

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEASONALLY UNEMPLOYED PARENTS IN THE GOUDA AREA

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The aim of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of seasonally unemployed parents in the Gouda area of the Western Province. Positive psychology provided the theoretical framework. A qualitative descriptive research design was used and seven adult parents were selected purposefully. Thematic data analysis focused on the inductive coding of collected data. Findings indicate that seasonally unemployed parents experience periods of employment and unemployment as distinctly different. Yet their experiences during periods of being employed or not are described as a series of challenges varying in degrees of difficulty for parents and their children.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

John Siko (2015), in his position as head of the Africa Business Intelligence Practice at The Risk Advisory Group, refers to the experience of unemployment as “feeling destitute, useless, worthless and dependent”. Since the start of the global crisis in 2008 more than 61 million jobs have been lost. Furthermore, a report published by the International Labour Office (ILO) (2013) forecasts that the situation is not expected to change within the coming years (2015-2020). South Africa has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (ILO, 2015), since the unemployment rate in this country averaged 25.35% from 2000 until 2016 (Statistics South Africa, 2016). It is evident that unemployment and matters related to unemployment, such as poverty, are a serious issue in South Africa, because 27.1 percent of people were indicated as being unemployed in the second semester of 2016 (Statistics South Africa, 2016). This percentage does not include those who were seeking employment at least two weeks before these statistics were calculated.

This study focused on the lived experiences of seasonally unemployed parents in the Gouda area. The unemployment rate in Gouda, situated in the Western Cape Province and governed by the Drakenstein Municipality, echoes the statistics provided by Statistics South Africa, as more than 25% of this community is unemployed (Drakenstein Municipality, 2013). The town is situated in a rural area and many unskilled workers are parents who face regular periods of unemployment, and find themselves in seasonal working situations such as agricultural labour or construction work (personal conversation, J. McHelm, 30 January 2015). People who are working during peak periods and who are unemployed during off-peak periods are described as seasonal workers or seasonally unemployed (Mafiri, 2002).

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Seasonal unemployment is a common phenomenon in rural areas such as Gouda; it occurs when people are not employed at certain times of the year as they work in industries where they are not needed all year round (Statistics South Africa, 2015). Tourism and leisure, farming, construction and retailing are instances of industries where demand, production and employment are seasonal. For example, in farming, the nature of some agricultural activities determines the number of workers needed for harvest time and the size of the harvest. Consequently, being seasonally employed or not determines the financial status of seasonal workers. Also, many rural towns in South Africa are characterised by poor living conditions and can be described as disadvantaged areas (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2010). Unemployment is therefore a serious issue, posing a threat to the wellbeing of many South African citizens (Mabela, 2012). Many adults in South African rural areas are part of seasonal unemployment patterns (Meyer, 2012). Studies have shown that any kind of unemployment in rural areas is characterised by poverty, underdevelopment, ill-health and psychological distress (Carter & May, 1999; Ferrer & Visser, 2015; Vorster, Wissing, Venter, Kruger, Malan & Macintyre, 2000). This means that adults, including adults as parents, who are seasonally unemployed and living in rural areas such as Gouda face numerous difficulties. It is important to mention that the researchers for this study adopted an ameliorative and transformative approach (Prilleltensky, 2008), working from the positive orientation of psychology as a strength-based approach.

Positive psychology is becoming increasingly influential both internationally and in South Africa (Temane & Wissing, 2013). In this approach there are two main streams of research, namely the hedonic and the eudaimonic perspectives (Keyes, Shmotkin & Ryff, cited in Wissing, Potgieter, Guse, Khumalo & Nel, 2014). The hedonic perspective focuses on life satisfaction and levels of positive affect, which can be linked to job satisfaction and income associated with the possession of material things and having opportunities (Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008). In other words, this perspective represents “feeling good” and may

result in positive affect and consequently hedonic (subjective) wellbeing. In contrast, the eudaimonic perspective regards wellbeing as the consequence of psychological actualisation (Waterman *et al.*, 2008) and focuses on concepts such as life purpose and meaningful existence (Fredrickson, 2013). In short, the eudaimonic perspective is associated with “functioning well”. Still, hedonia and eudaimonia are inter-related; for example, if a person values work responsibilities to provide for his/her family, and those efforts are successful, then both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing can occur (Waterman *et al.*, 2008), namely feeling good and functioning well.

Studies conducted in positive psychology emphasise that human wellbeing must be investigated while taking into account the impact of those factors referring to an inherent understanding of what is good for oneself – also referred to as *inner* wellbeing – as well as factors of *external* wellbeing in the workplace, related to the organisational environment (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015). In this sense, the ecology of wellbeing or positive human health is relevant for this research, indicating what factors protect and promote positive health as well as establishing what factors threaten persons’ wellbeing (Torp, Grimsmo, Hagen, Duran, & Gudbergsson, 2013).

South African research conducted within the framework of positive psychology indicates that unemployment and the loss of regular income impact on wellbeing negatively in many ways. Temane and Wissing (2013) found that unemployment is linked to lower levels of subjective wellbeing. Although Alatartseva and Barysheva (2015) clarify that unemployment and the absence of regular income are viewed as objective aspects of wellbeing, they have both “physical and psychological downsides” (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2006, p. 201).

Apart from the negative impact of unemployment on human wellbeing and functioning, Temane and Wissing (2013) indicate that rural communities often experience greater poverty. Factors linked to poverty in rural areas are, for example, having less access to resources than people living in urban communities, and a lack of proper educational facilities to realise children’s aspirations. Furthermore, the lack of financial resources as well as psychological support holds grave implications for parents as well as their offspring (Amunkete & Rothman, 2015). Studies have shown that the children of parents who experience financial hardships are adversely affected by the scarce provision of basic needs (Hartmann & Hayes, 2011). This means that these children have to face difficulties such as hunger, frequent moves, living with relatives and a lack of adequate health care. Financial difficulties also include the inability of parents to financially provide (save money) for their children’s education. Owing to the fact that their employment opportunities are unstable, it is hard for them to plan ahead (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2010).

Although financial resources are critical for families’ healthy functioning, a healthy family entails more than merely sufficient funding and providing for daily needs. According to the Department of Social Development’s White Paper (Republic of South Africa, 2013) a healthy family is characterised by good interpersonal relations and a good state of physical, mental and social wellbeing among all members. Aside from the family’s instrumental role concerning the provision of physical resources such as food, clothing and shelter, the family offers the space to build relational health, and provide emotional support and encouragement (Peterson, 2009, cited in Republic of South Africa, 2013). Therefore, well-functioning families are of key importance for any country, because they represent the core of a society’s wellness (Republic of South Africa, 2013). The opposite is also true, i.e. the impact of dysfunctional or broken families cannot be disregarded as an “emptiness” or mere absence of psycho-social wellbeing. All children need a healthy and nurturing family environment (Republic of South Africa, 2013). For example, research by Barblett and Maloney (2010) indicates that physical health and emotional competencies are vital for the healthy development of children. However, if children continuously experience lack with regards to basic needs and relational health, then an increase of risks is likely (Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2010). Moreover, most children who are living in unemployed households are particularly vulnerable to neglect and abuse, as a result of their parents’ (or primary caregivers’) regular experiences of distress and high levels of frustration (Härkönen, 2011). These issues – associated with the negative psychological effects of

unemployment – have been well documented in the past (Creed & Watson, 2003; Kinicki, McKee-Ryan, Song & Wanberg, 2005; Couchenour & Chrisman, 2014).

In short, worldwide unemployment and matters related to unemployment are a serious issue. The Gouda community in South Africa reflects this country's high rate of unemployment. The common occurrence of seasonal unemployment in this rural area poses a threat to the wellbeing of parents and their children, because periods of unemployment in rural areas have short- and long-term impacts linked to poverty, underdevelopment, ill-health and psychological distress. Since healthy families are of the utmost importance for any society, it was necessary to explore the lived experiences of seasonally unemployed parents in the Gouda community from a positive psychology approach, i.e. from a strengths perspective.

The research question guiding this investigation was: What are the lived experiences of seasonally unemployed parents in the Gouda community?

## **RESEARCH AIM**

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of seasonally unemployed parents in the Gouda community through a qualitative descriptive design.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research design and approach**

According to Kuhn (as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013), qualitative research allows the understanding and interpretation of local meanings, such as the lived experiences of seasonally unemployed parents. Rich data were required in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (De Vos & Fouché, 2011).

### **Participants in context**

Gouda is situated in the famous Cape Winelands District of South Africa. The racial make-up of this municipality is black/African (21,35%), coloured (63,75%), Indian/Asian (0,3%) and white (14,6%). In this municipal area 76,7% of the residents speak Afrikaans at home, 3,4% speak English and 19,5% speak other languages. The population for this study included all the seasonally unemployed parents in the Gouda area who were Afrikaans or English speaking. The local social worker identified the possible participants. Seven participants were purposively selected according to certain criteria that were relevant to the research objectives (Nieuwenhuis, 2007): parents/primary caregivers who are seasonally unemployed and living in this community for at least 5 years; parents to children younger than 18 years attending schools in the community; and willingness to participate in the research study.

### **Data collection**

Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, followed by the making of collages by the same participants. These individual interviews were used to obtain information from the participants to achieve a sufficient understanding of participants' lived experiences of being seasonally unemployed (Greeff, 2005). Collages were created after each interview; the researcher provided magazines, scissors, glue, pens, crayons and posters for the making of the visual data. The visual data were used to clarify and support the data provided during the course of the interviews. Data-collection opportunities took place in the social worker's office during a season of unemployment for participants.

Field notes were also made during the course of the study in the form of detailed descriptive accounts of the observations made by the researcher, for example, observations of participants' the non-verbal communication (De Jong, Monette & Sullivan, 2002).

### **Procedure and analysis**

Once ethical clearance was received from the North-West University (NWU-0060-12-[A1]), the researcher commenced with the process of data collection. A senior social worker was approached as the gatekeeper of this particular community, and the purpose of the research was explained to her. Care

was taken in applying the needed ethical requirements pertaining to the research procedure, such as informing participants that participation was voluntary, and underlining issues related to confidentiality and anonymity (Brinkman & Kvale, 2008).

All recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed and the textual data were used for the data analysis according to guidelines offered by Braun and Clark (2013). Thematic analysis focused on the inductive coding of the qualitative data, producing clusters of text with similar meanings to capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation (Gough & Madill, 2008:204). Initially, “immersion” in the data was accomplished by reading and re-reading the transcribed data. Secondly, coding was completed and provisional codes were created from the ideas identified in the previous phase. Thirdly, codes were combined in order to create broader themes across the dataset. Fourthly, the combined codes were refined and categorised as those identified as having clear links. Finally, the themes were named and presented as the research findings. It was kept in mind that the main themes ought to be distinctive and at the same time the themes should fit well together to constitute the overall analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This process was important to ensure accurate analysis and to enhance reliability.

Crystallisation, i.e. obtaining a clear perspective on the topic at hand, was achieved by using multiple data-collection methods, namely semi-structured individual interviews, collage making, field notes and observations (Tracy, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Trustworthiness was ensured by using well-established methods in qualitative investigation, such as data collection and data analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings are based on two main themes which were inductively established through thematic analysis. The following themes and sub-themes were identified: first, seasonally unemployed parents’ experiences during periods of employment entail dealing with physical challenges, financial problems, emotions and employment, and threats to effective coping and functioning; and second, seasonally unemployed parents’ experiences during periods of unemployment include additional physical challenges, even more financial problems and lack of income, emotions and unemployment, and coping to survive during times of unemployment.

The coding applied in the study indicated participants as (P) and the number of each participant after the letter P, for example, P1 and P2. The themes and sub-themes are given in the following section with some verbatim comments to illustrate the findings.

### **Theme 1: Experiences during employment**

Participants’ lived experiences are marked by various challenges during seasons of employment. They expressed their gratitude at being employed, but also described the particular difficulties they endure during this period. The first main theme entails four sub-themes, namely physical challenges, seasonal workers’ financial problems and income, emotions and employment; and lastly threats to effective coping and functioning during times of employment.

#### ***Sub-theme 1.1: Physical challenges during employment***

The participants firstly described various physical challenges they have to endure during seasons of employment. The nature of seasonal workers’ labour involves mainly agricultural activities and problems were expressed in terms of the working hours and the hardships associated with these tasks. Working hours ranged from nine to twelve hours per day during times of employment. Although they described breaks during the work-day, for example, lunch breaks and shorter breaks per day (one break mid-morning and one break during the afternoon), their work experiences included vigorous labour and these agricultural tasks involve difficult working postures, such as crouching and bending when picking fruit and carrying heavy baskets. Also, participants stated that they are exposed to risks to their health, for example, diseases linked to respiratory problems, probably as a result of the inhaling of toxic fumes of various pesticides and allergens that were sprayed on the plantations.

*“I was sick and had TB and did not feel strong to work, but felt I had to go to work or I will be losing my job.” (P5)*

### ***Sub-theme 1.2: Challenges concerning financial problems***

Although times of employment did mean an income, the participants stated that their income was not sufficient to provide adequately for their families. Their wages amounted to an estimated R128.26 per day, as prescribed by the Department of Labour implemented as from March 2016. These wages were used to provide for daily needs, for example, purchasing food and other necessities. Then again, they emphasised that they could not provide their families with healthy food such as fruit, vegetables and meat, since these food items were more expensive than, for example, maize and bread. Also, some of the participants mentioned that the proper management of their finances was problematic for them, because they never received any instruction regarding budgeting. Additional financial burdens listed were medical expenses and supporting their extended families. The participants clearly indicated that they experience financial difficulties even during their seasons of employment. The participants expressed their views clearly when it came to financial challenges:

*“When I work on the farm, I buy food for every day at the farm shop... and on Friday when I get paid ... most of the money go toward paying my debt and I have nothing left. The next week the same cycle repeats itself.” (P3)*

*“If I get a job, mostly nowadays ... it is just for a few days here and there. That money is just for food on the table.” (P5)*

The participants revealed that their basic needs remained mostly unmet, even when they were employed, because they simply earn too little money.

The emotional experiences of the participants were emphasised as they narrated their experiences related to seasons of employment.

### ***Sub-theme 1.3: Emotions and employment***

In general, the participants enjoyed positive emotions during seasons of employment. These positive emotions were associated with earning an income and the satisfaction of being able to provide for their families. They also experienced a sense of meaning and purpose. These feelings were expressed in the following statements:

*“See, if I’m working now, during season time, then I feel good. Every morning I’m up early and at work I’m busy. When I come home in the evenings then I’m tired, but it’s a good tired feeling because everything is right and normal. I do what I have to do as the man in the house and I feel happy.” (P6)*

*“The thing is, you see ... if you work for six or seven months of the year, then things are going well with me ... when I am working I can spoil my children a bit, I can buy them what they need during this time and it makes me feel very good.” (P5)*

Notwithstanding the experience of positive emotions, the seasonally unemployed parents also experienced negative emotions during times of employment, such as a fear of losing their jobs. These negative emotions are aggravated by constant worries, because they do not earn enough money to be free themselves from debt and meet their basic needs adequately. The constant agony and anxiety of losing their jobs included regular experiences of emotional turmoil and conflict because of the fierce competition to remain employed. They seemed to fret constantly about the size of the harvest and the number of people being employed. Unfortunately, participants’ experience loss of control, because the relatives and friends of supervisors seem to have more job security. In contrast, workers not related to supervisors (in the work situation) experienced constant pressure to perform well and to avoid being ill or absent from work, because of their uncertain position at work. When questioned about their feelings, the participants had the following to say:

*“The fruit supply is sometimes too little to appoint a large number of people, so that is also very uncertain, because you never know what is going to happen. That also makes you stress.” (P1)*

*“The managers then look for workers who stayed absent to lay off, sometimes they do not even consider that and anyone could be losing their job ... names are put on a notice board and then all of us are nervous. This is not a pleasant experience and we feel very insecure.” (P3)*

During times of employment the participants also indicated other stressors which are not related to work, but to their monthly income. The following statements revealed some of these stressors:

*“The fathers of these children pay child support money very poorly and not regularly and that makes it very difficult.” (P2)*

*“I was not able to work the whole season due to my child’s illness ... I had to stay off work to take care of my child.” (P2)*

#### ***Sub-theme 1.4: Threats to effective coping and functioning during times of employment***

Some of the participants expressed their fear and anxiety during their time of employment.

*“Sometimes I do not feel like going back to the factory to work because of all the nastiness that goes on, but I really do not have much choice, I do need the income.” (P3)*

It seemed as if the participants were constantly thinking about the possibility of mostly negative outcomes. The participants perceived a loss of control in their work environment and they were distressed about the rivalry among workers. Also, workers knew that they could be easily replaced because of the high number of unemployed people available. Concerns were expressed related to coping with their situation and feelings of rejection, low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, anticipation of possible setbacks and the demands by supervisors. The complexity of these concerns was perceived as threats.

Experiences during seasons of employment were described as more or less challenges pertaining to physical and psychological health.

The next section deals with participants’ lived experiences during seasons of unemployment.

### **Theme 2: Experiences during unemployment**

The participants revealed certain positive experiences during seasons of unemployment such as when they received support in the form of money, food and clothes. However, they also described the severe extent of the hardships they endure during seasons of unemployment. These experiences were divided into four sub-themes, namely physical challenges, financial problems, emotions during seasons of unemployment, and lastly, surviving during times of unemployment.

#### ***Sub-theme 2.1: Physical challenges during unemployment***

The participants mentioned that they experience hunger, diseases and poor living conditions. Some of them lived in the back yard of relatives in wooden and makeshift structures. They acknowledged that during stormy weather there were always leaks and water running inside their dwellings and these conditions were detrimental to their health and overall wellbeing.

The participants also expressed their physical difficulties in times of unemployment as can be seen from the following statements:

*“You need shoes and clothing and are not able to buy anything. This makes you feel helpless because you cannot do anything about it. The house needs fixing, the roof leaks and a lot needs to be done in and around the house.” (P7)*

*“It is very stressful. During the night you think about the children, what are they going to eat the next day.” (P1)*

It is clear that the participants are experiencing difficulties during their seasons of unemployment. These difficulties are confirmed by the collage created by Participant 2.

**FIGURE 1**  
**COLLAGE CREATED BY PARTICIPANT 2 TO ARTISTICALLY EXPRESS HER EXPERIENCES**



**Collage description**

The participant explained her collage by dividing it into two halves. She explained about the pictures in her collage that represented her period of unemployment:

*“There are two parts in my collage. The first part shows the time when I have work. On the other half of the picture I have put in pictures of a woman on her bed, crying and praying to God for the pain of having no income. The picture of the lady looking down says that she does not know now what to do. There is no income in the house and what to feed the kids? It is just difficult for her. The other pictures also shows that there are hard times ... very sad times ... the person is asking the question ... what now? ... there is no work ... she thinks about many things that are needed in the house ... but there is no money ... where is the money going to come from?”*

The participant’s collage clearly shows sadness and concern about the food and provisions needed for her family.

***Sub-theme 2.2: Even more financial problems and lack of income***

The participants made it clear that they have little or no income and have to rely on government grants during times of unemployment. In addition, they find it difficult to deal with medical problems, as their income is small or non-existent. The accumulation of family responsibilities makes it very difficult for the parents and, apart from the daily need to care for their children, they struggle to take care of debt and everyday problems, such as leaking roofs.

*“I want to forget about debt collectors that keep on calling me. Last year I bought some furniture and they are the ones calling me non-stop.” (P5)*

*“Things at home are not nice. I want to fix my house because the roof is leaking, but I cannot.” (P7)*



### **Sub-theme 2.3: Emotions and unemployment**

During times of unemployment the participants associate positive emotions with the support they receive from the community, for example, when they receive food parcels and the help of relatives.

*“Sometimes farmers deliver fruit and vegetables free for the people. This happens about twice a month, and it also helps a lot. The people are very happy when it happens.” (P1)*

Negative emotions during times of unemployment were explained in the form of continuous panic to provide sufficiently for their children. Participants revealed their negative emotions in the following:

*“This is the difficult time for me, because I have to run around to get some food on the table. It is very stressful for me. Especially when you have little babies ... it is extremely difficult ... they get sick.” (P4)*

*“I feel that I am being judged by people and do not wish to speak to anybody.” (P5)*

Positive as well as negative emotions were experienced by participants during times of unemployment. The positive feelings were associated with receiving care from relatives and the community during their seasons of unemployment. Negative feelings were experienced when they felt rejected by relatives when they were not earning an income and were unable to provide.

### **Sub-theme 2.4: Survival during times of unemployment**

#### **2.4.1 Support from family members and the community**

The participants experienced emotional support from their extended family, friends, the community and non-governmental organisations such as faith communities (churches).

*“The municipality has this employment programme where different groups of people get work for two weeks to sweep the streets.” (P2)*

*“Sometimes the family do help us out. My wife has a few friends who do also help us out sometimes.” (P6)*

*“I have my mother here with me in the house and she works at the moment, so she is the one who support us now.” (P3)*

The above statements by the participants confirm the support they receive from various sources. Although they expressed their sincere appreciation for the support, many needs remained unmet.

#### **2.4.2 Grants from the government**

The participants revealed that they have little or no income and have to rely on government grants.

*“The social grant for the children also helps a lot to cope and survive, during the time of no work.” (P1)*

*“So in this time of unemployment, we are dependent on the government social grant for the children. The grant aids to provide food for the children during this difficult period.” (P2)*

#### **2.4.3 Spiritual strengths and prayers**

The participants seemed to show some level of inner strength or an inner resources indicated in the following comments:

*“It is just a matter of faith ... you just do not know for sure that you will be employed. I just do what is expected from potential workers ... do the induction programme and hope and pray for the best.” (P4)*

Some of the participants openly expressed their faith in God, for example, when applying for work the next season, or asking God’s help for them to persevere when dealing with difficulties.

In summarising the main themes and the sub-themes, the following can be highlighted: although the lived experiences of the participants during seasons of employment as well as unemployment were described in terms of numerous physical and psycho-social challenges to a lesser or greater degree, the experience of a sense of purpose was emphasised and explained as their ability to provide for their families.

The findings were presented as identified themes that emerged from responses to the research question. In the following section the research findings are discussed as interpreted in the light of the literature. This will show how the present study contributes to current research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

## DISCUSSION

The experiences of the participants as seasonally unemployed parents could be described as a series of challenges linked to periods of employment and even greater challenges associated with periods of unemployment.

During seasons of employment the seasonally unemployed parents viewed/experienced their quality of life in terms of being employed and having access to those physical, psychological and financial resources for themselves and their families to survive. In spite of difficult working conditions, they experienced some happiness, since they were earning an income to support their families. National surveys have shown that having an income correlates with life satisfaction and feelings of happiness (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2002; Dhingra, Keyes, Satvinder & Simoes, 2010; Diener, 2000; Diener & Diener 2008; Diener & Lucas, 2000; Diener, Kahneman & Schwarz, 1999; Rothman, 2008; Seligman, 2011). In addition, South African studies show that employment is associated with higher levels of psycho-social wellbeing (Khumalo, Temane, & Wissing, 2012). While employment contributes to mental wellbeing and the building of psychological capital (Bono, Glomb, Shen, Kim & Koch, 2013), workers' personal resources associated with positive feelings and functioning are threatened when they experience unemployment (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2002; Clark, 2010; Dunn & Norton, 2013).

During periods of unemployment, apart from mainly monetary matters, numerous additional problems impact on their quality of life. These added problems manifested clearly in their daily "feeling and functioning", for example, in organising their daily lives. It is well-documented that an absence of a time structure presents a major psychological burden for the unemployed. Also, the experience of increased social conflict was common during seasons of unemployment, as a result of parents' high levels of emotional distress, lack of a social identity, and collective effort and purpose, (Gabriel, Harnois & World Health Organisation, 2000; Fisher, 2010; Galpin & Stairs, 2010; Rothman, 2008). These indicators are typical of a state of unemployment and can be adapted for the current study. During seasons of employment the participants were engaged in structured physical activities; they started their workday at specific times, which gave them a sense of purpose; they were also part of a collective effort and could therefore be productive rather than unproductive as in their seasons of unemployment. These regular activities, although tiring, brought with them a sense of self-worth. A study by Matuska and Christiansen (cited in Rothman & Welsch, 2013) confirms that people who are employed experience a sense of meaning and purpose that supports their overall wellbeing.

It must be mentioned that, even during periods of employment, parents struggled with problems linked to money matters because of their low wages and the regular uncertainty that is part and parcel of seasonal employment. Nevertheless, while they are employed, they are able to manage these problems in some way and to make ends meet. For example, seasonal workers in agriculture confirmed that they did struggle financially even during periods of being employed: *'When I work on the farm, I buy food for every day at the farm shop ... and on Friday when I get paid ... most of the money go toward paying my debt and I have nothing left. The next week the same cycle repeats itself.'* Participants' understanding of the perpetuation of these negative cycles includes the following: i) the unaffordable cost of healthy food, and good quality clothes and shoes; ii) workers' impaired health as a result of long working hours and demanding physical labour; and iii) parents' inability to take proper care of their

children during times of illness (meaning, when their children are suffering from illness, they had to ask somebody else to look after the children). In other words, seasonal workers in the Gouda community face financial struggles and their impact even in times of employment.

During periods of unemployment, these struggles were more extensive. Participants disclosed that they were not able to fulfil monthly obligations such as paying rates and taxes, debts and maintenance for their dwellings because of a lack of income. They also mentioned that these experiences of scarcity intensified their concerns about their children's education. Baxter *et al.* (2012) confirm that a lack of paid employment limits a family's economic resources; therefore less is spent on education, food and housing. All of these difficulties stir up mostly negative emotions for the seasonally unemployed and their families.

## EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Although emotions are short-lived (see Fredrickson, 2009; 2013), high frequencies of them have great impact on the preservation or depletion of human resources. So the more regular experience of, for example, negative emotions such as sadness and frustration typical during periods of unemployment was significant regarding seasonally unemployed parents' functioning and health. Furthermore, Diener (2000) argues that people's own evaluations of their quality of life are important in order to distinguish between feelings, such as happiness signifying an emotional state, and life satisfaction, which addresses a more global cognitive evaluation of one's life. In other words, the emotional as well as cognitive aspects of seasonally unemployed parents' experiences are of vital importance. Since there is a positive correlation between employment and better health, improved self-confidence and life satisfaction (Bungum, Moonie & Pharr, 2012; Bono *et al.*, 2013), emotional experiences of satisfaction and gratitude can be beneficial.

Ecological theories such as Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1943) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1984) can also assist us to gain some insight into why persons, for example, parents who are seasonally unemployed in the Gouda community, were negatively influenced by their context. While participants experienced improved levels of subjective wellbeing and happiness during times of employment, these seasons are not void of negative emotions, such as anxiety because of the regular lay-offs that occurred because of the instability of their working environment. Various researchers confirm these experiences of helplessness and anxiety when individuals believe they have very little influence over important events in their lives such as securing meaningful work (Seligman, 2011; Temane & Wissing, 2013). According to the ecological perspective, these negative emotional experiences are never limited to a single aspect of human feeling and functioning, but impacts on, for example, parents' psychological capital, pertaining to levels of self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, cited in Meyers, Van Woerkom & Bakkers, 2013). While levels of psychological capital are vital to seasonally unemployed parents' efforts to achieve their goals, their physical health cannot be disregarded.

Although work requires rather demanding physical activities for parents who are seasonally employed, they experience even more physical health problems during seasons of unemployment. If people are unemployed and work engagement decreases, they tend to report more physical diseases and depression (Clark, 2010; Harter, Keyes & Schmidt, 2003; Harter & Rath, cited in Prilleltensky, 2008). Unemployment can also be linked to a significant rise in health problems, because people are deprived of healthy, nutritious food (Baxter, *et al.*, 2012), and this scarcity in turn can be harmful to their immune systems, which are not being strong enough to withstand ordinary diseases (Sonkushre, 2011). But when these families are dealing with diseases such as diabetes, bronchitis or other chronic illnesses, their vulnerability cannot be denied, as they cannot afford to pay for treatments, which can sometimes lead to fatal outcomes. Unfortunately, these experiences of ill-being because of the lack of resources can also include unhealthy behaviour and harmful habits. A study done by Bungum *et al.* (2012) confirms that apart from a lack of healthy food, unemployment is also associated with unhealthy behaviours such as the increased use of alcohol, more tobacco consumption, and decreased healthy

physical activity. Also, the financial implications of these harmful habits added to families' experiences of negative stress (Sonkushre, 2011). According to Bronfenbrenner (cited in Rosa & Tudge, 2013), parents' experiences of difficulties do affect their children, since parents are usually part of the microsystem, i.e. home, school, neighbourhood, and as such are the people with whom children either live or are familiar with. Evidently, parents' experiences of the phenomenon do not refer to mainly isolated instances, but eventually contribute to the perpetuation of negative spirals, implying vulnerabilities for the parents and their children, for example, the presence of mood disorders (diseases related to depression, anxiety and panic disorders) as well as chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and premature mortality (Bungum *et al.*, 2012) as well as the more frequent incidence of family conflict during periods of unemployment, and in some cases this increase of family conflict can be linked to the disintegration of relationships (Baxter *et al.*, 2012).

It is clear from the findings that being unemployed covers much more than just being without a proper income. An accumulation of risks includes socio-demographic factors, such as families living in rural areas with lower levels of psychosocial wellbeing and higher levels of ill-being (Temane & Wissing, 2013). Although urbanisation may not be the causal determinant of better wellbeing, other variables associated with urban environments are important. According to Temane and Wissing (2013), rural communities often experience greater poverty and have access to fewer resources than people living in urban communities, and the lack of proper educational facilities may be a drawback in the realisation of children's aspirations. Experiences of negative stress were shown as one of the major factors affecting health in times of transition, especially when linked to a lack of employment security (Temane & Wissing, 2013).

Although parents' experiences of seasons of employment and periods of unemployment are dissimilar, the overall picture explains the troublesome conditions for themselves and their children. Evidently the series of challenges and complications linked to periods of employment merely differ in degree compared to the challenges and complications associated with periods of unemployment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Further studies, particularly more qualitative studies, with more representative samples, and specifically in more rural South African areas, are needed on the topic of seasonal unemployment as well as parenting in adverse circumstances. Future research on the association between continuous donations (charity), particular psychological support to the poor and learned helplessness would be of great interest in the South African context of rural communities. Research to provide guidelines for programmes to enhance life skills through training projects initiated by the government and/or non-governmental organisations for these individuals could be of great importance and can include issues such as building self-esteem and strategies directed by developing resilience to manage stress in order to increase positive behaviours, cognitions and positive emotions. Additional programmes, such as educational projects, could be provided in the form of three to six-week training courses in hairdressing, catering, plumbing, plastering and/or computer literacy to enhance their education to improve job prospects and skills or improve access to self-employment options. Information sessions which could assist individuals to be able to manage their income and improve their budgeting skills will also be helpful. Labour-intensive projects initiated by the government to improve infrastructure could be helpful and would utilise unskilled and semi-skilled workers. These kinds of programmes could also bring relief for these individuals and could equip them to be able to cope more effectively with their challenges in embracing resilient living towards thriving rather than mere surviving.

## **CONCLUSION**

There seems to be no question that seasonally unemployed parents in the Gouda area experience many difficulties, as revealed by their narratives. Evidently, the difficulties associated with both seasonal employment and unemployment are not only limited to financial issues, but cover a range of physical, emotional and psychological problems for parents and their offspring. These difficulties include both

objective (for example, money for basic needs) and subjective (for example, parents coping with these problems) aspects of wellbeing. Also, these difficulties are linked to personal resources related to seasonally unemployed parents' inner environment as well as to job demands, such as working conditions and salary for coping with the outer environment.

Positive psychology emphasises the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches to understanding positive human health. Seasonally unemployed parents' experiences of "feeling well" during times of employment and unemployment were expressed in terms of happiness and gratitude. The eudaimonic approach, which refers to "functioning well" and those meaningful long-term pursuits in people's lives, was also evident as some participants expressed their faith in God, meaningful relationships with their families, their desire to further their children's education, and to work well. This study is a good example that these two approaches cannot be viewed separately, because the mere provision of money (hedonic approach) is not the key answer to advancing lives worth living (eudaimonic approach). Ultimately, this study supports the standpoint that deficiencies in any one component of the ecology of wellbeing impact on the level of satisfaction in other parts.

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