stress was experienced by all interviewees, at varying levels from very rarely, to

constantly. Stress was particularly described in relation to job searching and interviews.

Connor 'I'm stressed all the time, it's, you can't shake it off, you start thinking jobs don't exist in the economy anymore and will they ever exist again, so you think how do you get into a company or how do you get a start, you kind of start working yourself up even though at thirty two, it's still very young for a guy's working life you know, I have forty years left before I retire and you start thinking is it over now before it even began, so you start thinking like that, I know it's negative'

The loss of financial independence through not having a job and an income, was portrayed as one of the largest rocks causing blockage in rivers of participants – *Stephen 'I was starting to get very, you know I never worried about money or paying bills or anything but it got to me for the first time I'd say in years.'* Lack of an income was described as limiting activity choices, social and educational possibilities. For Eric his local gym was too expensive to join and Catherine could not afford to continue education.

George 'to be financially independent would be brilliant; to be able to decide to go and do something and to not have to worry about money would be great'

Driftwood

In the Kawa (River) model driftwood refers to personal attributes and resources that can both positively and negatively influence life flow. Across participants' accounts the following were identified as driftwood that provided support and positivity; social support, personal characteristics and motivation to return to work. Family and friends and the support they provide was noted as the primary source of driftwood in the participants rivers, with all participants having similar testimonies as Patrick – *'I've good support at home, I've a good network of friends'*

Brenda 'I go visit somebody for a cup of coffee, because I do find getting up in the morning on my own, with nobody to talk to, finding somebody to talk to quickly, makes my day better, do you know so, making that connection with the outside world, actually then I can continue my day, more, on more of a positive note you know'

A range of personal characteristics were identified as having a positive effect on life flow. All participants held at least third level degrees and valued their education. Seven participants identified their stable life circumstances, life experience and associated maturity as positive characteristics that would be attractive to potential employers.

Stephen 'I suppose how you deal with things, to not let them get to you, when I was younger now I was a lot more emotional about things but I suppose I find a few good things about getting older, things, they bother you less and you can let a lot go, but I'd put that down just purely to age and maturity. I suppose you know this is my second recession going through so, you know there's something at the end of it '

Other characteristics that were identified as influencing life flow were; motivation, positivity and a commitment to keeping physically and mentally healthy. Three participants described productive activities they engaged in to overcome boredom. These were outdoor activities, travelling and being a pro-active member of the community.

Michael 'I'm physically healthy as well ... making a conscious effort to look after that, and I'm actively like going to the gym and that just from the physical point of view ... I am conscious of the mental health side of it too, it's something that I have to work on'

Motivation to return to work was described as driftwood in the participants' rivers. Seven participants reported regular engagement in activities such as interview preparation, keeping skills updated and career planning, implying a commitment to returning to employment. For the nine participants that had past work experience, work was described as preferable to both education and unemployment. Not only was financial security valued, but many other benefits of working were identified including social opportunities and the benefit of an externally structured routine.

Patrick 'the thing with students is you never finish you'd always have assignments to do and that kind of stuff, there's always something hanging over you, the only time you can relax is after the exams you know, whereas like yeah if you've a nine to five job ok there might be the odd day you might bring stuff home with you or stuff might carry through or there might be something you know but usually on the whole you can kind of just forget about it

The Riverbed

The riverbed refers to the persons' environment, such as the social, physical and institutional contexts and again influences life flow both positively and negatively. The environment was described as having a multi-faceted influence on the experiences of participants and their life flow that included; the recession, services for job seekers, social attitudes, social pressures, social networks and emigration. Participants were highly aware of the impact of the economic recession on the jobs market and eight individuals commented on a general negativity existing in Ireland as according to Eric - *'there's no positivity, all you hear about on the radio every day is how there's no jobs'*. Interestingly, one participant experienced a worse political environment in another country and felt Ireland had a more positive attitude than Spain where she had worked previously.

Mary 'I know unemployment is still very you know strong enough here but I think it's definitely more up-beat here, better attitude ... I just feel it's a positive thing, I think that Ireland is a great country'

Participants had encounters with services for job seekers that included college career advisories, FÁS*, the social welfare office and independent career advisors. All participants had both positive and negative experiences of engaging or trying to engage with these services with nine participants reporting that these services and attempts to access them led to confusion and uncertainty.

Connor 'I've spoken to so many professionals and so many improvement specialists ... I've had interviews with guys you know CV builders and guys you know that say you need to do this you need to do that, I've come full circle on myself a few times and one person tells you this and another person tells you that so, after a while you just get disenchanted with the whole thing'

*FÁS is Ireland's national training authority. It is a body that focuses on enhancing the skills and competencies of individuals and enterprises, specifically focusing on Ireland's economic development through the provision of individually tailored training programmes (Department of Education and Skills 2013).

Social expectations and norms were reportedly influenced the experiences of participants. Ten of eleven participants remarked on the social expectation to work in society, and the centrality of work to social interactions as George describes - *'Even if you're not at home and you go visit other people, they're like 'so how's the job hunt?' still unemployed, you know, stop reminding me please.'* Pressure created by other expectations and norms included the centrality of alcohol to socialising as described by three participants.

Brenda 'I was very aware that there's actually a sinister element to it ... it's just a drinking culture ... you have to really make an effort about making it not about drink in Ireland'

Two others discussed the pressure they feel to settle down, have a job and family because of their age as Eric tells of his own experience of comparing himself to his father - *'Well when he was thirty he had a solid career and wife and two kids you know, and whereas I have hit no such life milestones'*

Ten participants referred to a stigma being associated with unemployment and associated negative social experiences. Participants have experienced people who criticise their situation, people who resent those that receive government financial aid and people who do not relate to or understand the experience. This led to the avoidance of certain social situations.

Brenda 'there's also the begrudgery, like with me doing the springboard course, am, I said to somebody one night oh, thank god like I got on a course, springboard course, and he actually said to me, oh did ya? And I'm paying for that am I? ... It's like oh, yeah, so you're getting the dole and you're doing the course and I'm paying for your whole lifestyle'

Michael 'just the social interaction with people like you're afraid that people will ask you do you know what do you do, you know that sort of a thing like, you can get a bit, not wanting to meet new people.'

However, two participants felt indifferent to other people's opinions on their situation and another two participants felt they remained valuable members of the community despite the opinions of others.

Family and friends as a social network were described by all participants as both driftwood in their rivers and also an influencing environmental factor.

This network offered support both emotionally and financially. However, living at home with family also involved negative aspects, including unemployment becoming a focal point in family life, feeling too old to be at home, receiving unsolicited advice on job searching and the individual must share their rejection and feel guilty about doing so. Moving back home symbolised for four participants that they were decreasing their level of independence - *George 'I'm just tired of it I'm too old for it'*

To focus on regaining employment, factors needed to be taken into consideration such as moving for work and for those with families and a base, this decision was difficult to make while others felt they had no ties to home.

Stephen 'Yeah, well I mean it's like this if the family came out I'd be happy to go and stay gone but they're not going to come, well it's you know they have to make up their own minds, but I'd be happy to come back, because home is always home no matter how bad things are'

Eight participants had considered emigration to find employment. However making a concrete decision to emigrate was a difficult decision to make. It was a daunting prospect and there was a dilemma between wanting to be employed and not wanting to leave home. Finance was also a factor to consider. However, it was put forward that there were more opportunities abroad and even in other cities in Ireland outside of Limerick

Aisling 'Am yes and no. I want to get employment in OT and I know that moving will ah improve the chances of that so am, yeah but I suppose in looking at if I could find employment in Ireland I would stay here, so I suppose yeah I don't want to move per say I just want to get employment.'

George 'it's just deciding right, well I've been here enough there's nothing here that's the hardest part, right you know ok just stop looking and go, I've, haven't found that moment yet'

Life Flow

The river is a metaphor representing life. Life flow is where this model takes a cross section of the river at a particular moment in time, taking into account where the river was born, its journey so far and hopes for its

destination. All participants identified a significant change in their rivers in the months leading to participation. This was described as a change in direction due to leaving education and losing financial independence.

Brenda 'there's a huge gap between, what I have where I come from, and where I am now, which is kind of very, not moving'

Life flow became impeded due to the growing number of rocks presenting as described above. All participants explained that they were dealing with and preparing for unknown future changes leading to feeling as Patrick described - *'Top of a waterfall, could go well or it could...it could go into a nice smoother low or into a rough one, a fork in the river.'* Going forward, uncertainty and a lack of control dominated flow.

Eric 'what I'm really dealing with is a loss of control you know, I mean I feel like ah that led me to believe that I had no control over my life and that's really taking away my motivation.'

The rivers of individuals in this study were considerably impacted by rocks that were impeding and in some cases almost blocking life flow. For five participants, they felt that rocks were blocking their rivers leading to a revolving motion as a metaphor for not having a focus or future direction, or as one participant described leading to a complete lack of movement.

Brenda 'Well actually I found doing the picture mine was more of a lake it's very stagnant, at the moment, rather than a river, there is very little flow in it'

Connor 'I just had blocked at the moment or paused and just have to unblock it.'

Everyone identified that the primary cause of uncertainty and blockage was not having a job, while there was also worry about the future and being conscious of age and an impending time limit on how far employment is a feasible course for the individuals' river.

Michael 'it's the job thing that everything kind of revolves around'

Discussion

'When the self is seen as a river, all of the elements including self, society and circumstances are constructed as elements of one, inseparable whole, here all things are connected and difficult to comprehend in isolation' (Iwama 2006; p.140).

This study demonstrated that the concepts associated with the Kawa (River) model allowed for a description of the complexity of the unemployment experience and the issues unemployed graduates face. Rocks in a river are considered problematic and difficult to remove and participants in this research determined what constituted their own specific rocks. Although they varied in form and situation in the river for each individual, the findings suggested a number of common difficulties and sources of obstruction. Work is considered a primary source of financial independence as well as a valuable occupation in society (Yerxa, 1998) and all participants in this study identified that when they were not able to participate in this occupation finance became a challenge. This is consistent with the literature on how financial strain is a powerful predictor of psychological distress for people who are unemployed; less financial strain means a higher chance of coping well with unemployment (Price *et al* 2002; Rowley and Feather 1987; Vuori and Silvonen 2005).

A significant relationship has been identified in the literature between unemployment and a disruption to routine and the disturbance of social patterns and roles (Audhoe *et al* 2010). Poor time use refers to the challenges unemployed people face in establishing satisfying routines (Burda and Hammermesh 2009) and in this study, a decrease of engagement in productive and social activities occurred for all participants. This coincided with a negative change in routine. Participants had emerged

from education which involved a structured routine with regularly set goals and tasks. Also eight of eleven participants had been in full time employment in the past, and so the daily life of unemployment was in stark contrast to the routines and productivity of the past. This disruption to routine formed a substantial rock in the river, impeding life flow.

Participants reported that an unproductive routine allowed for passive periods which involved 'too much time to think', exacerbating patterns of negative thinking such as identity loss, and leading to lowered self-esteem, motivation and confidence. This is reflected in a wealth of international literature that identifies unemployed people as being at high risk of damage to psychological well-being (Audhoe *et al* 2010; Bolton and Oatley 1987; Heubeck *et al* 1995; Kieselbach 2003; Linn *et al* 1985; Waters and Moore 2002). All participants also reported feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and stress which reiterates the link between unemployment and stress related consequences as identified by Wanberg (2012). The experience of depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem echoes research on the experience of graduate unemployment, which identifies a relationship between unemployment and psychological distress (Cassidy and Wright 2008; Schaufeli and Van Yperen 1992) and also negative consequences on optimism and achievement motivation (Cassidy and Wright 2008).

The riverbed refers to a person's environment including the social, physical and institutional contexts which can influence life flow both positively and negatively. Cassidy (1994) explored psychological distress among unemployed graduates and discussed how the experience of unemployment is relative to alternative possibilities and expectations, thus one must take into account the influence of multiple variables. The environment of unemployed graduates in this study was described as having a multi-faceted influence on their lives. A harmonious relationship

with our surrounding context has the potential to enable and compliment life flow (Iwama 2006). Whiteford (2000) described how for people who are occupationally deprived, difficulties are created in the legitimate participation in mainstream society. Unemployed people are vulnerable to experiencing occupational deprivation. It is thus important to account for the contexts or environments in which occupational engagement takes place and how the dynamics of these environments effect engagement (Cole and Tufano 2008).

At a macro level the impact of the economic recession plays a part on the jobs market, and eight individuals commented on a general negativity existing in Ireland. This is consistent with the findings of Blustein *et al* (2013) in a qualitative analysis, that lack of support at a macro-level influences the perspectives of unemployed people and what they perceive are the opportunities available to them. Eight participants had considered emigration to find employment and discussed the difficulties and worries about making this decision. However, overpowering these concerns was that according to participants there were more opportunities abroad and outside of Limerick. Due to experiences with other services for job seekers, which generally resulted in confusion for participants in this study, the system and support mechanisms in place in the community appear to be not as accessible and as straight forward as would be desirable, which was found in the literature as a factor that constricts access to work (Blustein *et al* 2013).

Pressures exist in society that set ideals that a person must aim to achieve and participants are highly aware of these pressures. Social identity and not fitting to norms ties in closely with the environmental influences on a persons' river flow. The literature refers to the stigma around unemployment as reflecting the negative social and personal image associated with unemployment (Kulik 2000). Ten of eleven participants commented on the pressure to have a job and reported that a stigma was

negatively associated with being unemployed. This relates to how Blau *et al* (2013) identified how high levels of stigma among unemployed participants had a negative relationship with job searching, problem focused coping and lower networking comfort.

Social resources and support have been strongly identified as a factor that protects against psychological strain, reduces emotional loss and enhances personal control (Blustein *et al* 2013; Johnson and Jackson 2012; McKee Ryan *et al* 2005; Wanberg 2012). The social network of family and friends offered essential support for all participants in this study, but could also be a source of negativity in the riverbed. In an exploration of the how engagement in occupation is a human right, Hammell and Iwama (2012) identify that many people have little choice, control or opportunity to exercise will over their own life situations, and participant testimony has defined unemployment as a life situation that is entered into and exited from with limited choice and control. All participants reported uncertainty and a lack of control in the direction their life was taking and the possible changes that might occur in the future.

Occupational deprivation (Wilcock 1998) is defined as being unable to participate in meaningful occupations due to external circumstances that are beyond a persons' control. Unemployed people are particularly vulnerable and the participants of this study were obviously experiencing a deprivation of engagement in work. Occupational Therapists have an intrinsic understanding of this concept and the consequential disruption and devastation on daily routines and occupational engagement. The Kawa (River) model allowed for an understanding to be gained for both the researcher and participants, of the experience of unemployment in the individuals' river in respect of the influencing contextual factors. The river floor of the average participant in this study was rocky and uneven with significant rocks that caused obstruction; driftwood provided both positive and negative support and participants were on the receiving end of societal

pressure due to being located in a society that values an employed status and financial independence. Aside from the blockage and overbearing environment, there was also an issue of uncertainty in the direction of the river, leading to a pause in movement or as in some cases, coming to a complete standstill.

'Sukima' are spaces in a persons' river that Occupational Therapists should endeavour to focus on and maximise when considering direction of where to go in terms of therapy. The overall aim of therapy would be to maximise water-flow, to reduce and remove the elements that impede flow paying close attention to the environment, and to reduce the impact of negative influences existing in the environment by widening the sides and deepening the bottom of the river (Lim and Iwama 2011). A focus on returning to employment and in the meantime, maintaining a healthy life balance and engage in meaningful occupation while unemployed is key. This would occur through the therapist and client working with the natural potential that each individual has. It is critical to note that this promotion of healthy living in the community should take place with respect to the importance of the influence of culture (Scaffa *et al* 2008).

Findings of this study support the findings of the current evidence base on the Kawa (River) model (Carmody *et al* 2007; Fieldhouse 2008; Higman 2013; Paxson *et al* 2012; Richardson *et al* 2010). Firstly, its effectiveness has again been demonstrated within an Irish context but with a significantly different client group, emphasising its versatility. Secondly, the model was an easily comprehensible tool for both practitioners and clients and encouraged interaction between the group facilitator and participants as well as engagement in the group. It also facilitated the generation of rich and in-depth data, not solely on the individual health issues of unemployment but on how these issues interacted with each other which reflects on the significant amount of data that was generated. Finally, to repeat the conclusions of Carmody *et al* (2007) it facilitated a client-

centered process that allowed participants to describe their experiences and to evaluate their own lives in relation to their context. The simplicity of this model in that the definition of problems and circumstances is broad and diverse and eliminates technical language is possibly responsible for the ease of understanding that took place of the Kawa (River) concepts. Although participants were all unemployed Irish graduates, the flexibility of it in across a demographic that varied in age range, social status, career history etc. allowed for exploratory examination of individuals situation whilst in a group setting.

Limitations

In regards to the interpretation of results the researcher acknowledges that the following limitations may impact on the quality of the findings. The possibility of bias should be taken into account as the researcher who conducted the data collection, data analysis and construction of this paper is a recent graduate that prior to commencing research, had experience of unemployment and faces similar concerns as identified by participants in terms of future uncertainty and influential aspects of the environment, for example the limited job environment due to the recession. Therefore the researchers' preconceptions of the experience of graduate unemployment may have influenced the findings.

The researcher conducted this study as a novice user of the Kawa (River) model. During the process of drawing the rivers there were a minor number of challenges experienced that may possibly be due to the impact of the researchers' inexperience. On reflection the researcher could identify expanding on the description of the model with examples to the extent that this could impact on the participants creating preconceptions of what to include in their river.

Generalisation may be difficult to the whole population as the participants voluntarily took part in this study and Work Ready programme and unknown differences may exist between unemployed graduates who would voluntarily seek out an outlet in an effort to change their unemployment situation versus those who would not. Also eight of the eleven participants were male and this gender ratio is not representative of the unemployed graduated population. It is also imperative that generalisation of these findings is limited to the context of a current Irish graduate population.

Recommendations

A primary recommendation is the need for further research, to advance the evidence base for the Kawa (River) model. Sustained development is required of a model to ensure its validity and usefulness (Kielhofner 2009). Although research and development into the use of the model has advanced significantly in recent years with an increase in case studies across a broad range of individuals and practice settings (Lim and Iwama 2011) the model is relatively young to the profession of Occupational Therapy. In this study the model was utilised with individuals who were described as mentally and physically healthy and further research of this model and the Occupational Therapy process with the well population would be a move forward towards preventative care in the community. Further research across other cultures and contexts of the experience of unemployment could provide further validation of the findings of this Irish study.

This model identifies a direction for Occupational Therapy in terms of a focus for therapy with unemployed graduates and also the vulnerability of this population to health disparities if faced with long term unemployment. An intervention to promote return to work and well-being whilst unemployed would be a primary objective. Work has historically been a

central focus of Occupational Therapy (Krefting 1985) and this study reiterates that unemployment can directly lead to occupational deprivation. The profession holds an intrinsic understanding of the disruption and devastating consequences and the appropriate skills to collaborate with unemployed populations to promote well-being (AOTA 2009; Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002). An initial goal going forward would be to focus on the promotion of assets and skills and maximising the possible benefits of driftwood. Secondly, a reduction or elimination of obstruction will also enhance flow through addressing the rocks as identified and setting goals on overcoming these barriers.

The Kawa (River) model developed over concern that arose that the Western Occupational Therapists intentions around enabling self-efficacy and independence in certain occupations may not be appreciated in accordance with the priorities of an eastern-Asian client. Further research could examine whether in fact or to what extent Occupational Therapists focus on physical and mental health conditions and not on social and community health conditions, such as unemployment which cause significant health disparities.

Conclusion

Unemployment is a growing social problem and currently third level graduates are over-represented in the unemployed population in Ireland. A wealth of literature demonstrates the detrimental and complex effects of being out of work on mental health, physical health, and also on social patterns, status and time use. This study aimed to add to the qualitative literature on unemployment through exploration of the subjective meanings unemployed graduates attribute to the experience. A rich description of the participants experience emerged and reiterated findings of past literature, overall capturing a momentary insight into the vast expanse of what it is to be an unemployed graduate; obstructions and

barriers in their lives include finance, negative thinking and loss of structure; supports included social resources and personal characteristics; the environment or context was shown to have a multi-faceted influence on the participants lived experience; and overall a sense of a lack of control and uncertainty dominates the direction life is taking. This study therefore identifies a health problem area, the effects of which leave unemployed graduates highly vulnerable to occupational deprivation, and calls for Occupational Therapists and scientists to increase their awareness and education, and consider their input in relation to those susceptible to the effects of unemployment in the community.

The description of unemployment that emerged in this study was framed by concepts from the Kawa (River) model. This study aimed to enhance evidence for this model as an approach to Occupational Therapy. The strengths of the model lie in its consideration of the context in which occupational engagement takes place and its applicability to populations outside the current scope of practice, as in this case, members of the well-population that are particularly vulnerable to detrimental health disparities.

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Paper III:
‘Work Ready: A
qualitative evaluation of
an Occupational Therapy
intervention for
unemployed graduates’

Abstract

Introduction: Considering the number of graduates who are currently unemployed in Ireland, what is known about the relationship between unemployment and ill-health and the lack of intervention research with unemployed people, there is a need for Occupational Therapists to consider and develop their role as health care professionals within this area.

Method: This paper qualitatively evaluates Work Ready, a group Occupational Therapy programme that aims to support wellness during unemployment and re-employment for unemployed graduates. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach to gain an understanding of participants lived experience of the programme and any associated changes that occurred. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews and focus groups with eleven participants. Inductive thematic analysis was undertaken.

Results: Three themes emerged from the analysis process that encapsulate the participants' experience of Work Ready: 1) A changed perspective refers to changes in attitude and also the development of job search and lifestyle skills; 2) Taking action describes how participants made observable changes that encompassed their routines, lifestyle, goal setting, interview techniques, CV quality and job search behaviour; 3) The group influence describes the support, positive influence and learning that group members reportedly gained from one another as well as the overall group cohesiveness that formed in Work Ready. The study findings suggest that a CBT approach, practical learning of skills, an analysis of occupational issues and time use and the group forum were significant factors.

Conclusion: Conclusions drawn from this study recommend the development and rigorous empirical evaluation of preventative occupation-focused programmes with unemployed individuals, and specifically unemployed graduates.

Key Words: Qualitative, Phenomenology, Unemployed graduates, Unemployment intervention, programme, Occupational Therapy.

Introduction

Unemployment is a significant and current social problem. The unemployment rate in Ireland reached 14.7% in 2011 in the height of the recession, a dramatic increase from 4.6% in 2007 (Central Statistics Office 2007). The standardised unemployment rate currently stands at 13.3% (Central Statistics office September 2013) suggesting an improvement in the jobs market. However, there are other factors to be taken into consideration, for example, there has been an increase in those taking part in part-time jobs (Central Statistics Office September 2013) and the substantial outflow of people emigrating, which was accountable for 87,100 people leaving Ireland in 2012 (Behan *et al* 2012). A year-long study of Irish emigration, a related current and significant social issue, has recently found that 67% of emigrants have a third level education of three years or more, and are more likely to have a higher education than the population in general. This suggests that graduates are 'over-represented' in the population of those emigrating (Glynn *et al* 2013). The subjects of this research study are Irish third level graduates, who comprised 23% of those unemployed at the end of 2012 (Behan *et al* 2013). Ireland has the highest level in the European Union of 25 to 34 year olds that have completed third level education while simultaneously having an above average unemployment rate (Donnelly 2013), thus calling to question what is taking place in society to counteract unemployment.

Consequences of unemployment

Work is the most important means of obtaining economic resources, which leads to family well-being, participation in society, meets important psychosocial needs, is central to identity, social roles and social status (Waddell and Burton 2006). Strong evidence exists that becoming re-employed following job loss leads to improved self-esteem, improved

general and mental health, and reduced psychological distress (Waddell and Burton 2006).

The negative impact of the experience of job loss has been widely established, especially the impact on psychological health, physical health and general well-being (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005; Waddell and Burton 2006; Wanberg 2012). Primarily focusing on middle aged adults who have lengthy employment histories, studies have found a greater incidence among the unemployed of adverse psychological symptoms of depression, anxiety, distress, social exclusion and decreased self-esteem (Audhoe *et al* 2010; Bolton and Oatley 1987; Heubeck *et al* 1995; Kieselbach 2003; Linn *et al* 1985; Waters and Moore 2002). Psychological effects may manifest physiologically and greater reporting of health complaints and engagement in high risk health behaviours thus occurs, which then effects re-employment (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005; Waddell and Burton 2006). Physical consequences of unemployment include a greater risk of morbidity which is not accounted for by factors such as socioeconomic status, poverty, risk factors, or prior ill health (Beale and Nethercott 1988; Cook *et al* 1982; Jin *et al* 1995; Linn *et al* 1985; Mathers and Schofield 1998; Waddell and Burton 2006).

Unemployment disrupts the routine of daily life and is associated with poor time use due to the engagement in solitary leisure activities more so than meaningful and social leisure activities (Burda and Hammermesh 2009; Scanlon *et al* 2011; Waters and Moore 2002; Winefield *et al* 1992). The ability of unemployed people to structure daily routines in their lives and to remain active has been linked to positive mental health (Wanberg 2012).

When considering young adults specifically, evidence exists that unemployment has adverse effects on their mental and physical health; they show worse health behaviour and adverse social consequences, and their mortality rate is significantly higher than their employed counterparts (Hammarström 1994; Morrell *et al* 1998; Lakey *et al* 2001). Prolonged

unemployment early in a young males working life is likely to have a persisting effect on their future health and socio-economic status (Wadsworth *et al* 2009). In the literature it has been identified that a relationship exists between graduate unemployment and deleterious health consequences. These consequences were found to have occurred on psychological health, physical health, social support, optimism and achievement motivation (Cassidy and Wright 2008; Schaufeli and Van Yperen 1992). Cassidy (1994) explored psychological distress among employed and unemployed graduates and primarily found that the employed graduates were psychologically worse off than the unemployed. The author concluded that being unemployed is psychologically more ideal for a graduate than being in a job that does not match their aspirations or skill level, due to the demoralising experience of an unsatisfactory position. Additionally, a positive attitude to and engagement in constructive leisure activities were positive determinants of a resistance to stress (Cassidy 1994).

Programmes focused on the consequences of unemployment

As demonstrated and discussed in paper I of this thesis the negative effects of unemployment are well established, however, research on interventions for unemployed people is relatively sparse. Although intervention evidence is lacking a number of studies have identified programme strategies that have demonstrated significant positive results; the necessity of a group forum, a self-efficacy and coping methods focus and an emphasis on job search strategies (Audhoe *et al* 2010; Wanberg 2012). In addition to the above mentioned elements, empirical evidence exists to support a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approach that would include a component of the following: stress management; self-esteem; self-efficacy; personal control; preparedness against set-backs; thought management; coping resources (Borland and Tseng 2007; Brenninkmeijer

and Blonk 2011; Joseph and Greenberg 2001; Maysent and Spera 1995; Rose *et al* 2012; Spera *et al* 1994; Vinokur *et al* 1995; Vuori *et al* 2002; Yanar *et al* 2009). Spera *et al* (1994) emphasised that it is necessary to deal with psychological issues of unemployment before commencing a job search. Active learning of job search skills has been found to be another essential component of an unemployment programme, focusing on interview skills, job search efficacy and goal setting (Borland and Tseng 2007; Rife and Belcher 1994; Van Hooft and Noordzij 2009). In a quantitative study aimed at understanding how decision making relates to satisfying outcomes in the job search process, it was found that a focused and thorough search of job related information was positively associated with satisfaction and those who considered future outcomes were more likely to be more focused (Crossley and Highhouse 2005). Koen *et al* (2010) also emphasised the importance of strategy in job searching. In their study examining career adaptability and job search strategies of 248 unemployed people, a focused and exploratory strategy contributed to the number of job offers received (Koen *et al* 2010).

A number of interventions have been developed to successfully combat some of the deleterious effects of unemployment. The past research on these programmes have resulted in numerous positive outcomes for the participants involved that included decreased levels of stress and distress (Brenninkmeijer and Blonk 2011; Maysent and Spera 1995; Vinokur *et al* 1995; Vuori *et al* 2002); improvement in self-efficacy, optimism and a positive attitude (Rose *et al* 2012; Yanar *et al* 2009). In addition to psychological improvement, empirical evidence exists that participation in these programmes significantly improves the employment rate of participants following intervention (Joseph and Greenberg 2001; Rife and Belcher 1994; Rose *et al* 2012; Spera *et al* 1994; Van Hooft and Noordzij 2009; Vinokur *et al* 1995)

Community Health Promotion

A recommendation of the current research body is that more intervention focused work is needed, notably at a community level, more attention needs to be paid to 'primary prevention' and reducing unemployment numbers, and available services should be matched appropriately to the individuals who need those services (Wanberg 2012). In a narrative review of public health care based settings and strategies used to improve the health of unemployed people, Harris and Harris (2009) concluded that GP's and other health care workers in the community setting, have an essential role in health promotion, early supervision and return to work programmes for unemployed people, with a focus going forward on common health problems and preventive care and management of conditions that could act as barriers to return to work.

Occupational Therapy is founded on the health promoting benefits of engagement in meaningful occupation, that allow for participation in the home, workplace and community (Roley *et al* 2008). Research has demonstrated positive outcomes of vocational rehabilitation with various populations, for example, with school children, with people experiencing long term health conditions such as mental health issues, musculoskeletal injuries, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's, and social conditions such as homelessness (Benharoch and Wiseman 2004; Cahill *et al* 2009; Capo 2001; Henry 2005; Joss 2002; Munoz *et al* 2006; Townsend 2008). In order to achieve positive vocational outcomes with clients Occupational therapists frequently use group based therapy (Howe and Schwartzberg 1986). Multiple therapeutic advantages have been identified from group based therapy and such groups are seen as a valuable treatment tool (Cole 2008). Support groups provide a sense of belonging and empathy as well as the development of insight through peer validation and feedback (Cole 2008; Roberts *et al* 1997).

In order to understand the occupational experiences of individuals and groups a number of concepts have been developed within Occupational Science. Occupational disruption is described as a temporary disturbance to occupational participation (Wilcock 1998). In contrast, occupational deprivation is defined as being unable to participate in meaningful occupations due to external circumstances that are beyond a persons' control (Wilcock 1998). Unemployed and underemployed people are particularly vulnerable to deprivation, and Whiteford (2000) described how for people in such circumstances, difficulties are created in the legitimate participation in mainstream society. Occupational Therapists have an intrinsic understanding of these concepts and the devastating consequences that the unemployment experience has on daily routines. Through specific education and training, Occupational Therapists have the appropriate skills to collaborate with unemployed populations to promote well-being during unemployment (AOTA 2009; Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002).

The Work Ready Programme

Two Work Ready groups were facilitated by the Occupational Therapy faculty at the University of Limerick in 2010 and 2011, a programme that recruited unemployed people who had mainly been made redundant from industrial plant closures. Five strands of small scale evaluative research evaluated these programmes, the findings of which have been submitted for publication. Dunne (2012) evaluated the impact of programme participation on mental health and well-being. Although the findings were somewhat inconclusive, a positive effect on mental health was suggested. It was supported that the intervention needs to be multifaceted and target the whole persons' life satisfaction, in order to understand the effects of unemployment on health and occupations. Farrell (2012) demonstrated that participants had increased knowledge of self, improved direction in job searching and improved confidence. In addition, Quirke (2012) and

Farrell (2012) found that Work Ready assisted in the establishment of a balanced day through engagement in meaningful activities and a focus on lifestyle change. Common recommendations across these studies for the future of this programme were the need to take a multi-faceted approach, to include a focus on well-being, mental health, job seeking skills and the formation of a group (Dunne 2012; Farrell 2012; Morgan 2012; O' Mahony 2012; Quirke 2012). All strands of research on this project had low levels of evidence, and so recommended further in-depth research, of both qualitative and quantitative measures.

Given the unpublished and small scale research on Work Ready to date and the reviewed literature, further exploration of unemployed participants' experiences of this programme is warranted. This study adopts a qualitative approach to evaluate Work Ready, a group Occupational Therapy programme to support wellness during unemployment for unemployed graduates, and to examine occupational or other changes that occurred as a result of participation.

Methodology

Research Aim

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of unemployed graduates' lived experiences of participation in an Occupational Therapy Work Ready programme that aimed to support wellness during unemployment and re-employment for unemployed graduates. The paper also aims to establish any occupational or other changes that occurred as a result of participation.

Research Design

The study design employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach utilising pre and post programme focus groups and individual pre-programme interviews with eleven participants, as the primary methods of data collection. A qualitative approach was best suited to this research question because the focus of this study was exploratory in nature (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Recognised strengths of a qualitative approach are: that it focuses on context; that data is emergent rather than prefigured; it is grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall and Rossman 2011). Qualitative research is based on the assumption that meanings individuals attribute to experiences are subjective, socially constructed, complex, and unique which is in line with Occupational Therapy philosophy (Christiansen and Townsend 2011; Miller and Brewer 2003). Also in line with this philosophy are the principles of phenomenology, which aim to generate a holistic sense of the person and their intertwined relationship with their environment (Finlay 2002). The aim of this study was to examine the experience of the Work Ready intervention and related occupational or other changes for participants of the Work Ready programme. Thematic analysis, an accessible and

theoretically flexible method (Braun and Clark 2006) guided the data analysis. An inductive analytic approach (Patton 1990) was taken, using the six phase guide described by Braun and Clark (2006) to guide the analysis process.

Recruitment process

Despite the high numbers of unemployed people in Ireland, recruitment for this study required four months of various activities to recruit the initial 11 interviewees. Recruitment was completed in phases:

- Stage One 27th February 2013
An email was prepared by the researcher containing details and contact information on the programme. These were then sent via the careers services of University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College to graduates of 2011 and 2012. Due to a low response, recruitment was broadened to graduates of Limerick Institute of Technology, University College Cork and the Institute of Technology Tralee and to also advertise on the Facebook pages of these services. Posters (See Appendix C) about the programme were advertised in Limerick Department of Social Protection Offices. An ethical application amendment was sought and granted to advertise the programme on 'UL (University of Limerick) events' e-mail distribution list to access all members of the UL academic, staff and student community.
- Stage Two, 8th March 2013
All local (Kerry/Limerick region) radio and newspapers were contacted via email and phone, and permission to advertise was sought. All required payment which was not feasible, bar one radio station that invited the researcher (M. Lynch) to speak on air about Work Ready which took place on March 9th 2013.

- Stage Three 19th March 2013
Seven places were filled for the first group and five attended the first session. Recruitment difficulties and an interest in the programme expressed from the Springboard initiative*, encouraged the researcher to seek an additional ethical application amendment in regards to the inclusion/exclusion criteria, which was granted. This allowed for the recruitment of Springboard students, who would graduate in the year 2013. The email detailing information on the programme was sent to the course directors of the Springboard programmes in UL which was then forwarded to Springboard students.
- Stage four, 10th April 2013
The researcher took an additional measure of emailing a number of websites – International Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE), Qualifax.ie, Gradireland.ie, Citizensinfo.ie, who then emailed members or advertised online. It was taken into consideration that for these students it was a difficult time of year with upcoming exams and the summer about to begin.
- Stage Five, 16th April 2013
Given that for currently enrolled students participation in the programme was challenging due to imminent exams, the format of the group was modified to one session pre exams (two hours) and two more days (four hour sessions each) in the two weeks following exams finishing. The researcher emailed Springboard/ICT again emphasising an awareness of their situation and that the programme timetable would be revised to their schedule. UL careers and events were also emailed again with the revised dates.
- Stage Six 2nd May 2013
Five interviews took place before the initial session with the confirmed attendance of each participant. Three participants attended session one, one individual informed the researcher that

she had a project due and would be unable to make it and the others did not make contact. Four participants attended the remaining two sessions of group two.

*Springboard is an Irish government initiative that offers free, part time courses in higher education from certificate to Masters level. The programme is generally aimed at people who have previously been employed in construction, manufacturing or other sectors of the economy where employment levels are unlikely to recover to pre-recession levels. To be eligible for a place on these programmes the individual must be: unemployed and in receipt of payment from the Department of Social Protection; or be signing for social insurance contribution credits; or be previously self-employed; and be actively seeking employment. (www.springboardcourses.ie/Default.aspx)

Participants

Participants were recruited by purposeful sampling to take part in the programme and study. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are detailed as follows:

Inclusion - Individuals who are unemployed; who have completed a certificate level/diploma/undergraduate/postgraduate degree from a university/college/institute of technology/community college; who graduated in 2011, 2012, 2013 or will graduate in the year 2013.

Exclusion - Individuals under the age of 18; individuals who had been employed in an area related to their degree for three months or more.

Prior to recruitment ethical approval was obtained from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSREC), University of Limerick. The first point of contact was the researcher (M. Lynch) all interested participants were provided with a written information sheet (Appendix D). Those who made contact but were not eligible to participate were provided with a list of resources that they could access. Individuals could participate in the programme without participating in the study

described here. Informed consent in writing was obtained prior to programme commencement (See Appendix E). In table 1 participant demographic information is presented, pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities. Nine of the eleven interviewees participated in the Work Ready programme. For group one, five of the five group members participated in the first focus group and in the final focus group. For group two, three of four group members participated in the first focus group and four of four participated in the final focus group.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age Range	Most recent Qualification	Overall Programme participation
<i>Group One</i>			
Aisling	20-25	Graduated with a Bachelor of Science	Did not participate
William	20-25	Graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering	Attended 4/6 sessions
Michael	45-55	Graduated with a Masters of Arts	Attended 1/6 sessions
Brenda	45-55	Graduated with a Postgraduate degree in Business	Attended 4/6 sessions
Eric	25-35	Graduated with a Masters in Science	Attended 5/6 sessions
Catherine	45-55	Graduated with a Postgraduate degree in Business	Did not participate
George	20-25	Graduated with a Masters In Arts	Attended 5/6 sessions
<i>Group Two</i>			
Patrick	35-45	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Attended 3/3 sessions
Mary	35-45	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Attended 2/3 sessions
Stephen	45-55	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Attended 3/3 sessions
Connor	25-35	Will graduate in 2013 pending results	Attended 3/3 sessions

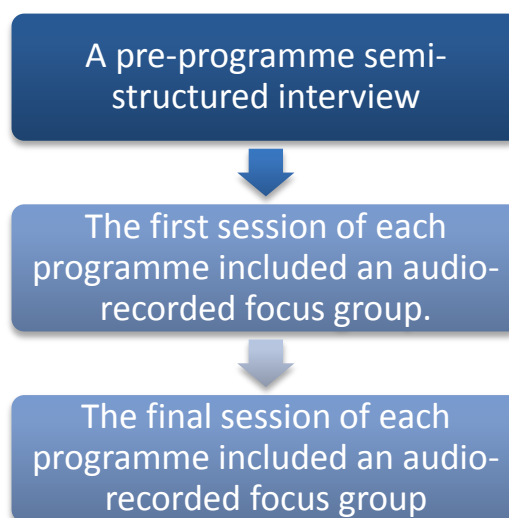
Ethical Considerations

Prior to recruitment ethical approval was obtained from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSREC), University of Limerick. Potential risks and benefits of participation were presented in the information letter (See Appendix D) and the risks associated with these changes (for example implementation of stress management techniques) were identified as minimal. Although the following circumstances did not

develop, the researcher was prepared for the following situations; Interview questions may have caused potential discomfort or embarrassment to participants, so the researcher carefully attended to both verbal and non-verbal indicators of dissent; If a participant appeared distressed or uncomfortable the researcher would remind participants that they could choose not to respond to a question and stop participating at any time; If the participant became distraught, counselling services would be recommended (Appendix F). Because all participants would have been involved in group intervention anonymity could not be guaranteed. The need for group members to maintain confidentiality regarding information disclosed by peers was discussed in the first session of each programme. To protect identities and privacy of participants pseudonyms were assigned and identifiable information was changed when analysing the data, writing up and publishing the research findings. Participants were free to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Data Collection

Two Work Ready groups took place in total. Data evaluating the programme was collected via three means for each programme - *Figure 1: Three means of data collection*



Pre-programme semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews are recognised as an effective data collection method in gathering rich unique responses about individuals' experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge (French *et al* 2001; Patton 1990). The researchers' aim was to assemble a representation of the interviewee's experience of unemployment since graduation. The interview schedule was also designed to provide information about potential participants in relation to forming focus group questions, forming individual specific goals and to inform a structure of the programme. The interview was guided by questions around a number of themes; occupational performance as a student, occupational performance now, the environment and social supports/networks, job search activity to date, expectations of the programme and goals for the future. A copy of the interview script is located in Appendix G. This script was generated from a comprehensive review of literature on the experience of unemployment and also based on scripts used in previous Work Ready programmes. Eleven pre-programme interviews were conducted in total.

Focus group during session one of Work Ready

Strengths of a focus group lie in the creation of a natural atmosphere, allowing the researcher to explore unanticipated issues that may arise in the discussion and to gain multiple viewpoints on the issue (Letts *et al* 2007; Marshall and Rossman 2011). The aim of the initial focus group was to enhance understanding of the unemployment experience. Both focus groups were approximately sixty minutes in duration and were completed with each group in the second hour of the first session of Work Ready. Prior to its commencement, introductions to the group members and researchers took place through ice-breakers, to increase familiarity among participants. The programme and overview of sessions were also discussed. The focus group was structured on the Kawa (River) model. The researchers gave examples of the four different concepts of the model and

an overall example through a case study of an individual, to demonstrate its concepts. Each participant was then encouraged to individually draw their personal 'river' from their perspective, identifying their own life journey. This self-evaluation of their own situation allowed for the researcher to hear the participants' interpretation of their life flow and the personal influencing factors on the experience of unemployment. A flexible script with prompts and questions guiding exploration of each concept was used for each focus group (See Appendix H); it was generated based on a literature review, including a review of studies of the Kawa (River) model and from the in-depth one to one interviews completed with participants prior to commencement of the programme.

Focus group during the final session of Work Ready

The aim of the final focus group was to explore the participants' perceptions of the experience of unemployment following participation in the programme, and investigate any changes in occupational performance, or other changes as a result of participation in the programme. Both focus groups were approximately sixty minutes in duration and were completed with each group in the second hour of the last session of Work Ready. The focus groups were again structured on the Kawa (River) Model. The researchers revisited the concepts and description of the model. The participants were asked to again draw their 'river' focusing on the various aspects based on their current experiences. The researchers and participants discussed the four concepts in detail before comparing the material to the rivers drawn in the initial focus group and identifying any changes made. Discussion also focused on how these changes were achieved, enables and barriers to making change, participants experiences of the programme and their overall consensus on the impact of the programme. A flexible script with prompts and questions guiding exploration of each concept was used for each focus group (See Appendix I).

The researcher (M. Lynch) facilitated all interviews and the four focus groups while the researchers' supervisor (Dr. K. Robinson) facilitated three interviews and co-facilitated one focus group.

Data Analysis

Qualitative phenomenological data analysis was employed in order to address quality and to holistically clarify the inherent issues of the participants' experience of Work Ready (Taylor 2007). Phenomenology was an appropriate approach to this study because this study did not aim to focus on interpreting or explaining the behaviour of participants but to describe their lived experience and to try to get a sense of participation through their words (Finlay 2002). The expected result of this approach was to elucidate meanings that were rich in detail (Finlay 2002). Thematic analysis informed by phenomenology was employed to engage in an inductive analytic process that allowed themes and patterns to arise from the data rather than being defined prior to analysis and collection (Patton 1990). All pre-programme interviews and focus groups were transcribed in full and entered into QSR NVivo 9© Software Programme (QSR International Pty Ltd 2010). The six stages of inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2006) then took place. The first stage involved the researcher immersing themselves in and becoming familiar with the data through repeated reading and note taking of the transcripts. Secondly, a list of 275 initial codes was generated from the data paying attention to all aspects of the data. The third stage involved searching for themes by condensing codes down; this resulted in 33 codes remaining. The fourth stage involved reviewing and discussing the codes generated and their validity in order to make identifiable distinctions between each. In stage five three overarching themes were named and defined, determining what aspect of the data each encapsulated. Finally, a coherent and logical account of the data was created that reflected the research question.

Trustworthiness

'Trustworthiness in qualitative research is crucial since the primary contribution of qualitative research is to capture and convey the experiences, meanings and events encountered in the field' (Lysack *et al* 2006; p.352). The researcher engaged in a process of reflexivity throughout the study design, data collection and data analysis to analyse her own roles and attitudes. The researcher maintained a reflexive diary throughout the research process, accounting for all interactions with the participants and the data and also reflected on preconceptions that existed prior to beginning data collection. Finlay (2002) refers to this phenomenological process as 'hermeneutic reflection' which refers to being aware and continuously reflecting on the emergence of our own presuppositions and assumptions. This was especially essential as the researcher conducted all programme sessions, interviews and focus groups. Member checking took place through provision of summaries of both the pre-programme interviews and focus groups, which were sent to participants via e-mail within 7-10 days of their occurrence; however no changes were sought by participants. A peer review of the findings took place with the supervisors of this researcher project. The use of the same script for all interviews and focus group involved in data collection aimed to maintain consistency and allow participants the opportunity to explore what they considered significant issues (Minichiello *et al* 2003).

Provided in this paper is a detailed description of the data collection, analysis process and in-depth findings, supported by direct quotes from participants, to increase transferability. Adequate descriptions of the sample and setting have been provided to allow for further comparison and investigation with the population in this study. Close monitoring and documentation of all procedures and processes took place. This included all of the data generated within the study, a detailed description of data collection and analysis, personal notes, reflections, copy of the interview and focus group scripts and an explanation of the research model chosen to shape the study. This also encouraged reflexivity for the

researcher. This study is open to being scrutinised and audited; an audit trail functioned as a means of reliability, checking on both the procedures and conclusions of the study (Lysack *et al* 2006).

Description of Intervention and Guiding Theories

Previous research on Work Ready completed in 2010 and 2011 gave a broad description of an occupation focused intervention. To inform the Work Ready programme for this study a literature review regarding unemployment was undertaken and a review of intervention studies (reported in paper I of this thesis) which guided amendments and development of the programme. The group sessions were informed by the previous Work Ready groups facilitated in 2010 and 2011. The detailed time plan of each session can be found in Appendix J and the overall programme outline is demonstrated in figure 2. Due to difficulties in the recruitment process as outlined and consideration of participant examinations in Group 2, the programme delivery format varied as detailed in the table below:

Table 2: Comparison of programme format

Group One	Group Two
Weeks 1 = 2 hour session Week 2 = 2 hour session Week 3 = 2 hour session Week 4 = Skipped due to bank holiday Week 5 = 2 hour session Week 6 = 2 hour session Week 7 = 2 hour session Total = 12 hours, 5 participants.	Week 1 = 2 hour session Week 2 = Skipped, student examinations Week 3 = 5 hours* (2 ½ sessions combined) Week 4 = 5 hours* (2 ½ sessions combined) *Completed over a full day. Total = 12 hours, 4 participants

The aim of the programme was to facilitate living well when unemployed. Overall, the programme offered a range of client-centered sessions with

each intervention session having occupation based, discussion and educative elements. A humanistic approach guided this intervention, reflecting a belief that the client is a unique, valuable individual and the real expert on their own life (Borg and Bruce 1997). A principle of the humanistic approach is client-centeredness which entails a collaborative process between therapist and clients, in which they negotiate and share choice, responsibility and decision making and in which the therapist endeavours to facilitate participation and enable the client to solve occupational performance issues (Creek 2008; Law and Mills 1999). Following recruitment and before the programme commenced all participants were interviewed in-depth about their experiences of unemployment and expectations of the programme. Findings from these interviews influenced the design of the intervention. Participants contributed on a weekly basis to the aims and contents of each session.

Figure 2: Outline of Work Ready Session Plans



Guiding Theories

A number of theories informed the programme:

Kawa (River) Model: The conceptual model of Occupational Therapy practice that guided the overall intervention was the Kawa (River) model. The Kawa model focuses on an individuals' dynamic with their unique surrounding contexts, which creates particular conditions in which a particular occupation or action takes place and thus has a significant influence in determining ones state of being (Iwama 2006). In this model a river is a metaphor for a persons' life. Life is conceptualised as being like a river and the aim of Occupational Therapy is to enhance life flow, through limiting or removing obstruction, enhancing resources and considering the environment (Iwama 2006). The Kawa model aims to fundamentally assist in considering the participants empowerment, involvement and appreciation of their personal experiences of being unemployed graduates. These core values were adhered to throughout the intervention but notably the model acted as a guide in gathering data during focus groups in the initial and final sessions. The purpose of the Kawa (River) model was introduced and examples given of the four different concepts using imagery and case studies. Each person was then asked to draw their own river in the first and last session and to compare. A discussion then took place on the four concepts of the model in relation to the unemployment experience before and after participation in the group.

Relatedly, a career transition programme for laid off professionals was evaluated by Joseph and Greenberg (2001) and one of the mediums through which it was delivered was self-generated imagery. Programme participants had a higher employment rate than a control group at follow up and the study concludes that evidence exists for an imagery programme in aiding unemployed individuals deal effectively with a major life stressor

Group Theory: The research on the nature of therapeutic groups was utilised to inform the Work Ready programme. The collaboration of group

members in similar circumstances with similar goals is discussed by Cole (2008) and while stating the purposes of groups the author alludes to the notable advantages of a group process: group interaction creates energy that maximises motivation for change; the microcosm created and mutual group feedback allow for self-awareness, understanding and self-efficacy; group support during the practice and learning of occupational performance skills (Cole 2008; Roberts *et al* 1997). Occupational Therapists have frequently used group based therapy since the 1920's (Howe and Schwartzberg 1986).

Therapeutic Use of self: As described earlier, humanism informed both the data collection in this study and the therapeutic programme. Throughout the intervention the researchers sought to use themselves therapeutically. Therapeutic use of self is an essential process of Occupational Therapy and was used in the intervention and evaluation processes of the Work Ready programme. This theory prompts the facilitators to be professional (competent; ethical, confidential) at all times and to avail of qualities such as insight, patience, humour, energy and empathy in order to enhance the forming of the therapeutic relationship (Hagedorn 2000) between the group members and facilitators.

Occupational perspective: As an Occupational Therapy intervention the health promoting effects of engagement in occupation was an underlying theory guiding the overall aim and every session of the programme. Occupational disruptions were addressed in the initial focus group, session two focused on participants exploring their daily patterns and routines of self-care, productivity and leisure and participants then made use of a diary to plan and goal set around a new occupation they were to take on, and present on in the final week. Engagement in meaningful leisure occupations versus sedentary activities were used to demonstrate the experience of flow during three sessions. Also job searching and goal setting were explored as productive occupations to engage in.

Occupational roles were addressed when considering volunteering and identifying skills.

Habit theory and behaviour change: According to the Trans-theoretical Model of Change, three aspects assist the stages of behaviour change: processes of change, decisional balance and self-efficacy (Prochaska *et al* 1994). The facilitators of the Work Ready programme during session two focused on the cognitive process, as well as the doing of behaviours and habits, on weighing up the pros and cons of a decision and on participants self-efficacy, when considering making changes to routine. A behavioural approach was also incorporated and entailed developing new skills through a graded approach, distraction with activity and deliberately targeting behaviour in a controlled environment so that the target behaviour is reinforced (Cole and Tufano 2008; Supyck-Mellson and McKenna 2010). This approach took form in actively creating a more balanced routine through diary use, rehearsal of interviews, practice of relaxation techniques, forming CV's and actively searching for volunteer opportunities as well as presentations and discussion around these topics. The second session provides information regarding habits and behaviour change and encouraged the participants to challenge negative habits and behaviours.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Cognitive Behavioural therapy (CBT) is a popular, evidence based psychotherapeutic approach (Duncan 2008). It focuses on key areas of thoughts behaviours, emotions, physiological responses, environment and any factorial change can lead to improvement or deterioration in another. Audhoe *et al* (2010) found that one study showed that a CBT component was the prime reason for any positive effect on re-employment in their evaluation of the effectiveness of multiple vocational interventions with unemployed people. The researcher focused on this approach during session four focusing on mental health awareness, to enable participants to change negative styles of thinking and anxious behaviour, which were barriers to occupational engagement and

confidence when job searching. Methods used were presentation, a questionnaire on stress, discussion and rehearsal of relaxation techniques.

Psychological science: Cole and Tufano (2008) put forward that occupation could be best understood and studied via the behavioural sciences such as psychology and sociology. External reinforcement and observational learning was an aim of the group process particularly in relation to CV's and interview skills development, which may then result in encouraging internal reinforcement around changes to behaviour and confidence. These processes according to theory promote self-regulation (Bandura 1977) which can be attained through identifying goals which serve as guidelines when they are observable and measurable. This is followed by self-efficacy, and insight into individual's abilities. Deci and Ryan (2000) found that motivation plays a main role in our development and being, as it is correlated to our senses of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Motivation to engage in meaningful occupations and roles was a guiding theory in order to enhance participant's sense of self efficacy and identity, beginning with use of the KAWA model through to activities focusing on assertiveness when preparing for interviews.

Findings

Three overarching themes emerged from the data analysis that defined the participants' experiences of engaging in the Work Ready programme; a changed perspective: new attitudes and skill development, taking action and the group influence.

A Changed Perspective

This theme dominated participants reported experiences of the programme. This theme describes a changed, more positive perspective on their future and current situation and the job search process, alongside skill development (9). Two participants described a change from being focused on their own difficult and personal situation to a changed perspective where they reported feeling more accepting of their situation.

Connor 'I think it makes you realise again you know brings it back to the conscious mind that you have to get over it and you know there's a sequence of steps that you can take to get over it, you can do things rather than thinking, can't get a job, it's me I'm useless and, you know so it's just an issue and these supports are set up, this is your job you know, this is your job to run these courses and stuff so, it's not unusual, it's part of the process'

Changes in attitudes and beliefs contributed to this change in perspective, for example, gaining insight into and re-evaluation of routines and habits occurred for all programme participants (9). This insight focused on how time spent engaged in productive or constructive activities was significantly low.

George 'That was a terrible thing to realise you spend a whole lot of time doing nothing ... it was good actually to confront how little you actually do'

Six participants described learning various methods and skills in maintaining a balanced routine, such as through diary use, increased

physical activity and socialising. Participants engaged in the occupation of baking to demonstrate an example of engagement in a constructive activity and productive versus sedentary time use. The activity was described as enjoyable by five participants also reported that this experience created an awareness of the benefits of spending time engaged in a purposeful leisure activity.

Stephen 'it had definitely a therapeutic aspect to it, I mean the fact that you have a fine product at the end of it is a bonus as well, you can show that you were actually doing something and that there's an end result to it'

Another change in perspective and beliefs reported by participants, was overcoming low confidence and negative thoughts. Four participants described these changes through belief and attitude change and therefore becoming more positive and confident individuals, following participation in the programme.

Eric 'I've overcome a lot of the negativity and a fair bit of the indecision you know ... by my own admission I wallowed for a while you know and ah I know it's ah it's time to get up going'

Five participants referred to a changed view of the value of social support networks and Mary as an example described a new interest in renewing old friendships - *'I've realised I just want to renew my old friendships really from Galway'*.

According to all participants (9) skill development through activity based interventions was central to the development of this changed perspective. Specific skills participants reported they developed and practiced in the programme included; interviewing, CV writing, job searching and goal setting. One participant attributed his success in getting a job to his mock interview. Other benefits of the mock interview included gaining knowledge from watching the recording and practice in a realistic situation. All participants (9) spoke of how feedback from the group members and facilitators provided insight into necessary improvements they would have otherwise not seen themselves.

Brenda 'I loved that CV ... to get different sets of eyes on something that you've worked so hard on, and to so easily say 'take that word out, put that word in' and it's better immediately'

The SMART method of goal setting was a technique learned by all who attended (9) where each participant made efforts to refine their goal setting technique in relation to life balance and job searching. Other job search techniques developed and practiced by participants included; networking, a more focused career choice and the consideration of volunteering by two participants. In pre-programme interviews, networking was described by five interviewees as a method that successfully results in employment. In one pre interview, Amy described this was an already identified goal for the future - *'I have a huge network that I could work on, but I'm not doing it, so this is what I have to do'*.

During the programme this information was discussed and shared, with those who had experience of networking and informal job search strategies, recommending it to other group members. Consideration of networking as a valuable and successful job searching tool, became a focal point for four participants.

Eric 'need to get on top of this whole networking thing ... I was kind of unimaginative in my job strategy you know in terms of waiting for posts to appear am, but ah you know other than this it might feel the pickier you have to be, you know a lot more willing to write cold letters you know and putting yourself out there, so that was something I was aware of but kind of ignoring you know and now I realise just how important it is'

The sessions on stress management and staying mentally healthy were attended by six participants in total. The feedback describes the information as valuable and informative overall. For two individuals stress management techniques were already part of their routine before taking part in this programme. One participant reported new learning based on this aspect of the programme. By identifying that he had recently been experiencing stress, it changed his perspective and increased his understanding of a conflict situation in his workplace.

Stephen '... how it manifests itself like a lot of the things that you had up there I could actually identify with, you know, it just seems to get bad around interviews or stressful times like, you know it kind of clicked today ... I've had a bit of problems in the last few weeks but I can relate a lot to what has been going on in the last few weeks now, whereas I mightn't have done before, so recognising the stress signs is an important one I would say'

A changed perspective through attitudes and beliefs and also the development of job search and lifestyle skills occurred for all participants, resulting in this theme dominating the findings that emerged.

Taking Action

Actual changes in activity and behaviour occurred in relation to job search techniques for all participants. A central aspect of the programme was goal setting, where each participant recorded weekly goals using the SMART technique and also as a closing exercise of the programme. Each participant took part in a mock interview, which was directly followed by feedback and a follow up interview. Each person prepared a CV, which was followed by feedback and a follow up CV review. Positive changes took place from these programme elements including; the creation of SMART goals focused on achieving a healthier life balance, improved body language and the creation of a more concise explanation of skills and experience.

Mary 'the whole thing about talking through your education and your work experience and getting that prepared in a way that is succinct but gets across the more important points, I think it definitely helps you in preparation for the interviews'

Two participants described how improving their interview technique assisted their performance in interviews that subsequently resulted in employment. Brenda describes her success following learning about power posing and body language and how she put this learning into action.

'that power posing like that did prepare me for the interview yesterday, going in I was much more, not much more aware but much more skilful in using my body language ... I didn't worry about what I was saying but I

made my body language be what I wanted it to be and I kind of felt I flowed much better because of my body language ... yeah I really knew my worth yesterday and I felt that just came from the power thing beforehand and watching my body language'

The SMART goals mentioned above also focused on the development of job search strategies. Participants came to the group with an uncertainty of the effectiveness of their job search approach - *Eric 'a google search definitely didn't help, it just confused me more'*. In the final focus group it emerged that four participants had adapted their search strategies, changing their technique to include networking and also in regards to actively putting applications together and seeking references. As an example, one participant had a broad interest in psychology to begin with and in the final session discussed the specified occupation he was interested in, a psychotherapist, and also the method of becoming qualified in this area. Six group members gained employment whilst part of the programme. For those that gained employment, discussion took place on the positives and negatives of returning to work, which included feeling busy, feeling tired, being able to plan, an increase in motivation, less stress, a sense of nervousness and a new perspective going forward.

Michael 'It's been very busy. It has meant major upheaval at home but overall it's been good'

Patrick 'a bit of apprehension because am it's over ten years since I did a nine to five job so do you know you have all that apprehension about, will you like it, you don't like it, do you stick with it or are you back out again looking for a job you know like would I have been better off not getting it and maybe, you know all these things that you're thinking about you know, am so, that's just where I'm at'

Eight participants reported a change in routine. One participant described adapting his routine coming towards exams, so that he would engage in more studying than socialising – *Connor 'limit socialising to an hour every couple of days'*. Participants reported making other adaptations which included; taking up hobbies such as gardening, watching less television, engaging in DIY work around the house and developed more regular

sleeping patterns as described by Eric - *'Yeah getting up early has been really good ... I've been up, at eight or before it every day lately'*

Within six weeks, participants of Work Ready made behavioural changes that encompassed their routines, lifestyle, goal setting, interview techniques, CV quality and job search behaviour.

The Group Influence

According to eight participants, the forum that was created among group members was a positive and influential environment and social support was found from having opportunities to be with, and share experiences with, people in a similar situation. Group members reported that they talked through experiences amongst each other with humour and respect for one another, and talked through topics they found difficult to discuss with others.

George 'we were saying you could go weeks without actually doing anything, like if you said that to someone who actually goes to work every day and has to come home and do stuff they wouldn't, just wouldn't understand it'

For eight participants, individuals in the group influenced their learning and decision making in a positive way with a focus on moving forward, achieving goals and supporting each other in doing so.

Mary 'when you're doing this often you're on your own really and you're asking for advice and different opinions and this and that and the other, but it's very dispiriting and people give you the opposite opinion all the time so, I think when you're in an environment where people are kind of talking it out a bit, it puts it more into perspective for you and then you can make your own decision in the end anyway but at least you've got a better, and different opinions'

Learning influenced by the group was also reportedly due to the honesty and depth in the feedback received. As an example, group two agreed with Marys' description of the value of the feedback each member received compared to generic methods of developing CV and interview techniques.

'you can get that from the internet probably anyway do you know, a personal feedback of your own particular tendencies and weaknesses and strengths is so much more valuable because you can't get that normally from anybody'.

One example of supporting each other in moving forward was where Stephen discussed an issue of conflict he was dealing with at work, and talking it out within the group reportedly changed his perspective, and Patrick reinstated the group support - *'A problem shared is a problem halved, there you go, give us a ring during the week'.*

A relaxed, non-judgemental atmosphere among people in a similar situation was how participants described the group they had been a part of. This atmosphere and an understanding and openness among people in a similar situation, was what participants attributed to the establishment of such a support group

Brenda 'it was just different to have somebody, kind of to be by your side rather than looking in front of you or pushing you from behind, just somebody to be by your side is what I found in the group'

George 'You're not trying to solve each other's problems ... Yeah like we were saying you could go weeks without actually doing anything, like if you said that to someone who actually goes to work every day and has to come home and do stuff they wouldn't, just wouldn't understand it'

On reflection, William referred to the experience as fostering a sense of teamwork - *'it was good because you got talking to people and we were working as a team, we were working together'*

These comments were particularly made in comparison to the type of support available from friends and family, and other services for job seekers. Eight participants disclosed that discussing unemployment in the Work Ready programme was different because there was an understanding of each other and open discussion on the experience of unemployment.

Brenda 'if you're just in a careers advisory in an office somewhere where you know them for ten minutes and you ask them to help with your problem I mean, I wouldn't, so I mean you're more comfortable doing it in this kind of setting yeah'

Connor 'good to get different opinions and different situations and just with people who had the same problems and issues'

In summary, the theme 'The group influence' described the support, positive influence and learning that group members reportedly gained from one another as well as the overall group cohesiveness that reportedly emerged and maintained over the length of the programme.

Discussion

This paper set out to qualitatively appraise the experience of participation in the Work Ready programme for unemployed graduates. This appraisal took place through an in-depth analysis of the lived experience of their participation and the occupational and other changes that resulted from participation. Overall, the findings that emerged described multiple positive aspects of taking part in the group. Findings demonstrated evidence of a change in perspective through new attitudes and skill development, multiple changes in everyday activity and of the creation of a positive and supportive environment among the group members.

‘A changed perspective’ is a theme that explores how participants changed their attitudes to their current and future life situation and developed new skills in relation to job searching and the maintenance of well-being while unemployed. All participants reported gaining insight into and a new perspective on their routines and described this as leading to a re-evaluation of the significance of activities they engaged in on a daily basis. All found that time spent in a productive or a constructive activity was very low and this is consistent with the findings that disruption to routine and poor time use are consequences of unemployment (Burda and Hammermesh 2009; Scanlon *et al* 2011; Waters and Moore 2002; Winefield *et al* 1992). Following participation in Work Ready, six participants reported learning methods of how to maintain a balanced routine. A decrease in optimism and achievement motivation occurs in unemployed graduates (Cassidy and Wright 2008). Through the analysis it was apparent that some participants had become more optimistic following participation in Work Ready; four participants described beginning to overcome negativity and issues with low confidence which is an outcome that has been found in similar programmes for this population

(Rose *et al* 2012; Yanar *et al* 2009).

The second theme describes how a change in action occurred during the process of Work Ready. Participants reported making changes to their behaviour; eight positively made changes to their routines including creating more regular sleeping patterns. Participants also actively developed goal search strategies, advanced the quality of their curriculum vitae and improved interview techniques. As one study found that being in a job that does not meet skill level is more detrimental to psychological health than being unemployed (Cassidy 1994) having a focused strategy and identified area of suitable employment was essential. A notable change was that following the programme, six group members had gained employment and two of the remaining job seekers reported overall enhancing their job search technique, which is consistent with research on unemployment interventions that identify a significant positive effect on re-employment (Joseph and Greenberg 2001; Rife and Belcher 1994; Rose *et al* 2012; Spera *et al* 1994; Van Hooft and Noordzij 2009; Vinokur *et al* 1995).

Unemployed graduates experience a negative impact on the social supports available to them (Cassidy and Wright 2008) and the third theme explores how group cohesion and support was a positive outcome of participation and an essential part of the programme experience. Roberts *et al* (1997) in evaluating a support group intervention with cancer patients found that the group forum provided a sense of belonging and empathy as well as the development of insight through peer validation and feedback, elements of a group that are also reflected by Cole (2008). This study also identifies similar strengths of a support group. The group environment among unemployed graduates in Work Ready, facilitated by qualified Occupational Therapists, was reported by all participants to create a support network and positively influence each-others learning. All felt that a non-judgmental and relaxed atmosphere was what allowed such group cohesion to be created. Access to a support group was mentioned by just one interviewee as a reason for participation prior to the programme

commencement and so to have gained such support was an unseen advantage for the majority of participants.

Exploration of what programme elements and strategies contributed to the experience as demonstrated through the three themes, is a necessary point of discussion. The essential programme components discussed here were included in past research on the Work Ready programme in the University of Limerick (Dunne 2012; Farrell 2012; Morgan 2012; O' Mahony 2012, Quirke 2012). Programme elements that have demonstrated significant positive results in the literature include; the necessity of a group forum, a self-efficacy and coping methods focus and emphasis on job search strategies (Wanberg 2012), all of which were addressed in Work Ready.

Firstly, a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) focus was essential. Programmes that address self-esteem, self-efficacy, personal control, preparedness against set-backs, thought management and coping resources have been successful in the past (Borland and Tseng 2007; Brenninkmeijer and Blonk 2011; Joseph and Greenberg 2001; Maysent and Spera 1995; Rose *et al* 2012; Spera *et al* 1994; Vinokur *et al* 1995; Vuori *et al* 2002; Yanar *et al* 2009). Audhoe *et al* (2010) found in an analysis for vocational interventions for the unemployed, that a CBT component was the prime reason for any positive effect on re-employment. This Work Ready programme referred to the approach of CBT in an effort to focus on mental health awareness and changing negative styles of thinking. There was not a uniform result across participants in relation to negativity and confidence; it can be maintained that participation in this programme did not have a significant effect on these areas. However, the findings of this study that demonstrate improvements in confidence, insight and a more positive outlook imply improvements occurred in relation to psychological wellbeing. For five Work Ready participants there was a new value gained of the social supports available to them. Although an increase in optimism was not reported by all participants, it could be suggested that the focus on

CBT enhanced the changes that occurred in other areas of psychological well-being: all participants gained insight and all participants reported a new change in perspective, thus indicating a trend on the positive effect on outlook.

A focus on learning practical skills relating to job search behaviour was an inherent aspect of Work Ready and this approach is consistent with other unemployment programmes that have been researched, focusing on interview skills, job search efficacy and goal setting (Borland and Tseng 2007; Rife and Belcher 1994; Van Hooft and Noordzij 2009). Audhoe *et al* (2010) recommended that further evaluation should take place of return to work intervention strategies, and to include behavioural components in programmes for unemployed people. This study incorporated behavioural components such as rehearsal of interviews, and other practical skills of changing CV layouts and writing structured plans whilst goal setting. Gaining skills, confidence and new knowledge on job search techniques was reported by all who took part in the programme. All nine individuals focused on their learning of new information and development of new skills and gave examples of adapting body language in interviews, physically making improvements to CV's during group time and observably improving on interview techniques over the course of mock interviews. In prior research of Work Ready, these were identified as the most beneficial elements of the group (O' Mahony 2012). These elements imply a focused method was taken in creating an effective job search strategy, which is consistent with past findings on the success of a focused process of job searching (Crossley and Highhouse 2005; Koen *et al* 2010). Six participants gained jobs and other reasons could be attributed to this separate to participation in the programme, such as existing networks and an increase in job openings. However, two participants felt that improving their interview technique in the programme assisted their performance in interviews that subsequently resulted in employment. Also, the two remaining unemployed participants identified changing their job search strategy and having more confidence with their new approaches. It could

be submitted that practical skills and direct feedback in programmes with unemployed people are successful mediators of change, particularly in relation to job searching.

In the introduction of this paper, an Occupational Therapy approach to an unemployment intervention was recommended and subsequently demonstrated to be effective in the findings. The profession has an inherent understanding of the disruption and devastating consequences that unemployment has on routine, due to our foundation on the health promoting benefits of engagement in meaningful occupation (Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002; Roley *et al* 2008). Unemployed peoples' ability to structure routines and remain active has been linked to positive mental health (Wanberg 2012). The group facilitators discussed occupational disruption in regards to participants' current routines, the importance of occupation, what engagements they found to be meaningful, and methods of maintaining a balanced routine. There was also an activity based approach of engaging in the occupation of baking. Five participants felt they gained new knowledge in relation to the value of an occupation. However, interestingly eight participants discovered changes in their routine following the programme and reported the change was related to identifying issues with routine and type of activities they engaged in. The reported change of adaptation to routine, in eight of nine programme participants, can thus be attributed to the unique occupational focus on meaningful and structured engagement. This change of perspective and behaviour in relation to routine and activities was an important finding as Cassidy (1994) identified that having a positive attitude to and engaging in constructive leisure activities were positive determinants of a resistance to stress.

A final component of this programme that enabled a positive experience was the formation of a cohesive group. Cole (2008) stated a number of advantages of the energy created within a group of people in a similar situation. They included the interaction creating an energy that maximises a motivation for change, and that the support and feedback

from people in similar circumstances allows for development of self-awareness, feedback and self-efficacy. It may be inferred that the facilitators Occupational Therapy focus and experience of group formation was a contributing factor to group environment created. O Mahoney (2012) questioned if the group members were of different ages and outlooks in their study, would there be a difference in the importance of group support but this proved to not be an issue within this strand of research which involved people of various backgrounds and ages. In fact the demographic of this research comprised specifically of graduates, in contrast to past research on the Work Ready Programme, implying the programmes relevance to multiple groups of unemployed individuals. Wanberg (2012) stressed the necessity of a group forum when considering future research into groups for unemployed individuals and all previous strands of research on the Work Ready programme reported the group forum to be successful in its purpose. It has been reiterated through the literature how the formation of group support is an essential element of such a programme, and this study again repeated these findings. Of note are eight participant testimonies on the availability of in-depth discussion within this group, in comparison to other supports available for unemployed graduates, where discussion of well-being and issues with their situation does not take place to such an extent.

Limitations

In regards to the interpretation of results the researcher acknowledges that the following limitations may impact on the quality of the findings. As the researcher (M. Lynch) facilitated each session of the programmes and also conducted the focus groups, bias should be taken into account. The researcher had in-depth knowledge of what occurred in each session prior to evaluation of the programme and observed experiences within sessions of the group that could influence the interpretation of results. A significant

limitation is that participants were asked to feedback on their experience of Work Ready to the Occupational Therapist (M. Lynch) who facilitated the programme. It is thus likely that they may have been inhibited in criticising the programme and expressing negative comments. Although participants could contact the supervising researcher (Dr. K. Robinson), no alternative format, either written or to an external individual, was offered to the participants as a means of giving feedback. Such methods would have increased honesty and validity of the findings.

All participants had been in education in the year preceding participation in the programme. Unfortunately, the second group were out of education for a shorter period of time, and it is difficult to judge whether they were in a similar mind-set in relation to unemployment and job searching. There also existed differences between the two groups in terms of the second group having an adapted programme timetable as outlined in the methodology. It is not possible to judge if the differences would have a significant impact on the group experience. This could have impacted on evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme as not everyone received the same exposure and had potentially different experiences. However, there were no visible inconsistencies in the findings of each group. It should also be taken into consideration that the participant demographic varied across both groups in terms of age, education, employment history and unemployment history yet through analysis this did not appear to impact significantly on the experience of the programme.

Generalisation may be difficult to the whole population as the participants voluntarily took part in the programme and unknown differences may exist between unemployed graduates who would voluntarily seek out an outlet in an effort to change their unemployment situation versus those who would not. Also seven of the nine participants were male and this gender ratio is not representative of the unemployed graduated population. It is also imperative that generalisation of these findings is limited to the context of a current Irish graduate population.

Recommendations

In regards to Work Ready being run in the future there are a number of programme elements that were proven to be successful in this research. A CBT approach allowed participants to develop insight and decrease negative thinking. Practical activities of mock interviews and CV analysis were commented on as being the most effective way to learn new skills and acted as a motivation for change. The group forum was essential in the creation of an environment where open discussion and supportive learning could take place.

There are possible adaptations that could be of benefit to make to Work Ready. Addressing psychological well-being of an individual who is unemployed is a confirmed and necessary area to address (Wanberg, 2012). In this programme participants felt this was not applicable in the situation yet they experienced changes in psychological well-being indirectly. Perhaps in the future this aspect of the programme can be adapted to be more relatable and practical to the participants in question. Also, participants positively experienced engagement in baking and subsequently made change to their routines. Adapting this to engagement in more than one occupation could further reinforce the meaning of an occupation and its potential benefits for participants.

The facilitation of this particular group by Occupational Therapists with knowledge of occupational disruption is crucial. As this research has demonstrated, a focus on a balance in routine and on engagement in meaningful occupations was key to creating the improvements in well-being and job searching behaviour that were observable in this papers findings. Harris and Harris (2009) recommended that health workers in the community take on their duty of care in the essential role of health promotion and put their unique abilities to good use, to intervene at a preventative stage. Unemployed people experience occupational deprivation with devastating consequences on well-being, and to reiterate

Whitefords (2000) conclusion, Occupational Therapists must address this problem now and in the future by both social and political means. Other community organisations such as FÁS, have a central and established role in being the most well-known and accessible outlet for a person who becomes unemployed in Ireland. Their expertise in career planning and other job search areas would not be matched by an Occupational Therapist. A more cohesive network of supports with an amalgamation of disciplines and expertise would be most beneficial to the client in taking a comprehensive approach to prevent all of the negative effects of unemployment.

Timing of this intervention is critical. This researcher recommends continuing this programme with individuals who have been unemployed for no more than a year to ensure that the interventions purpose is preventative. It would also be advisable to continue research with individuals about to graduate as occurred with the Springboard students in this study, as the percentage of graduates in unemployment remains high. Learning of strategies to maintain well-being and establishing an effective job search strategy, in preparation for potential unemployment would be appropriate as a preventative measure. Programme adaptations should occur in this case, to take into consideration that many pre-graduates do not have experience of unemployment and so may find it difficult to relate to the extent of negative effects.

All other strands of research on the Work Ready programme have recommended further research and this paper reiterates that recommendation. Although the findings of this study are promising, the study is limited and a randomised control trial would be suitable to implement. This is necessary as the fact that weak evidence exists for such interventions, is the main hindrance in having such necessary programmes provided on a larger scale in the community. A randomised control trial with a large sample size would be recommended to ensure a high level of evidence based practice. Quantitative analysis on this scale would provide

significant results on changes that occurred during the programme in relation to psychological and physical well-being and changes in relation to job search behaviour. This research approach would also account for the influencing factors on programme findings such as the group forum, the approaches used and personal factors. A follow up six months after the programme would evaluate its effectiveness long term. Research across other cultures and contexts, differing from an Irish setting, could provide further support for the effectiveness and the validity of the Work Ready programme.

Conclusion

Unemployment is a social problem that poses a significant risk to multiple aspects of health and well-being with potentially devastating consequences. A substantial number of Irish people face unemployment and this number is over-represented by Irish graduates (Glynn *et al* 2013). Current research recommends that more attention needs to be paid to 'primary prevention' and reducing unemployment numbers, and available services should be matched appropriately to the individuals who need those services (Wanberg 2012). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the experience of unemployed graduates' participation in the Work Ready programme. The findings indicate that participation influenced the creation of a new perspective, more structured routines and job search strategies, positive changes in attitude and also created a forum that provided support and encouragement. Notably, six group members had gained employment by the time the group concluded. A CBT approach, the employment of practical skills as a method of learning, in-depth analysis of occupational issues and time use and the group forum itself were found to be essential programme elements.

Occupational Therapy as a health care providing profession holds a critical role in health and well-being promotion, and potentially this role is

expanding to address multiple social issues in the community outside of the standard areas of practice. Occupational Therapists appreciate the disruption and devastating consequences that the unemployment experience has on a persons' occupational being and have the appropriate skills to collaborate with unemployed populations to promote well-being during unemployment (AOTA 2009; Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002). Essential characteristics in preventing the deleterious effects of unemployment are knowledge of the value of engagement in a meaningful occupation, a client-centered focus and therapeutic skills that will enable the creation of a supportive group forum.

Although this strand of research focuses on a different demographic than previous research on the Work Ready Programme, findings were similar overall, thus demonstrating its adaptability to different members of the unemployed population. Also the group was complex in terms of age range, discipline range and the multifaceted effects of unemployment experienced by participants; Occupational Therapy relates well to complexity.

Further research is needed but this paper advances the evidence for the rigorous empirical evaluation of preventative occupation focused programmes with unemployed individuals, and specifically unemployed graduates. It is reiterated here to focus away from the effects of unemployment and focus on preventative measures that can be taken in the community. The findings overall illustrate the benefits of engagement in an Occupational Therapy programme through its support of well-being and improvement of job search behaviour during unemployment. This paper's contribution is that it was able to recommend further research into and advocate for the continuation of an Occupational Therapy programme with unemployed graduates in Ireland.

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Discussion

The overall aim of this thesis was to augment the evidence available to Occupational Therapists working with unemployed people and to explore the role of the profession in the theory and service development with this client group. To address this overall aim the nature of published research on the topic of prevention or assistance-focused interventions to help individuals find work or improve their well-being whilst unemployed was qualitatively appraised (Paper I). The experience of graduate unemployment was qualitatively explored through a conceptual model of Occupational Therapy practice, the Kawa (River) model (Paper II). Finally, evidence to support an Occupational Therapy group programme for unemployed graduates (Work Ready) and the lived experience of participation in the programme was qualitatively examined (Paper III).

Discussion of Results

Paper I is a narrative literature review that aimed to generate a qualitative synthesis of current research on interventions that targeted the well-being and re-employment of people out of work. This discussion provided an insight into the best evidence that exists on the topic and qualitatively appraises the programmes; their implementation, findings and overall recommendations. The programmes present significant evidence of improved self-efficacy and optimism, lower levels of stress and an improved employment rate among participants. It also emerged from this review that a focus on CBT, skill development, coping resources and the format of a group forum, are programme elements that have led to favourable outcomes. Paper I highlighted that an opportunity exists for Occupational Therapy to enhance this area of research, particularly in consideration of the need for existing evidence to focus more on meaningful engagement in occupation and the impact of time use and daily routines. Unemployment is a growing social and health problem and Occupational Therapists possess the required skills and experience to

successfully implement programmes with the unemployed population. Occupational Therapy practitioners and scientists should be focusing on the innovative extension of traditional practice, on the potential consumer of OT services and on the taking of preventative measures in relation to community health and well-being.

Paper II aimed to add to the qualitative literature on unemployment through exploration of the subjective meanings unemployed graduates attribute to the experience. A wealth of literature demonstrates the detrimental and complex effects of being out of work on mental health, physical health, and also on social patterns, status and time use. (McKee Ryan *et al* 2005; Waddell and Burton 2006; Wanberg 2012). The Kawa (River) Model facilitated the emergence of a rich description of the graduate unemployment experience highlighting the influence on their lives of four inherent factors: *rocks* or obstructions such as finance, negative thinking and disruption to routine; *driftwood* or the participants' resources such as support networks and personal characteristics; the multi-faceted influence of the *environment* or riverbed on unemployment, from government to community to family; and finally the overall sense of uncertainty and lack of control dominating *life flow*. Paper II acknowledged that unemployment is a significant health problem area, the effects of which leave unemployed graduates highly vulnerable to occupational deprivation, and reiterated the findings of paper I in challenging Occupational Therapists and Scientists to increase their awareness and education, and consider their input in relation to those susceptible to the effects of unemployment in the community.

Paper III qualitatively determined many positive outcomes of an Occupational Therapy group programme for unemployed graduates (Work Ready) and explored the lived experience of participation in the programme. Work Ready was adapted to the graduate population based on a review of intervention evidence (Paper I) and also through increasing understanding of the graduate unemployment experience (Paper II). The findings of Paper III were categorised into three themes, indicating that

participants changed their perspective attitudes and beliefs; developed new skills in job searching and maintaining a balanced routine, made changes to behaviour and created a group forum that provided support and encouragement. Overall, the findings identify many positive benefits of the Work Ready programme for both mediating the unemployment experience and supporting re-entry to the labour market. This paper advances the evidence for preventative occupation based programmes with unemployed individuals, and specifically unemployed graduates, reiterating that focus needs to be on preventative measures that can be taken in the community. This paper recommends further research into and advocating for the continuation of an Occupational Therapy programme with unemployed graduates in Ireland.

Methodological Considerations

Paper I took a narrative review approach which is discursive in nature and allowed for a quality appraisal of each study. However, the nature of a narrative review according to Slavin (1995) will inevitably involve encountering key study limitations. Reviewer bias in the selection of studies to be included may have occurred as the methodological approach is not as rigorous as a meta-analysis or systematic review. Also, a systematic method for deciding the significance of each piece of evidence was not included. However a recent meta-analysis (Wanberg 2012) was published that partly focused on unemployment interventions and therefore repeating this process was not warranted. A meta-analysis involves a quantitative aggregation of data across individual studies on a similar topic and allows for the generation of new hypotheses and an overall improved power and precision of findings (Abate 2006; Green *et al* 2011). A narrative review approach instead allowed for consideration of unemployment interventions with greater attention to discussing the theories guiding interventions, the delivery methods, professionals

involved and the included intervention elements rather than focusing on outcomes and results alone. The author attempted to enhance the validity of this review through the specification of a search strategy and inclusion criteria. Interventions included in this review took place in a variety of settings across different countries. The environment and context in which occupational engagement occurs is shaped by culture (Kielhofner 2002). Cultural differences of an Irish context as well as varying social policies and legislative approaches to unemployment may have influenced the findings and also may make generalisation difficult. This includes government policy, social attitude to unemployment and the opportunities and supports available to unemployed people.

A qualitative research design was suitable to the research question in Paper II and paper III as it intertwines with Occupational Therapy philosophy in that it is based on the assumption that meanings individuals attribute to experiences are subjective, socially constructed, complex, and unique (Christiansen and Townsend 2011; Miller and Brewer 2003). The strengths of qualitative research also lie in how data is emergent rather than prefigured and is grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall and Rossman 2011). For both paper II and paper III the design utilised focus groups and individual pre-programme interviews with eleven participants, as the primary methods of data collection. All interview data was transcribed in full and entered into QSR NVivo 9© Software Programme (QSR International Pty Ltd 2010).

Thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible approach which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data (Braun and Clark 2006), it was chosen as it is appropriate for use with those who have little experience of qualitative analysis and could therefore facilitate participation in the research process. The six stage guide to thematic analysis described by Braun and Clark (2006) was adhered to with a different approach taken for each paper. For paper II, data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach availing of deductive measures (Crabtree and Miller 1999). The analysis was guided by

the theoretical constructs of the Kawa (River) model which was used to extract data relating to the models core concepts. Four main themes were thus named and defined based on the four core elements of the model. In paper III, thematic analysis was incorporated to develop literature inductively allowing themes and patterns to arise from the data rather than being defined prior to analysis and collection (Patton 1990).

In paper III, phenomenology was chosen as an appropriate approach to the study of the lived experience of participation in the Work Ready programme. This was because the purpose was not focused on explaining behaviour but to generate a sense and rich description of the experience, through the words of the participants (Finlay 2002). The principles of phenomenology aim to generate a holistic sense of the person and their intertwined relationship with their environment (Finlay 2002) and paper III employed these principles through data analysis and generation of the findings.

In paper II and paper III the possibility of bias should be taken into account as the researcher who conducted the data collection, data analysis and construction of this paper is a recent graduate that prior to commencing research, had experience of unemployment and related to the concerns as identified by participants. Therefore the researchers' preconceptions of the experience of graduate unemployment may have influenced the findings. A significant limitation was that the primary method for participants to give feedback on their experience of Work Ready was through the person who facilitated the programme (M. Lynch). It is thus likely that they may have been inhibited in criticising the programme and expressing negative comments. No alternative format was offered to the participants to give feedback and this would have increased honesty and validity of the findings. Reflexivity took place to combat this and allow the researcher to analyse her own roles and attitudes. The researcher engaged in maintenance of a reflexive diary throughout the research process accounting for all interactions with the participants and the data and also

reflected on preconceptions that existed prior to beginning data collection. Finlay (2002) refers to this phenomenological process as 'hermeneutic reflection' which refers to being aware and continuously reflecting on the emergence of our own presuppositions and assumptions. Generalisation may be difficult to the whole population as the participants voluntarily took part in this study and Work Ready programme and unknown differences may exist between unemployed graduates who would voluntarily seek out an outlet in an effort to change their unemployment situation versus those who would not. Also eight of the eleven participants were male and this gender ratio is not representative of the unemployed graduated population.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to recruitment ethical approval was obtained for the study and methods of data collection described in paper II and paper III, from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSREC), University of Limerick. Potential risks and benefits of participation in Work Ready were presented in the information letter (See Appendix D) and the risks associated with these changes were minimal. Because all participants would have been involved in group intervention anonymity could not be guaranteed. The need for group members to maintain confidentiality regarding information disclosed by peers was discussed in the first session of each programme prior to the focus group taking place. To protect identities and privacy of participants pseudonyms were assigned and identifiable information was changed when analysing the data and composing this thesis.

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Conclusion

The overall aim of this thesis was to augment the evidence available to Occupational Therapists working with unemployed people and to explore the role of the profession in the theory and programme development with this potential client group. A number of implications for the practice of Occupational Therapy and future research with unemployed people have been identified throughout the papers comprising this thesis.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice

Paper I, paper II and paper III all recognise and discuss the impact of unemployment on health and its associated consequences on occupational well-being. It is crucial for Occupational Therapists, Occupational scientists and Occupational students to increase their knowledge of this growing social problem at an educational level and through promotion of practise with this population in the community. Work has historically been a central focus of Occupational Therapy (Krefting 1985). Occupational Therapy generally provides services and vocational rehabilitation to people with an illness or disability and evidence does not exist of implementing therapy in the community with a focus on preventative health promotion with people who are well. Harris and Harris (2009) recommended that health workers in the community take on their duty of care in the essential role of health promotion and put their unique abilities to good use, to intervene at a preventative stage.

In light of Occupational Therapy theory and what is known about the unemployment experience, an Occupational Therapy approach to intervention is justified to develop and tested for efficacy as identified in paper I and II, and subsequently evaluated in paper III. Occupational Therapists have the appropriate skills to focus on cognitive behavioural elements, behavioural change in terms of job search skills, identification of coping resources and the analysis of occupation and time use. The profession also has invaluable experience of group facilitation and health

promotion in the community. In this thesis the state of unemployment is seen as a form of occupational deprivation; the profession holds an intrinsic understanding of the disruption and devastating consequences of occupational deprivation and the appropriate skills to collaborate with unemployed populations to promote well-being (AOTA 2009; Douthwaite 1994; Joss 2002). Facilitation of the Work Ready programme by Occupational Therapists was shown to elicit an understanding of the experience of graduate unemployment (paper II), and to be successful in skill development, attitude change and behavioural change (paper III).

Other community organisations have a central and established role as outlets for unemployed people in Ireland. Their expertise in career planning and other job search areas would not be matched by an Occupational Therapist. A more cohesive network of supports with an amalgamation of disciplines and expertise would be most beneficial to the client in taking a comprehensive approach to prevent all of the negative effects of unemployment. Occupational therapists should seek out opportunities to learn with others, share implicit knowledge and to develop communities of practice.

In the approach to therapy with the unemployed population it is fundamental to be aware of the context and the influence of multiple factors on the lived experience of unemployment. The Kawa (River) model was utilised in paper II and paper III and would be recommended as a conceptual model of practice in gaining a rich description of the lived experience of unemployment. This model acutely identifies a direction for Occupational Therapy in terms goals for therapy with unemployed graduates and also the vulnerability of this population to health disparities if faced with long term unemployment.

Implications for future Research

Firstly, paper II recommends that advancing the evidence base for the Kawa (River) model would be beneficial as it proved successful as a conceptual model of practice and sustained development is required of a model to ensure its validity and usefulness (Kielhofner 2009).

All evidenced based research on unemployment interventions and the unpublished research on the Work Ready programme have recommended continued research and the three papers of this thesis reiterate that recommendation. Both papers I and III identify evidence that supports a number of programme elements that should be considered in the design and development of future interventions with the unemployed population; a CBT approach, job search skills development, analysis of coping resources and the formation of group forum. There are possible adaptations that could be of benefit to make to Work Ready in terms of the approach to mental health and an increased focus on the potential benefits of engagement in meaningful occupation.

The findings of paper III are promising, however the study is limited and so the next step the future research of this programme would be the implementation of a Randomised Control Trial. This is necessary as the fact that weak evidence exists for such interventions, is the main hindrance in having such necessary programmes provided on a larger scale in the community. A Randomised Control Trial with a large sample size would be recommended to ensure a high level of evidence based practice. Quantitative analysis on this scale would provide significant results and feedback on changes that occurred during the programme in relation to psychological and physical well-being and changes in relation to job search behaviour. This research approach would also account for the influencing factors on programme findings such as the group forum, the approaches used and personal factors. A follow up six months after the programme would evaluate its effectiveness long term and significantly increase the validity of the findings.

Finally, timing of this intervention is critical. This researcher recommends continuing this programme with individuals who have been unemployed for no more than a year to ensure that the interventions purpose is preventative. It would also be advisable to continue research with individuals about to graduate as occurred with the Springboard students in this study, as the percentage of graduates in unemployment remains high. Learning of strategies to maintain well-being and establishing an effective job search strategy, in preparation for potential unemployment would be appropriate as a preventative measure. Programme adaptations should occur in this case, to take into consideration that many pre-graduates do not have experience of unemployment and so may find it difficult to relate to the extent of negative effects.

Concluding Statement

The aim of this thesis was to augment the evidence available to Occupational Therapists working with unemployed people and to explore the role of the profession in the theory and service development with this population. The prevailing theme throughout this thesis was the need for health care to prioritise returning to the occupation of work to counteract poor health in the well population.

The first major contribution made in this thesis was the gathering and presentation of an inside perspective into the experience of graduate unemployment. This experience was conceptualised from an Occupational Therapy viewpoint resulting in the creation of a rich description of the barriers to well-being these graduates are faced with, their resources and supports, the influence of varying environmental factors and a description of how overall life flow is defined by unemployment. Understanding unemployment extends beyond the traditional definition of being out of a job but available for work.

The second contribution presented in this research is Work Ready, which was developed and analysed as an Occupational Therapy intervention to maintain well-being during graduate unemployment and to support re-entry to the labour market. This development and implementation was based on a synthesis of the existing evidence in order to draw implications and recommendations for Occupational Therapy practice with unemployed graduates. The findings identified positive benefits of the programme that included a more positive perspective, skill development and the creation of a forum of support, suggesting that it is important to continue the development of this programme. Work Ready is in the initial stages of development but has the potential to counteract the inevitable health consequences unemployed graduates face.

The reasons for the continuation of research on this topic is threefold; being unemployed long-term will potentially lead to detrimental effects on occupational performance, physical and mental health and well-being; the evidence for the effectiveness of interventions is insufficient; the statistics on unemployed graduates represent a social issue. This thesis appeals to Occupational Therapists, researchers and practitioners alike, to employ the recommendations discussed, to continue to make strides in researching and advocating for the continuation of an Occupational Therapy approach to this growing epidemic.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Roles and Responsibilities the 2011 Work Ready Research Team

Name	Roles	Responsibilities
Nancy Salmon	Project Manager	Since February 2011 - Liaise with members of research team to ensure that projects are all aligned with overall research aims; coordinate ethics application; coordinate recruitment; manage data; chair biweekly research team meetings; write up meeting minutes.
Judi Pettigrew	Head of Department, Intervention Co-facilitator; Research Supervisor	Developed initial idea of doing research project that included the entire department (autumn 2010); attend biweekly meetings with project manager; attend biweekly research team meetings; co-facilitate 3 group intervention sessions; supervise 2 student investigators; delegate the workload of staff
Katie Robinson	Team Member, Intervention Co-facilitator, Research Supervisor	Developed and ran pilot of this research project summer 2010; contributed to ethics application; co-facilitate 4 group intervention sessions; attends biweekly research team meetings; Devise intervention.
MaryBeth Gallagher	Team Member, Intervention Co-facilitator, Research Supervisor	Co-facilitate 8 group intervention sessions; supervise 3 student investigators; attends biweekly research team meetings; Devise intervention.
Alison Warren	Team Member, Intervention Co-facilitator, Research Supervisor	Co-facilitate 6 group intervention sessions; supervise 2 student investigators; attends biweekly research team meetings; Devise intervention; Complete risk assessment
Mairead Cahill	Team Member	Contributed to ethics application; attend biweekly research team meetings; Devise intervention; Complete risk assessment

Margot Barry	Team Member; Intervention Co-facilitator	Contributed to ethics application; co-facilitate 3 intervention sessions, attend biweekly research team meetings; Devise intervention.
Sherrie Buckley	Team Member; Intervention Co-facilitator	Attend biweekly research team meetings; co-facilitate 8 group intervention sessions; Devise intervention.

Appendix B: Author contribution to papers comprising the thesis

Page Number	Paper	Contribution of M.L to the paper
13	Paper I 'Interventions for unemployed people: A narrative review'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paper conception and design (with supervisor K. R) - Review of literature - Drafting of paper - Critical revisions of paper for important intellectual content (with supervisors K.R and M.C) - Final preparation and editing of paper
46	Paper II 'Gaining a holistic perspective on graduate unemployment through application of the Kawa (River) model'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paper conception and design (with supervisor K.R.) - Review of literature - Co-ordinate recruitment - Data collection and analysis (with study participants) - Drafting of paper - Critical revisions of paper for important intellectual content (with supervisors K. R. and M. C.) - Final preparation and editing of paper
87	Paper III 'Work Ready: A qualitative evaluation of an Occupational Therapy intervention for unemployed graduates'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study conception and design (with supervisor K. R.) - Co-ordinate recruitment - Group facilitation (with supervisor K. R.) - Data collection and analysis (with study participants) - Drafting of paper - Critical revisions of manuscript for important intellectual content (with supervisors K. R. and M. C.) - Final preparation and editing of paper

Appendix C: Recruitment poster

Work Ready



- How effective is your **job search** strategy?
- What **skills** do you bring to the table?
- Is there **balance** in your life?
- How are your **interview** techniques?



Newly graduated and unemployed?
This programme may be for you...

What's involved?

In Spring 2013 the Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of Limerick is offering free group sessions designed to help graduates who are unemployed stay fit for work and support them in finding work. The group will take place once a week for 6 weeks in UL and will focus on job search skills, balance, routine and staying mentally and physically healthy.

To participate or for more information, please contact
Katie Robinson at:
Email: katie.robinson@ul.ie



This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (No. 03_01_05_EHS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact: Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, EHS Faculty Office., University of Limerick.

Tel (061) 234101; Email : ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix D: Volunteer information letter



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Evaluation of a group Occupational Therapy programme to support wellness during unemployment for unemployed graduates.

You are invited to take part in a study evaluating an Occupational Therapy intervention programme for unemployed graduates run by the Occupational Therapy Department at the University of Limerick. You can take part in the programme without taking part in this evaluation of the programme.

Taking part in this study means engaging in a private pre-programme interview and two focus groups, one in the first session and one in the final session of the programme. The first private interview will take 45-60 minutes to complete and will take place before the Occupational Therapy programme begins. The interviewer will be an Occupational Therapy Research Student. The interview questions are about your day to day experiences since becoming unemployed and how your daily activities have changed. The interview will be tape recorded. A week after the interview a short summary of the interview will be sent to you to check through.

The first focus group will take 45-60 minutes to complete and will take place in the initial session of the Work Ready programme. The facilitator will be an Occupational Therapist. The focus group will be tape recorded. The discussion will be structured around the unemployment experience focusing on environmental factors, life circumstances, personal factors and

life and health. A week after the focus group a short summary of the focus group will be sent to you to check through.

The second focus group will take 45-60 minutes to complete and will take place in the final session of the Work Ready programme. It will focus on any changes in your daily life since you started the programme and your experience of participating. The focus group will be tape recorded. A week after the focus group a short summary of the focus group will be sent to you to check through.

There are no risks associated with taking part in this study. Getting involved in this programme will not affect your benefit/allowance. All of the information you provide as part of the research study will be kept confidential at all times. However, because you will be involved in a group Occupational Therapy programme anonymity is not possible. Your name or identifying information about you will not be reported in any publications arising from this research. There is no compensation or payment for taking part in the study.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and everyone is completely free to refuse to participate. Participants can withdraw or stop the study at any time without any consequences. You can simply contact Katie Robinson via email or phone and say you don't want to continue with the research study. No questions will be asked.

Please contact Katie Robinson if you have any questions about this study

katie.robinson@ul.ie

Occupational Therpay Department

University of Limerick (061) 213370

If you have any concerns about this study please contact: Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Limerick, Tel (061) 234101

Appendix E: Volunteer Consent Form



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Volunteer Consent Form

Evaluation of an Occupational Therapy Programme for

People who are Unemployed

I _____ am aware that I am being invited to participate voluntarily in a research study evaluating an Occupational Therapy programme for graduates who are unemployed. I have read and understand the volunteer information letter.

I have been informed by the researcher, Maeve Lynch that:

- The purpose of this research is to assess the effectiveness of the 6 week Occupational Therapy intervention programme.
- My participation will involve taking part in an interview with the researcher before the programme and responding to a summary of the interview via email.
- My participation will also involve taking part in a focus group before and after the programme and responding to a summary of those focus groups via email.
- My participation and responses will be kept confidential at all times. I will not be identified, nor will identifying information about me be reported in any publications or presentations arising from this research.

- My participation in this research is completely voluntary and I am free to refuse to participate.
- If I agree to participate, I can withdraw at any time without consequences.
- If I do withdraw from the study I can still remain in the Occupational Therapy intervention programme.

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

I have received two copies of this form, one for me to keep and one to return to the researcher.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix F: Recommended Counselling services

It is recommended that anyone experiencing distress related to mental health contact their GP to discuss the situation and for advice about what services and supports might be available.

Other services and supports include:

1. **Aware:** This is a voluntary organization whose mission is “to create a society where people with depression and their families are understood and supported, are free from stigma and have access to a broad range of appropriate therapies to enable them to reach their full potential.”

Contact Information

Website: <http://www.aware.ie/>

Helpline: 1890 303 302 Email: wecanhelp@aware.ie

2. **Grow** is a voluntary mental health organization that helps people who are experiencing mental health problems.

Contact Information

Website: <http://www.grow.ie/>

Phone: 1890 474 474 Email: info@grow.ie

3. **Limerick Mental Health Association:** This organization is connected to the national voluntary organization Mental Health Ireland. “The aims are to promote positive mental health and support people who experience mental health difficulties”

Contact Information

Website: <http://www.lkmentalhealth.ie/index.htm>

Phone: 061-446786 Email: info@LKmentalhealth.ie

4. **Pieta House** offers counseling and support services to people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Contact Information

Website: <http://www.pieta.ie/Index.html>

Phone: 353 (01) 601 0000 Email: mary@pieta.ie

5. The Samaritans “provides confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair”

Contact Information

Website:

http://www.samaritans.org/talk_to_someone/find_my_local_branch/ireland.aspx

Phone: 1850 60 90 90 Email: jo@samaritans.org

Appendix G: Pre-programme interview script

Objectives of the interview

The researchers aim is to assemble a representation of the interviewee's experience of unemployment since graduation and to provide information on the Work Ready intervention. It will also provide information about the potential participants in relation to forming focus group questions and forming specific goals and a structure for the intervention itself. The questions found here are guides to covering the general themes of occupational performance as a student, occupational performance now, environment and supports and goals for the future.

Preparation

The interviews will take place in a room in the Health Science Building that allows for confidentiality and is also located close to staff members nearby. The interviewer will have a script and notepad for the interview and this will be introduced to the person while also obtaining permission to audio record the interview, to take notes during the interview and use that information for future research purposes.

Process

The questions below describe the specific themes and information that the researcher aims to gain. Before beginning the researcher will explain the purpose of the interview and an overview of the research project and then ask for permission to begin. Participants will be reminded that they can stop the interview at any time.

Student Life

- 1) Can you tell me about your degree?
- 2) How many years was your course?
- 3) What specific subjects/areas did you specialise in?
- 4) Do you keep in contact with your fellow classmates?
- 5) What type of expectations did you have about employment when you were a student?

Routine after Graduation

- 1) Can you tell me about what a typical day during the week is like now?
- 2) And are the weekends any different?
- 3) How is your routine different to when you were a student?
- 4) Do you have any leisure activities, things that you enjoy or do to relax in your current routine?
- 5) Are you physically active regularly?
- 5) How does finance affect your life?

- 6) What would you say is the most difficult aspect about becoming unemployed following graduation in your experience?

Relationships

- 1) Has family life been affected by your unemployment experience? How?
- 2) Have other relationships in your life been affected? How?
- 3) How would you describe your mental health at the moment?
- 3) Do you feel you have a forum available to you to confide any problems or issues in?

Work Readiness

- 1) What do you see yourself doing in the future?
- 2) How does this differ to how you saw your future whilst studying?
- 3) What concerns do you have about the future?
- 4) What options have you considered in terms of employment?
- 5) Have you had any work experience, paid or voluntary, since graduating?
- 6) Have you had any interview experience?
- 7) Describe your job search strategy to date.
- 8) Is there anything you would particularly like to gain or experience from participating in this programme?

Prompts

- How did this make you feel?
- How so?
- How not?
- Can you elaborate on that?
- Tell me more about...
- Is that aspect something that means a lot to you?

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

The participant will be reminded they may or may not participate in the Work Ready intervention. If they choose to participate they will be given information regarding location and time and will be provided with a consent form. They will be informed that they have two weeks to give consent and also that they can withdraw from the study at any time once the Work Ready intervention has begun. The participants will be thanked for their involvement.

Appendix H: Initial focus group script

The focus group will take place in the second hour of the first session of intervention. Prior to its commencement, introductions to the group members and researchers will take place through ice-breakers, to increase familiarity among participants. The programme and overview of sessions will also be discussed.

Introduction

Just to mention some ground rules for the group:

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

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

As a method of gaining an understanding of everyone's individual experiences of unemployment at the present time we are going to base our discussion today on the Kawa (River) model, an Occupational Therapy model. The river of this model is a metaphor for an individual's life journey. Rocks are a metaphor for life circumstances and problems; the riverbed is a metaphor for environmental factors (eg. physical and social); driftwood is representative of personal factors and resources; the river itself is a metaphor for life flow and health (Iwama 2006).

The researchers will give examples of the four different concepts of the model, and an overall example through a case study of an individual, to demonstrate how it works. Each participant will then be asked to individually draw their own 'river' about the various concepts from their perspective, identifying their own life journey. Participants will be asked to present to one another.

Then as a group the four different concepts of the Kawa model will be discussed in relation to the employment experience. Subtopics for discussion are as follows:

Environmental factors:

Social outlets available (family/friends/hobbies/sports)/ How unemployment is viewed by your social group, family, community/ What is available to you in your local community/ accessible facilities/ government

or local level policies or schemes available to you as an unemployed graduate.

Life circumstances:

The main barriers to socialising/ the main barriers to being physically active/ unemployment effecting mood and motivation/ obstacles to re-employment/ fears.

Personal factors:

Main positives in your life/ sources of support/ relationships/ experience and education gained as a student.

Life flow and health:

Overall life balance at present/ good versus bad flow/ looking to the future/ hopes

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

Appendix I: Post programme focus group script

The focus group will take place in the second hour of the final session of intervention.

Introduction

The purpose of this focus group is to explore your experiences of participating in the Work Ready programme. Just to mention some ground rules for the group:

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

Again, please can I have your permission to record this group? As a method of gaining an understanding of everyone's individual experiences of the Work Ready programme we are again going to base our discussion on the Kawa (River) model.

The researchers will then revisit the concepts and description of the model. The participants will be asked to again draw their 'river' focusing on the various aspects based on their current experiences. The researchers and participants will discuss the four concepts in detail before comparing the material to the rivers drawn and discussed in the initial focus group and identifying changes made. Discussion will focus on –

- Social environment
- Supports available (family/ friends/ community/ government)
- Barriers and methods for addressing these
- Positives in your life
- What skills have been recently gained
- Life flow now and routine
- Future goals

Discussion will also focus on participants' experiences of the Work Ready programme, the positives and negatives they experienced and their overall consensus on its impact and what they would change.

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

Appendix J: Work Ready Session plans

Week 1

Objectives

- To welcome participants and introductions to the group and each other
- To conduct a focus group based on Kawa model
- To demonstrate an overview of following sessions

Session Plan

11:00 – 11:15	<i>Introduce self/others.</i> With tea/coffee. Everyone says their name and something about themselves. Facilitator makes brief presentation on: unemployment, why this intervention, introduction to the group purpose and goals that have been identified thus far. Using a flipchart, participants will brainstorm expectations for the group. Participants establish group rules on the flip chart eg. Phones off, punctuality etc.
11:15 – 10:45	<i>Interview.</i> Each participant is interviewed to capture baseline skills and techniques, each asked same question, 'tell me about your work history' and is recorded. Finish with demonstration of Ted Talk.
10:45 – 11:50	<i>Focus Group.</i> Introduce purpose of focus group and ask for permission to audio-record. Facilitator introduces the purpose of the Kawa model and gives examples of the four different concepts using and image and gives an overall example through a case study. Each person will be asked to draw their own river and then present to one another. While drawing tea/coffee will be available. A discussion will then take place on the four concepts of the model in relation to the unemployment experience.
11:50 – 12:00	<i>Closure.</i> Briefly lay out plans and goals for the sessions ahead and highlight that participants have an input on session plans/activities that will take place. Hand out Time Use survey to participants and ask if they could complete it for the following session. Identify as a group an activity to take part in during the next session. Thank participants for attending.

Resources

- Flipchart, paper, pens
- Pens
- Audio Recorder, camera
- Presentation on unemployment
- Kawa model diagram and case study
- Outline of session plans
- Time Use Surveys

Week 2

Objectives

- To explain theory on routine, balance and making change
- To explore participants daily routines
- To identify interests not pursued and methods of engaging in these
- To participate and reflect on physical and sedentary activities

Session Plan

11:00 – 11:30	<i>Activity.</i> To demonstrate finding flow in an activity participants will engage in an activity of their choice as decided the week before. Baking. Discussion will take place after reflecting on the experience. Introduce content of today's session.
11:30 – 12:00	<i>Presentation</i> focusing on the topics: theory of ADL's, routine, balance, time use, habit theory, sleep hygiene, making a change and flow. Each person has completed the time use survey from the previous week. Results are discussed in comparison to an average student's day and an average working adult's day using pie chart demonstrations.
12:00 – 12:10	Tea Break: OT kitchen
12:10 – 11:35	<i>Making a plan.</i> Each member to identify an interest/activity not pursued and to make a SMART plan of implementation, identifying potential strengths and barriers. Group will be asked to keep a diary on their progress and to update the group each week.
12:35 – 12:55	Repeat of interview focusing on question prepared from week previously.
11:55 – 12:00	Summarise session and plan re pursuing an interest and recording through a diary. Ask participants to email CV to Maeve Lynch and to bring a hard copy of the CV next week.

Resources

- Whiteboard, paper and pens
- Presentation
- Time Use Surveys
- Demonstration pie chart for student/working adult
- Resources for activity: ingredients and utensils
- Sheets for goal making
- Projector
- Video recorder
- Laptop

Week 3

Objectives

- To identify own transferrable skills and examples in relation to career choice
- To develop job search strategies and rehearse interviews and improve technique
- To develop knowledge of good practice in curriculum vitae preparation

Session Plan

11:00 – 11:20	<i>Introduction.</i> Review and update on goals set the previous week. Group discussion on progress and plan goals for the following week, identifying strengths and barriers etc. Introduce contents of today's session.
11:20 – 11:50	<i>CV's.</i> Brainstorming activity on good principles of c.v. preparation as a group. Refer to resource list of c.v. preparation help sites and o-net website that details particular skills needed for particular jobs. Discussion and examples on good V bad CV's and feedback on main issues from CV's sent in the previous week. In pairs participants to evaluate and give feedback on each other's CV's.
11:50 – 11:55	Tea Break
11:55 – 12:10	Sample stress management activity – Each person to complete the HADS questionnaire followed by a systematic relaxation session.
12:10 – 12:55	Interview with two participants with pre-arranged questions: two interviewers and others observing. This is followed by group discussion and feedback after each interview followed by a repeat interview with the same questions.
12:55 – 13:00	Review session and plan for the goals set at the beginning of the session and go over plan for next week: ensure aspects are being covered that the participants wish to cover.

Resources

- Whiteboard
- Paper and pens
- Participants CV's with comments
- Goal planning sheets
- Recording equipment
- Prepared interview questions

Week 4

Objectives

- To continue rehearsal of interviews and improving on technique
- To gain information and awareness on mental health
- To identify support networks and resources.
- To address job search techniques and strategies

Session Plan

11:00 – 11:20	Brief review of previous week and progress with goals set in the previous week. Introduce aims and contents of today's session
11:20 – 11:50	<i>Presentation and discussion.</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Focus on mental health awareness. Discuss experiences of stress and current strategies used.2. Each member to complete questionnaire (HADS).3. Presentation on anxiety, stress and depression using slides and diagrams of the body – include signs, symptoms, statistics and identifying these.4. Discussion and advice on coping methods and getting help. Refer to reference list on advice and support groups.
11:50 – 12:10	<i>Relaxation activity and break.</i> Reminder of systematic relaxation completed the previous week. Introduce deep breathing activity.
12:10 – 12:30	Group brainstorm on common setbacks that occur when unemployed and job searching. Each group member to take a 'problem' and identify a strategy. Group discussion and feedback on strategies. Facilitator led discussion on resources through which to job search and identifying a suitable position in relation to a person's skillset
12:30 – 12:55	Discuss dealing with criticism, problem solving methods and relate to goal setting techniques from week 2. Brainstorm support networks and resources as a group.
11:55 – 12:00	Session closure. Review interview feedback and mental health awareness. Inform group following session will involve a focus group and a final interview session.

Resources:

- Presentation
- Reference list of advice and support groups
- HADS
- Pens & paper
- Video recorder and projector

Week 5

Objectives:

- For participants to participate in mock interviews as an interviewer and interviewee
- To discuss the experience and interview strategies
- To explore the benefits and value of volunteering as an occupation
- To investigate local resources and opportunities of volunteering

Session Plan:

10:00 – 10:05	Introduce content of today's session.
10:05 – 11:05	Each participant will participate in a 10min mock interview - to be recorded with permission of the participant. Facilitator and 1/2 group members to act as interviewers. Group members give feedback to interviewee on their performance.
11:05 – 11:15	Coffee Break
11:15 – 11:35	Interviewing strategies presentation and discussion focusing on: good V bad/body language/ managing anxiety. Discussion on assertiveness, communication styles, skills and tips. Refer to identity 'who am I' discussion from initial focus group. Participants to complete questionnaire on levels of assertiveness.
11:35 – 12:00	Presentation and discussion on benefits of volunteering. Each member to identify one future career goal and consider potential skills required. List 3 skills you already have and 3 skills you would like to develop and then identify a potential volunteer role. Group discussion on how each role relates to skill development and future career goals.
12:00 – 12:15	Computer activity where each participant will use the internet to seek out volunteer opportunities in an agreed relevant city or town (Limerick and surrounding areas).
12:15 – 12:30	Remaining participants will participate in another short mock interview employing techniques from earlier discussion. Ask participants to prepare short presentation on the occupation they have been engaged in and how they have addressed routine balance etc. for the following week.

Resources:

- Room set up for interviews
- Presentations
- Pen & paper
- Flipchart
- Computer room/recording equipment

Week 6

Objectives:

- To review and summarise the Work Ready programme and learning that occurred
- For participants to present on an occupation they have engaged in
- To complete the post programme focus group
- To bring closure to the sessions

Session Plan:

10:45 – 11:45	Interview skills. Repeat of mock interviews and feedback followed my presentation on interview skills.
11:50 – 12:50	As a method of gaining an understanding of everyone’s individual experiences of the Work Ready the final focus group will take place with permission from participants to audio-record. Facilitator reintroduces the concept and description of the Kawa model. The participants will be asked to again draw their ‘river’ and write about the various aspects based on their current experiences. The researchers and participants will discuss the four concepts in detail before comparing the material to the rivers drawn and discussed in the initial focus group and identifying changes made. Discussion will then focus on participants experiences of the Work Ready programme, the positives and negatives they experienced and their overall consensus on its impact.
11:35 -12:15	Thank participants for their attendance and contribution. Refer to resources and information to take away and that the will be contacted with copies of the data gathered from the group. Group lunch as a closing activity.

Resources:

- Video Recorder and white board
- Projector
- Kawa model diagram and case studies
- Rivers from first focus group
- Audio recorder