EMPOWERING UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE
THROUGH ‘SELF-HELP’ GROUPS

SHARON T. MTHEMBO
EMPOWERING UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE THROUGH ‘SELF-HELP’ GROUPS

BY

SHARON T. MTHEMBU

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PHD Community Psychology in the Department of Psychology University of Zululand.

PROMOTER: PROF S.D. EDWARDS

JANUARY, 2001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Statement of the problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Motivation and modus operandi</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Methodology</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Limitation of the study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Resume</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0 Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Defining a sense of community</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Explaining a sense of community</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Unemployment as affecting a community and its consequences</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Participatory action research: a varied approach to empowering</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1 Resource and power differences</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2 Researcher responsibility and criteria for defining relationships with mutual aid groups</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Specific empowering characteristics through community participation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Participatory action research with self-help-mutual aid – goals and aims</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.1 Mutual-help group members in grass roots settings</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Empowerment theory</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Empowerment multiple forms</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 The contextual embeddedness of empowerment</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Empowerment model, framework and enabling activities</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 Role-taking revisited: the researcher's narrative and cognitive moral growth</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12 Role-taking and the cognitive - developmental approach</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13 Narrative psychology</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13.1 The narrative approach</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14 Resume</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 3 : METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.0 Introduction</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 What is qualitative research?</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1 Is qualitative research complete?</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.1 Benefits to the researched</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 A case for greater utilization of qualitative research methods</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Qualitative research methods can support the core values of</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the field of community psychology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1.1 Diversity</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1.2 Context</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.1.3 Empowerment

3.2.1.4 Opportunities for empowerment and transformation

3.2.2 Qualitative methods are a powerful set of tools for understanding the "why" of human behaviour

3.3 The setting

3.4 The sampling method

3.4.1 Method

3.4.1.1 Procedure 1

3.4.1.2 Procedure 2

3.5 The process of forming mutual aid groups with persons becoming attached and affiliated to groups on the basis of their having expressed and explored alternative occupational interests

3.5.1 The group interview

3.6 Resume

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Nomological network for psychological empowerment

4.1.1 The intrapersonal component

4.1.2 The interactional component

4.1.3 The behavioural component
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Mutual aid groups for enhancing empowerment</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Commitment to the mutual aid groups</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Concerns in the analysis of mutual aid group data</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Complexity of group data</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Preparing members for the expectations of group work</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 Initial interview protocol of the initial unemployed group at Richards Bay labour pool</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 Findings from narratives (themes)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.1 The web of stress</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.2 Experience of distress</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.3 Survival strategies</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.4 Directly confronting the problem</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.5 Coping in connection with others</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10 Protocols during group functioning (analyzing themes)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11 The researcher's experiential journey (my own story)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11.1 Procedures</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11.1.1 Entry</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11.2 Support systems</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11.3 Evaluation of the work by the promoter</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction 85
5.1 Summary of the main findings 86
5.1.1 Narrative – people’s account of being unemployed in the form of stories 86
5.2 Drawings from this research 87
5.3 Empowerment 92
5.4 Mutual aid groups as a useful empowering methodology 93
5.5 Limitation of the study 95
5.6 Recommendations 96
5.7 Conclusion 97

REFERENCES 99
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this is my own work and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

S.T. MTHEMBU

JANUARY, 2001
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgements are extended to:

My promoter Prof S.D. Edwards whose critical responses were always helpful and illuminating.

Mrs Avril Bishop who, with endless patience, typed the manuscript.

The National Research Foundation for a Team Research Grant for Community Psychology in Zululand.

Friends and colleagues at the Psychology Department and the University of Zululand for advice and support Tina Zondi who assisted me with search of information and with all the support.

Prof N.V. Makunga for her endless support. Sphiwe Ngcobo, Sthembiso Mtshali and Mzwakhe Mkhonza for their presence in times of need.

My family whose understanding, care and support enabled me to complete my studies. I especially thank my Dad and Mom, they are a blessing and source of inspiration. My sisters Gugu, Buhle, Nokwanda and my brothers, Vumani and Themba and my late brother Khayelihle for their love. My Son Nqobizizwe who is a source of joy in my personal life.
There is strong evidence showing the adverse effects of unemployment on social and psychological functioning as well as on physical health. With the present depressed economy, individuals will continue to be vulnerable to the harmful effects of retrenchment and unemployment. Such factors contribute to crime in our country.

The South African community psychology movement is an attempt to take psychology to the people and empower communities, particularly historically and economically disadvantaged communities, through improved networking, education, health, social welfare and development projects which optimize local resources, resolve problems of the apartheid years and improve relationships within and between communities.

A qualitative participatory action research approach to empowerment was utilized in this thesis. Mutual aid groups proved to be a successful empowering methodology to unemployed people in their own communities and their contexts.

The contention of the present study is that qualitative research, with its value emphasis on capturing the diversity of respondents' experiences, its attention to the context of researched phenomena and its capacity to document the voices of historically marginalized communities, greatly facilitated the realization of these core values in our work with communities.
The main finding in this study is that research and practice both benefit from a narrative approach that links process to practice and attends to the voices of the people of interest. Narrative theory and methods tend to open the field to a more inclusive attitude as to the data and to cross disciplinary insights as well as community collaboration.

From the present study it becomes clear that culture tends to prescribe certain ways of acting which can be referred to as prescribed stories. The narrative approach used here does not claim that culturally prescribed stories are either good or bad, nor does it take a moral or evaluative position on the dominant narratives in communities.

Mutual aid group methods are found to be appropriate for those conducting action research and those concerned to “empower” research participants because the participants become an active part of the process of analysis. Group participants may actually develop particular perspectives as a consequence of talking with other people who have similar experiences.
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Psychology in South Africa is confronted by challenges. Despite political changes and reform, South African psychologists are faced with the task of dealing with the damage of the past politics and struggle within communities and organizations.

Vogelman, Perkel and Strebel (1992) suggest that one manner in which psychologists can correct imbalances of the past is through community psychology. Community psychology is defined by Levine and Perkins (1987) as the field that was born out of a commitment to addressing the problems of marginalized communities, an interest in preventing rather than treating mental health problems and a desire to work with disempowered communities to help them gain greater control over the resources and institutions that affected their lives.

A growing body of theory and research has attempted to delineate the relationship between communities, psychology and empowerment (Rich, Edelstein, Hallman and Wandersman, 1995; Speer and Hughey, 1996; Wandersman and Florin, 1990). Zimmerman (1995) links community psychology and empowerment, asserting that certain community organizations are empowering as they facilitate community members' acquisition of skills, competencies and positive beliefs. Several researchers have empirically identified specific group characteristics that serve as empowering mechanisms including:
In this research, mutual aid groups and empowerment will be actively promoted to achieve involvement and support in striving towards accepting responsibility for self determination and healthy life styles. Literature reveals that mutual aid groups are effective in bringing about positive change.

In this particular context empowerment will be defined by the co-researchers in the mutual aid groups. A working definition for this proposal is that empowerment refers to the process by which individuals, groups and communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards maximizing the quality of their lives (Adams 1990). The term “mutual aid group” will be used interchangeable with “self-help group.”

Mutual aid groups constitute one mechanism whereby a community can take control of its situation. Several factors have been identified as contributing to the growth of mutual aid groups (Adams, 1990; Wilson, 1993; Matzat, 1993). At a general level these have included industrialization and technological development, which have led to depersonalized and dehumanized institutions and the alienation of people from communities, institutions, each other and themselves. Such factors have led people to seek to re-establish greater control over their own lives by recreating community and fellowship in alternative forms of mutual aid groups.
Mutual aid groups have been defined by Wilson (1995) as made up of people who experience the same problem or life situation, either directly or through their family and friends. They come together for mutual support, sharing of experiences, information and ways of coping. Groups are run by and for their members. Some mutual aid groups expand their activities. They may provide services for people who face the same problem or life situation or they may campaign for change. Professionals may sometimes take part in various ways when asked to by the group.

Matzat (1993) summarizes the research literature on the benefits of mutual aid groups. These include reduced depression, increased self-esteem, more personal contact, increased skills in conflict management, a comparative perspective on one's own problems and more selective use of the formal care system.

Further he proposes that these benefits are the product of particular processes characterized by mutual aid groups. These include:

- modeling, whereby members learn from others coping with the same problem successfully.
- the helper therapy principle whereby mutual assistance assures that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy the sense of competence, self-esteem and assurance derived from helping another.
- direct empathy - because others share the problem, understanding is virtually assured. This is not necessarily true of professionals who may have no personal experience of the problem.
destigmatization - many of the problems people have are reduced within groups of people who share a problem. It is the "norm" and no longer a minority issue.

- the combination of potentials - when combined in self-help groups, the strengths which individuals possess become a potent and cumulative force for change.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Modern professional psychological services are generally inaccessible to the majority of the population in most countries. There are many reasons for this problem including the traditional individually mandated, specialized and costly nature of these services, the limited number of practitioners and their typical urban locality.

In South Africa such problems are compounded by the legacy of apartheid and its consequences such as poverty, crime, violence, unemployment, oppression, abuse of power, racial discrimination, corruption, injustice and related ongoing psychological trauma. Vogelman, Perkel and Strebel (1992) argue that existing services in South African psychology are commercialized and urbanized. This has helped divorce psychology from the daily life experience of the majority of poor people. This can be overcome through the vehicle of community psychology.

Powell (1979) sees benefits to professionals from maintaining close links with mutual aid groups, suggesting that they are exemplary models of the qualities associated with therapeutic outcomes of effective interventions in professional programmes. He asserts that reciprocal relations can provide
professionals with information and understanding distinctive social problems and special resources that some clients need.

Levine and Perkins (1987) have analyzed the concept of social support in the context of mutual aid groups and have argued that there are several key features to this concept: Mutual aid groups:

- promote a psychological sense of community
- provide an ideology that serves as a philosophical antidote
- provide an opportunity for confession, catharsis, and mutual criticism
- provide role models
- teach effective coping strategies for day to day problems and
- provide a network of relationships.

These are the key reasons this particular study focuses on mutual aid groups for empowerment.

1.2 MOTIVATION AND MODUS OPERANDI

The South African community psychology movement is an attempt to take psychology to the people, especially to help historically, socially and economically disadvantaged communities help themselves through improved networking, education, health, social welfare and development projects which optimize local resources, resolve problem of the apartheid years and improve relationships within and between communities.
This thesis tries to identify some of the problems associated with empowerment. Some of the key areas which will be addressed in this work are the following:

- the redistribution of resources
- a new emphasis on constructive partnerships
- a changed approach to research

Further this dissertation will provide in-depth case studies to describe the influence of mutual aid groups on unemployed people. Hereby it wishes to

- indicate whether change has taken place with regard to being unemployed and participating in a mutual aid group
- reflect the mutual aid group's experiences
- assess empowerment effect in terms of pre and post test measures
- generate hypotheses for future research studies.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

There are different research methods of relevance to such a study in community psychology. In this specific work action research will be used.

Action research involves collaboration between people. There is a concern to bring about planning and instigating practical change. The action researcher learns less by drawing on prepositional
knowledge, than by ‘doing’. Action research has a practical rather than a conceptual or abstract “scientific” orientation, tied to the pragmatic arms of policy makers. Action research is fundamentally a ‘hands on’ approach.

Action research involves analysis of situation within their local contexts. Cohen (1988) points out that it is essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. This means that a step-by-step process is constantly monitored over varying periods of time and by a variety of techniques e.g. diaries, interviews, case studies etc., so that the feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustments, directional changes and re-edification as necessary. Often, this direct participation in the area being studied, permits the researcher greater access to data and situations.

Action research involves sharing the benefits of research among participants and ‘researchers’. This prevents the research being captured by an academic agenda which has little relevance to the field in question. Equality of status is accorded to those who are researched, with the right to speak and have their views seen as central to the research enterprise.

Action research is characterized by its acknowledgement of the impossibility of objectivity. Whilst action and research are analytically distinguishable, in practice they are inextricably intertwined. In Polanyi’s (1962) terms, knowledge is always gained through action and for action. The aim of action research is not to minimize research effects but rather to attend to the influence of researchers on the social setting, and to use this influence productively in order to make some positive change which can be monitored and theorized.
1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research is limited to facilitating small groups of unemployed people into mutual aid groups. This is only one type of many forms of social transformation needed in the country in order to empower poor people.

1.5 RESUME

High rates of unemployment and job loss are a social phenomenon that characterized the 1980's and distinguished that decade from the previous forty years. Depression is one of the key effects of unemployment. This has led to people perceiving themselves as powerless (Flaim and Sehgal, 1985).

Participatory action research will be used in this study as an intervention programme. It focuses on useful knowledge, problem solving and social change. It strives to integrate research and intervention so as to reduce gap between knowledge and action. Further it emphasizes mobilizing oppressed people to create societal - level change. Defining their own reality heightens consciousness, and participants may then begin to challenge expert or dominant ideas as empowerment is fostered (Yelch and Levine, 1992).

The reason why this work is based on participatory action research is that it is premised on the belief that linking research to action is crucial. Action is carried out through equal participation. Action is intrinsically tied to research, because activism without analysis is counterproductive and
potentially detrimental. An "action-reflection - action" cycle provides the most potential for empowerment.
2.0 INTRODUCTION

There is strong evidence showing the adverse effects of unemployment on social and psychological functioning as well as on physical health (Barling 1990; Fryer and Payne 1986; Catalano 1991). With the present depressed economy, individuals will continue to be vulnerable to the harmful effects of job loss and unemployment.

Because the fundamental causes of job loss and unemployment are rooted in societal and economic processes, remedies for their adverse social effects must be sought in comprehensive economic and social policies (Blinder 1987). Although national and state social and economic policies need to address the problems that result from unemployment, various community-based efforts can be undertaken to reduce the social and psychological impact of unemployment at the local level. For example, special community-based intervention programmes can be implemented to provide support and coping skills to unemployed through mutual aid groups within community settings. This implementation of support and coping skills in community settings is one of the focus areas of community psychological interventions (Orford 1992, Levine and Perkins 1997).

2.1 DEFINING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Vogelman, Perkel and Stroebel (1992) state that psychologists need to be aware of the prevailing myths and ideas of South African society and how these have been internationalized. Further they
contend that the personal and work transformation required by a commitment to community and organizational accountability is often difficult for academics and psychologists since their training has emphasized the role of "expert." Having received degrees in psychology they are led to believe that they are now sole expert in psychology.

Defining a sense of community is invaluable to professionals as experts. A sense of community can develop "among group members who have a common history, share common experiences, develop emotional closeness, and whose group membership conveys a recognition of common identity and destiny" (Heller 1989:6). Heller defines such groups as "relational communities" because a sense of community develops out of its members (Heller 1989; Rothman 1998). The importance of relational communities lies in their ability to function as "mediating structures for society in that they serve to connect individuals to the larger social order while providing a vehicle for the satisfaction of personal needs through group attachments (Heller 1989:6).

This idea that there is a reciprocal relationship between the individual and the larger group appears as key to defining a sense of community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) described a sense of community as a process of mutual experience, identification and commitment. To experience this sense of community, members must feel committed to the larger group and also feel that the larger group is committed to them. One can define this larger group in many different ways. Price (1985) argued that, in mutual aid groups, the psychological community has multiple referents, each of which may play a role in our own sense of belonging, friendship network and functional work of the mutual aid group as a whole.
2.2 EXPLAINING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Researchers have worked to specify the psychological properties of communities (Heller 1989; McMillan and Chavis 1986, Price 1985; Sarason 1974). A consistent theme in the literature is that a sense of community is derived from relationships and structures that provide support and promote self-efficacy.

Glynn (1981) highlighted the importance of support in his review of theories of community life. He noted that a common theme of all of these roles has been the erosion of traditional social supports in our communities and the impact of this erosion on sense of community.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined a sense of community as a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and shared faith that member’s needs will be met through their commitment to be together.

Another contributor to a sense of community depends in structures and relationships that promote a sense of power or self-efficacy. Glynn (1981) noted that whether researchers attribute the decline in a sense of community to industrialization, bureaucratization, or societies inadequate adjustment to both, all suggest that at least part of this decline is the result of reductions in autonomy, personal involvement and local power. McMillan and Chavis (1986) emphasize that participation is central to a sense of community.
2.3 UNEMPLOYMENT AS AFFECTING A COMMUNITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Unemployment is widely acknowledged to be a stressor with both acute and chronic aspects (Liem and Liem 1988). A prolonged period of unemployment is a chronically stressful state. Even minor stressors which are chronically present may adversely affect mental health. Certain already economically disadvantaged groups – especially blacks and women – are disproportionately likely to face prolonged unemployment. In addition, some groups appear to be differentially vulnerable to mental distress following unemployment.

Stress, distress and coping processes have come under intense scientific scrutiny in recent decades (Coyne and Dowey 1991). Researchers have also become increasingly sensitive to the fact that different groups may manifest distress in different ways. For example, men are more likely than women to drink, consume drugs or become hostile. Women are more likely than men to become depressed and anxious (Aneshensel, Rutter and Lachenbach 1991; Cleary 1987). The impact of a stressful event such as unemployment may vary across different forms of distress. For example, depression appears to linger longer than anxiety.

From the standpoint of theory, there is evidence that the stress process unfolds interactively. That is, the response to stress is affected not only by the social status and circumstances of the person affected but also the dynamic socio-cultural environment that is reflected by social roles and group memberships. Whereas differentiation in life event research has tended to be inspired by empirical results, this move which attempts to understand the environmental context in which distress occurs has been more theory driven.
Some of the most important research on the way higher-order levels of the environment affect individuals has examined the relationship between changes in economic conditions and mental health. Brenner (1973) conducted extensive investigations into the relationship between economy and admission to public mental hospitals in New York State. He found an inverse correlation between manufacturing employment and first admissions to mental hospitals. When the economy prospered, hospitalization rates decreased. A similar pattern held for readmission, emergency admissions and admissions to hospitals for the “criminally insane.”

Brenner’s (1973) findings are provocative. They are correlational in nature. They cannot tell us why that relationship exists. Catalono (1979) suggests two alternative explanations of Brenner’s findings. As ecologists would predict, economic change may increase the incidence of factors which precipitate abnormal behaviour (stressful life events, such as divorce or job loss) and thereby increase rates of mental illness. Alternatively, the rate of abnormal behaviour could remain relatively constant, but economic conditions might preclude home care and encourage the use of institutions as shelters for those who need help, thus “uncovering” existing cases of mental illness. In a study analyzing monthly data from Kansas City, Catalono and Dooley (1979) found support for the first explanation. Changes in the economy were associated with the monthly incidence of stressful life events and depressed mood of residents, giving support to an ecological interpretation of Brenner’s findings.

A second problem with Brenner’s findings is that they are based on aggregate (or group) level data. We do not know if those same people hard hit by a recession are also the ones who enter mental hospitals. We also cannot determine from these dates if unemployment causes mental illness, or if it is those who are less mentally fit who become unemployed; that is unemployment might be a response to
rather than a cause of emotional strain. In order to follow these issues, we need longitudinal studies which follow the same individuals over a long time span.

Raymon and Bluestone (1982) studied the impact of unemployment among aircraft industry workers. In addition to financial hardships, serious emotional or physical strain occurred among many of these workers. High blood pressure, alcoholism, increased smoking, insomnia, neurastheria, worry and anxiety were among the commonly reported forms of strain.

Reaction to unemployment are affected by life circumstances. In the study of aircraft workers, middle-aged heads of households with young dependents were most severely affected.

Recent research on job loss and unemployment is reported to be an opportunity rather than a disaster for a lucky few. One form of enhancing such success is through empowering mutual aid groups using participatory research.

2.4 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: A VARIED APPROACH TO EMPOWERMENT

Participatory action research is becoming an increasing utilized methodology in social science research (Williams 1996). The epistemology for participatory action research asserts that inquiry is a process wherein knowledge is experience based, stored and embedded in dialogue. Participatory action research asserts that research participants should be active contributors during all stages of the research endeavour in order to enhance the salience and utility of research outcomes.
2.4.1 Resource and power differences

Several analyses of participative works propose that totally nonhierarchical participation can happen only when there are no differences in influence or in agendas among participants (Brown 1983; Gruber and Trickett 1987). Not only is such a lack of differences unlikely, it is not necessarily ideal.

Researchers and research participants have access to different resources that are critical to any research process. A relationship that is based on pooling those resources is of key importance in creating a valid picture of the community phenomena under study. However, whether researcher or community initiated, there are both differences and inequalities in the resources contributed by each party. The inequalities stem, at least in part, from differences in the types of informational resources, the participants' relationship to the information sought and the investment in the work.

With respect to differences in informational resources, researchers typically have access to scientific knowledge, whereas participants provide popular knowledge. Although both scientific and popular knowledge are critical to developing an understanding of the phenomena of interest, there is a mystique about scientific knowledge that leads many to value it more highly. Whenever one party has information that is useful but not generally accessible to another, that party has a degree of power over the other (Gruber and Trickett 1987). It is only through the demystification of scientific knowledge that the research relationship can become equalized. In most research relationships that process of demystification of scientific knowledge can only be accomplished through the efforts of the researchers.
Information becomes a source of power differences in the research relationship in another regard. Even if researchers share their purposes and preferences openly with research participants, the type of information that is relevant and appropriate for researchers to share is typically far less personal and intimate than the information that we ask from participants. Such sharing rarely brings a personal vulnerability equal to that resulting from the participant's disclosures about their lives. It is difficult to avoid some lopsidedness in the sharing of personal information in a search for better understanding of community phenomena.

2.4.2 Researcher responsibility and criteria for defining relationships with mutual aid groups

Brown (1983) suggests the following actions to facilitate participation in an unequal world:

- Actively question or re-evaluate what participation means in each new research situation. In order to avoid the assumption that involvement in each and every step of research is desired or valued by all research participants, we can be guided by the notion of person - environment fit. Each research situation may require a different version of participation that is based on the preferences, history, skills and background (including race, class and gender) of those involved. Researchers are responsible for ensuring a shared process for defining the style of research relationship (including type and amount of participation), which could also result in the joint framing of research questions.

- Maximize mutual respect for the different resources each party brings to the research endeavour. Mutual respect does not imply homogeneity among parties, nor does it require the minimization of differences. In fact, it can be quite insulting to community members when a
researcher tries overly hard to be "one of the gang." Developing mutual respect is a gradual process that is based on recognition of the unique resources provided by researcher and participants. The researchers learn respect for the community through involvement and observation, while earning respect from community members by sharing resources in a manner consistent with the communities' culture and norms.

- Recognize power differences while minimizing procedures that accentuate or rigidify a hierarchy. When researchers are able to work with participants during the initial phases of research to anticipate radiating effects of the research relationships, the power differences between researchers and participants are less likely to become oppressive or rigidified. For example, we can jointly develop mechanisms for resolving differences that emerge between individuals or groups during the course of research. We can also develop plans to give something back to participants (e.g. through encouragement, feedback, or ongoing consultation). Similarly, we have a responsibility to ensure that the process of our work does not simply reinforce the status quo.

- Focus on the phenomenon, not on the person. Community research typically focuses on a social issue, problem, or dynamic within some defined system. We work with individuals, but the focus is rarely on the person apart from the social problem. To the extent that we confuse the phenomenon of study with person providing the information we risk objectifying or depersonalizing research participants.

Emphasis on the phenomenon pushes us to understand the implications of our decision as to who we question and where we enter a system for the purposes of research. These decisions should be guided by our theory regarding the social problem being studied (unemployment in this specific case) rather
than by the personalities or characteristics of particular participants. Clarity regarding what phenomena are of interest should guide our work.

In developing a participative research relationship we must openly acknowledge the resource and power differences among researchers and participants.

2.5 SPECIFIC EMPOWERING CHARACTERISTICS THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

A growing body of theory and research has attempted to delineate the relationship between community participation and empowerment (Rich, Edelstein, Hallman and Wandersman 1995). Zimmermann (1995) links community participation and empowerment, asserting that certain community organizations are empowering as they facilitate community members acquisition of skills, competencies and beliefs. Several researchers have empirically identified specific community characteristics that serve as empowering mechanisms including:

a) support from community mentors (Kieffer 1984)
b) availability of multiple membership roles (Maton and Salem 1995)
c) inspiring growth based organizational belief systems (Maton and Salem 1995)
d) promotion of participation benefits while minimizing participation costs

The process of empowerment clearly provides skills to community members.
2.6 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITH SELF-HELP/MUTUAL AID - GOALS AND AIMS

Participatory action research with mutual aid groups has the following common goals:

- promotion of the social and behavioural sciences for the well being of people and their communities.
- Promotion of theory development and research that increase understanding of human behaviour in its social contexts.
- Encouragement of the exchange of knowledge and skills in community research action.

The specific aims are:

- empowerment
- social change
- learning as an ongoing process
- supportive relationships

2.6.1 Mutual-help group members in grass roots settings

Matzat (1993) maintains that interventions that "act" small and locally, even as they think more globally, are often the most effective. Small scale-local alternative, empowerment oriented support and
advocacy interventions include: community development, environmental action, community crime prevention and self-help and consciousness-raising groups.

The common form of empowerment-focused intervention is the mutual aid group. Mutual aid groups aim to improve the psychological and physical functioning of individuals sharing some specific life experience or problem. Although mutual aid groups are avowedly apolitical and eschew social action, the movement as a whole has transformed over time toward models of advocacy and empowerment (Riessman and Boy 1992). As with other empowerment-based social interventions, both support mutual aid which cuts across political lines. Further, they maintain a dialectical approach may be needed to understand the mutual aid movements simultaneous strains of populism and progressivism.

The empowering experience of mutual aid groups is salient at the individual and group levels (Maton and Salem 1995). The idea of empowerment has become popular in self-help and mutual aid group members because the sources of help are group members own efforts, knowledge and emotional support. The origin of and control over such groups typically rests within the members themselves not with professionals or any external agency or authority (Levy 1976). For most such groups, their primary purpose is to empower their members in taking control over their lives. Paradoxically, some successful mutual aid groups convince their members that the first step toward empowerment lies in relinquishing the desire for individual control and accepting the influence of group norms. Often a fine balance between collectivism and individualism can be obtained. Rigger (1984) reported that mutual aid groups tend to attract more women than men.
2.7 EMPOWERMENT THEORY

Empowerment is a process by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them. It is essential at this stage to note Orford's (1992) emphasis on community psychology being about working with people in their own natural context and settings.

Empowerment is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours to social policy and social change (Rappaport, 1984). Empowerment theory, research, and intervention link individual well-being with the larger social and political environment. Theoretically, the construct connects mental health to mutual help and the struggle to create a responsive community.

It compels us to think in terms of wellness versus illness, competence versus deficits, and strength versus weaknesses. Similarly empowerment research focuses on identifying capabilities instead of cataloging risk factors and exploring environmental influences of social problems instead of blaming victims. Empowerment oriented interventions enhance wellness while they also aim to ameliorate problems and provide opportunities for participants to both develop knowledge and skills and engage professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts (Zimmermann 1995).

Empowerment is seen as an intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. It is simply a
process by which people gain control over their lives, more democratic participation in their community and society and a critical understanding of their environment.

Theories of empowerment include both processes and outcomes, by suggesting that actions, activities, or structures may be empowering and that the outcome of such processes result in a level of being empowered (Swift and Levin 1987). Further they maintain that both empowerment processes and outcomes vary in their outward form because no single standard can fully capture its meaning in all contexts or population.

Empowerment suggests that participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources and some critical understandings of the sociopolitical environment are basic components of the construct. Applying this general framework to an organizational level of analysis suggest that empowerment includes organizational processes and structures that enhance member participation and improve goal achievement for the organizations. At the community level, empowerment refers to collective action to improve both quality of life in a community and the connections among community organizations.

A distinction between empowering processes and outcomes is critical in order to clearly define empowerment theory. Empowering processes might include collective decision making and shared leadership. Empowering processes at the community level might include collective action to access government and other community resources (e.g. media). Empowered outcomes for individuals might include situation-specific perceived control and resource mobilization skills. When we are studying organizations, outcomes might include development of organizational networks, organizational growth.
and policy leverage. Community level empowerment outcomes might include evidence of pluralism and existence of organizational coalitions and accessible community resources.

Empowerment suggests that participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources and some critical understandings of the sociopolitical environment are basic components of the construct. Applying this general framework to an organizational level of analysis suggests that empowerment includes organizational processes and structures that enhance member participation and improve goal achievement for the organization. At the community level, empowerment refers to collective action to improve the quality of life in a community and to the connections among community.

2.8 EMPOWERMENT MULTIPLE FORMS

Empowerment theory assumes that empowerment takes on different forms for different people. (Rich, Eldelstein, Hallman & Wandersman (1995). Although, within a given context or setting, members may be working towards a common goal, these individuals have unique personal histories, assume different roles and often represent different constituencies (Maton, 1993). It has been argued that these social and historical characteristics shape individual desire for empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). Because personal history emerges from the intersection of demographic characteristics and social opportunities we should expect individuals with different racial, gender, ethnic, class and social backgrounds to desire different forms of empowerment (Collins, 1990). These studies on empowerment (Bartunek, Foster-Fishman and Keys, 1996; Bartunek, Lacey and Wood, 1992) found that individuals who had more experience, for example, newcomers to a participatory decision-making process, were more
likely to define a directive leader as empowering while those more experienced in this process needed real influence over decisions to feel empowered.

The present researcher in this thesis urges caution with regard to the methodological strategies commonly used in empowerment studies. This is because research may inadvertently obscure the variety of empowerment experiences for persons in a given setting. First, many research interventions have been constructed around the setting leader or researcher’s definitions of empowerment (Gruber and Trickett, 1987; Spreitzer, 1995; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988). This definition may not be consistent with the empowerment—expectations and experiences of setting members which negates the aim of community psychology. For example, Strawn (1994) described how a program intended to facilitate the empowerment of some low-income women inadvertently increased their alienation by inaccurately defining what empowerment meant to them and which processes would facilitate their empowerment experience. The program developers designed the program around their own cultural bias of American individualism, providing the women with individual case management services. However, within some of the targeted communities, community and social interaction were more valued and deemed more appropriate than individual action. By ignoring the importance of a culturally relevant vehicle for empowerment, the program developers inadvertently undermined the natural sources of support and strength. Strawn’s study well illustrates the importance of attending to the setting members’ meanings of empowerment.

Secondly, researchers have tended to use singular operationalizations of empowerment within their targeted setting (Ozer and Bandura, 1989; Spreitzer, 1995; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988). While targeting a delimited number of process or predictor variables increases the feasibility of an empirical
investigation and the ability to identify aspects of empowerment that are common across individuals, this approach potentially ignores alternatives routes to increased control. Such an approach can significantly limit both our understanding of empowerment and our ability to promote social change through empowering interventions. The psychology research literature is rife with examples of the dangers of constructing too narrow conceptualizations of a phenomenon. For example, women were traditionally viewed as limited in their capacity for moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981); their need for achievement (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark and Lowell, 1953), and their mathematical abilities (Benbow and Stanley, 1983) until new researchers noted that these constructs had forms and meanings for women different from those for men (Eccles and Jacobs, 1986; Entwistle, 1982; Gilligan, 1982).

By utilizing singular measures of empowerment and limiting our operationalization of the construct to our own or leader’s meaning of empowerment, we significantly risk silencing the unique and personal empowerment experiences of the targeted population. We risk excluding groups or individuals who do not share the leader’s or researcher’s desires for or definition of empowerment. These efforts may inadvertently exacerbate the powerlessness of or misrepresent the needs of a target population. The use of research methodologies that elicit the multiple meanings that empowerment may have for different members of a setting facilitates the development and implementation of effective empowerment interventions.
2.9 THE CONTEXTUAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment researchers explore the importance of context in understanding empowerment processes and outcomes. The unique forms empowerment takes in community coalitions, community organizations, neighbourhood association (e.g. for crime preventing), corporate work settings, and human service delivery systems have been explored and documented. The specific characteristics that facilitate empowerment within these settings have also been considered. This work has significantly advanced our understanding of the multiple contingencies of empowerment and has emphasized the importance of attending to the unique form empowerment takes within any given context (Zimmerman, 1995).

However, theoretical and empirical developments in the field of organizational culture suggest that any one setting may consist of multiple subcultures or environments, each presenting its own contingencies for member behaviour. These subcultures emerge from the different settings and the personal histories that group members accumulate as a result of their roles (Meyerson and Martin, 1987). It is important to understand how different contexts influence empowerment experiences of individuals.

2.10 EMPOWERMENT MODEL, FRAMEWORK AND ENABLING ACTIVITIES

This section focuses on the modes of community empowerment, a framework for collaborative empowerment and specific enabling activities associated with the process of enhancing community capacity for change. The specific framework that will be used in this study is based upon (Zimmerman's 1995) work.
Zimmerman focuses on the development of empowerment theory and measurement. He points out that, as an open-ended construct, psychological empowerment takes on different forms in different contexts, populations and developmental stages and cannot be adequately captured by a single operationalization, divorced from other situational conditions. He argues that efforts to develop a universal, global measure of empowerment may not be a feasible or appropriate goal. He begins with a theoretical discussion of the differences between empowerment values, empowering processes, and empowered outcomes, which may provide clear and specific criteria for measuring empowerment. This general framework cuts across individual, organizational and community levels of analysis. Zimmerman recognizes the interdependence of these levels but emphasizes (individual level) psychological empowerment because it is a goal common to all levels of intervention. The framework to be used for empowering the unemployed through mutual aid groups, includes intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural components, as Zimmerman (1995) has articulated how psychological empowerment operates through these components.

Zimmerman (1995) maintains that, as an intrapersonal component, empowerment addresses the manner in which individuals think about themselves and includes concepts of perceived control, self-efficacy, motivation to control and perceived competence. The interactional component of psychological empowerment assess how people understand and relate to their social environment. Interactonal characteristics address our ability to develop a critical understanding of the forces that shape our environment, knowledge of the resources required and methods to access those resources to produce social change. Interactional characteristics include the role of collectives in community life, problem solving and critical awareness (Kieffer, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995). The behavioural component of psychological empowerment includes actions that address needs in a specific context.
Empowering behaviours might range from individuals adjusting to adverse conditions that are not malleable to change, to working with others in a voluntary mutual aid group using community resources.

2.11 ROLE-TAKING REVISITED: THE RESEARCHER’S NARRATIVE AND COGNITIVE MORAL GROWTH

A cognitive-developmental approach to psychology has dominated discussions of moral action and growth, and the concept of role-taking has been central to related understanding. Narrative, both as conceptual approach and as method of investigation and interpretation, is presented in this study as a critical and complementary adjunct to the cognitive-development of the researcher and the community of the unemployed.

In this study the researcher examines processes of moral change in the light of emerging concepts from narrative psychology. Drawing from mutual aid groups accounts, narratives and progress in relation to the researcher’s experience and growth, there is a move from the traditional structuralist paradigm to a different and more adequate foundation for understanding moral behaviour brought about by community psychology using action research. This, in turn, argues for shifts in the formulation of goals and interventions relevant to community empowerment.
Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1981) maintains that moral development is charted on the basis of qualitative reorganizations of an individual's pattern of thought, re-organizations that integrate within a broader perspective the insights that were achieved at previous (lower) stages. The developing person in this scheme "becomes better able to understand and integrate diverse points of view on a moral - conflict situation and to take more of the relevant situational factors into account" (Jennings, Kilkenny and Kohlberg 1983:282).

Of the developmental conditions most crucial to the restructuring and advancement of moral thought, the most significant is role-taking. According to Kohlberg (1981) moral development is fundamentally a process of the restructuring of modes of role taking. Role taking is what differentiates social experience from mere interactions. Social experience involves taking the attitude of others, becoming aware of the thoughts and feelings of those others, and putting oneself in their place. More than empathy alone, the concept of role-taking emphasizes the cognitive as well as the affective side of social interaction, stresses an organized structural relationship between self and others, illuminates the fact that interactions of all kinds involve understanding and relating to the roles of the society or community of which one is part and that these interactions entail role interpretation and negotiation even when empathy and sympathy are not aroused in the parties involved. The first pre-requisite for role-taking is participation in a group or institution in which interaction and communication are emphasized.
The cognitive developmental approach to moral development has advantages for psychology, education and community that are well known and widely promoted. The approach rests in a dignified and durable Piagetian tradition of thought, appeals to the notion of universal good and is attractive in some quarters on account of its universalizable categories of moral thought.

2.13 NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

2.13.1 The Narrative Approach

A more recent entry to considerations of human development within the science of psychology is represented by authors who argue that narrative is a useful, if not indispensable, root metaphor for psychology (Sarbin, 1990). Bruner (1986) says psychologists know much about the "paradigmatic" or logic - scientific mode of thought but astonishingly little about its narrative parallel. despite the fact that narrative is as prevalent or more so, in the human condition and that people frame their accounts of conduct in the form of stories.

The narrative has particular utility for those efforts within psychology to account for action. This conception calls for an organizing principle that is faithful to the complexities observed when human beings engage in intentional performances to realize their often unarticulated goals. Contained in the meaning of "action" is the notion of goals, purposes and intentions (Sarbin 1990).

The narrative approach is particularly suited for the present community psychology study, in its aim to understand behaviour in context, including the context of time as noted by Sarbin (1990). Further he
says participants have histories which have implications towards their futures that also figure in the stori
ded constructions of the participant's account of their conduct.

In the narrative approach, speech is taken to be evocative of relationships alive within the actor and in which the actor is embedded. These relationships are thought to affect and be affected by other relationships, which are grounded in larger contents of discourse, between and among persons, their stori
ded constructions of reality and the narrative categories and routines provided by culture. These stori
ded constructions of reality are contextualized according to persons' positions in the social arenas that are simultaneously shaped by and formative of that culture.

The narrativists would move us from accounts rooted in the paradigm of cognitive representation and internally held principles to a paradigm of discursive construction and inter-subjectively possible frames of discourse. The separate though interactive subject of the structuralist world is reviewed as an inhabited, decentered actor, in a theatrical world of possible stories, in which all action is rehearsed, justified and reviewed according to the narrative possibilities inherent in the actual context(s) in which action occurs. A narrative approach in this case moves us toward a redefinition of behaviour for individuals and groups through telling their stories in their own voices.

2.14 RESUME

Theories of empowerment refer to both the processes and outcomes of the phenomenon (Zimmerman, 1995). The model of community empowerment, and related framework of collaborative empowerment through mutual aid groups, outlines an interactive process in which people who share common
concerns and experiences gain influence over conditions that matter to them. Literature review has highlighted enabling activities by which a community can build its capacity to pursue its chosen purposes. One of the methods suggested here is the use of mutual aid groups. A narrative approach is perceived as therapeutic in its authenticity of telling the story through people's voices which enhances empowerment.

In summary, one appreciates Rappaport's (1987) argument that the empowerment concept provides a useful guide for developing preventive interventions in which the participants feel they have an important stake.

Recent theoretical, methodological and empirical work on empowerment must always be revisited for our own development as researchers. Qualitative studies of empowerment based on collaborative methods and communal narratives analyzed at multiple levels can be used to advance our understanding of the processes by which social and personal change occurs.

Rappaport (1981) suggests that we must create settings that promote empowering communal and personal stories and listen more carefully to the voices telling those stories. Empowering research methods deserve further attention. As maintained by Vogelman, Perkel and Strebel (1992) community psychology and its research methods, participatory action research in this case, is one manner in which professionals can reach masses and also address the imbalances created by the past apartheid system.
CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter documents the qualitative action research methodology employed in this thesis. Literature on qualitative action research methodology is reviewed in relation to the action methodology employed in this study. It is necessary to outline briefly why qualitative research is appropriate for this study on empowering unemployed people through mutual aid groups. This in turn requires a brief narration as to the contextual origins of qualitative research.

Qualitative research methods have a long history in the social sciences and deserve to be an essential component in any health service. Qualitative research takes an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter through the study of phenomena in their natural settings, thereby attempting to make sense of or interpret such phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). It begins by accepting that there is a range of different ways of making sense of the world and is primarily concerned with discovering the meanings experienced by those who are being researched and with understanding their view of the world rather than that of the researchers.

3.1 WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as a set of specific research tools including case studies, focus groups, life histories, in-depth interviews, observations and analyses of a variety of contexts. Further they maintain that qualitative research has also been considered from a more
explicitly paradigmatic perspective. From this point of view, the specific research methods of qualitative inquiry reflect an underlying philosophy of science which eschews the traditional positivist belief in an objective reality that can only be understood through detached scientific inquiry. Rather, qualitative methods are consistent with and reflective of, the events in peoples' lives. From this point of view, scientific objectivity is regarded as an impossible stance since our values and biases permeate all aspects of the research process. Interpersonal detachment is seen as an obstacle to the sharing of personal beliefs, data are considered to be embedded inseparably from the specific contexts in which they are gathered and the research process is ideally based on collaboration and mutual learning.

3.1.1. Is Qualitative Research complete?

There is a widely held belief among researchers and granting bodies that although qualitative research is essential for establishing a solid research program, qualitative research is not an end in itself. Qualitative research is a foundation for "real" research, the quantitative investigation of the model. It is advisable for qualitative researchers, as they progress through their research programs, to eventually move onto quantitative inquiry to confirm the preliminary results of their qualitative work (Silverman 1994). The plan of this study is for the groups to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 to support the above suggestion.

There are two concerns with this belief: the first is that qualitative research is not a product, complete in itself, and the second is the assumption that expert qualitative researchers must be experts at quantitative research as well as qualitative research methods, and move easily, naturally and with ease between the two paradigms (Silverman 1994).
3.1.1.1. Benefits to the researched

Qualitative research inquiry addresses issues of authority, interpretation and reinterpretation in the construction of accounts and authentic texts which appropriately represent the researched. The voice of the researched is valued and given a central place in qualitative research inquiry. A second benefit is that constructivist, critical, participatory methodologies such as qualitative research inquiry address issues of adequacy and authenticity of text and potentially empower and transform the researched (Lincoln 1993).

Lincoln (1993) claims that "what contributes to an authentic text is the enlargement of scrutiny, inspection and assent of the researched" (p.36-37). Scrutiny of narratives, text co-created will become more authentic to the researched and, unlike earlier ethnographies, will benefit the researched community by representing their perspectives as well as those of the researcher.

To be authentic, Lincoln (1993) claims that texts must not only tell the story provided but should also convey the feelings in a way that invites consumers of the story to vigorously experience the researched life through the text. According to Lincoln, to be authentic, "the reader should come away from such texts with heightened sensitivity to the lives being depicted, and with some flavour of the kinds of events, characters, and social circumstances which circumscribe those lives" (p.37).
3.2 A CASE FOR GREATER UTILIZATION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

A primary motive is to advocate for the greater use of qualitative research methodologies by community psychologists. The rationale for this position derives from three premises:

(i) Qualitative research methods are consistent with core values of the field of community psychology.

(ii) Qualitative methods can lay the groundwork for the development of culturally anchored quantitative methods and measures.

(iii) Qualitative methods are a powerful set of tools for understanding the "why" of human behaviour – the subjective meaning people make of their experiences that give rise to specific behaviours.

3.2.1 Qualitative research methods can support the core values of the field of community psychology.

Several researchers (Duffy and Wong 1996; Levine and Perkins 1987; Sarason 1974) agree that, although the specific wordings differ, there are several consistent themes in community psychology. These include respect for and emphasis on diversity, the use of a contextual framework which confirms that individual and community experience can only be understood within the setting in which such experience is located, taking into account the present and historical interactions between people and lived context, and a focus on empowerment, including the development of research processes that are themselves empowering to community members. It is the contention of the present study that
qualitative research, with its emphasis on capturing the diversity of respondents' experiences, its attention to the context of researched phenomena and its capacity to document the voices of historically marginalized communities, can greatly facilitate the realization of these core values in our work with communities.

3.2.1.1 Diversity

A central value in the field of community psychology is diversity. An article by Trickett, Watts and Birmann (1993) traced the evolution of community psychological views on diversity. They define diversity as an appreciation of the importance of studying the variety of contexts in which people live their lives. Social identity characteristics, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, class or religion shape the lived experiences and stories told by various communities and thus are important areas of study for community psychologists. Furthermore, an appreciation for diversity challenges us to look more closely at the origins of the so-called "general" psychological theories, in which regard Trickett et al., (1993:267) have stated:

"Each reflects a similar concern about the implicit assumption of theories developed by dominant cultural psychologists....... From this perspective each group has a distinctive worldview which underlies the development or psychology for and by members of that group. This emphasis on cultural pluralism as part of the substance of psychology represents an emphasis on the socio-political status shared by these groups in their efforts to gain access to the field."
Further Trickett et al. (1993) have assessed that although community psychology has professed to value such diversity, the field has a long way to go in truly addressing issues of diversity in research and practice. There are several components to the understanding of the multiple perspectives and viewpoints, that members of various groups may have, which will lead to more fully documenting the diverse range of human experiences.

Furthermore we must raise questions about the universality of our so-called "basic theories in psychology given that they have been created by persons with particular backgrounds and world views. Harding (1991) has stated the views of various phenomena that are obtained by looking through the eyes of different groups of people, may lead to the formulation of diverse theories and hypotheses about how such phenomena operate, thereby further diversifying the diversity.

Qualitative research methods are ideally suited to putting a valuation of diversity into practice. The link between qualitative research and diversity can be seen when considering qualitative research purely as a set of tools or methods and also when examining it as reflective of an alternative research paradigm. As a set of tools and methods, such techniques as in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus groups provide extensive, thick descriptions of a phenomenon. Such rich descriptions allow us to capture both the diversity and the specificity of human experience.

Banyard (1995) conducted research on the coping strategies of homeless mothers. She was interested not only in capturing the general types of coping strategies employed by the women, but also in examining what these specific strategies were. Although the literature on stress and coping may speak generally about such concepts as "stress" in the parenting role of "use of active – behavioural coping
strategies” those interested in working with homeless families must understand the specificity and variety in their particular experiences with such phenomena. Parental stress may mean juggling a work schedule with day care and sport practice for a middle-class professional mother. For homeless women, however, it had much more to do with finding ways to feed hungry children when one’s food budget was not sent or finding ways to provide a piece of candy for a child, live in a shelter and eat food that is not of the family’s choice. Investigating the phenomenon at this level of specificity enabled the researcher to appreciate differences within the group of homeless mothers in terms of their approaches to life in the shelter (Banyard 1995).

Generating this level of detail and description contributes to our ability as community psychologists to understand and appreciate the diverse experiences of those we work with. It is these specific details which also help us to design the specific details of intervention programs that are grounded in participants lived experiences (Banyard 1995).

Qualitative research does not begin with questionnaires developed from the point of view of the researcher nor derived from general theories which may have little relation to the lived experiences of the group of interest. Qualitative researchers recognize that there may be a variety of phenomena that are missed if we restrict people to forced-choice answers. Instead, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, case studies or focus groups promote the researcher’s ability to capture the perspective of the research participant.

The ability to capture and understand the points of views of different research participants adds new and critical voices to our understanding of phenomena, which in turn give us new information that can
be used to develop new or revised theories and constructs as called for by Trickett et al., (1993), Harvey (1989); Casey (1994) and Lincoln 1993).

In its focus on thick description of specific context, qualitative research may help us to pay closer attention to the unique relationships of researcher and participant and also provide space for a careful consideration of the researcher’s individual standpoint and its impact on the research. Using qualitative research either as a set of methods or as reflective of a different philosophy of science promotes an appreciation, respect for and an ability to document diverse perspectives, a fundamental value of community psychology. Qualitative research methods can assist us in capturing the multiple standpoints of community members which in turn will assist us in creating theories and interventions that are more inclusive and representative.

3.2.1.2 Context

It is an axiom of the ecological model that human behaviour can only be understood when viewed in context, that is, when the various ecological determinants of behaviour are taken into consideration. Wilson (1996) notes that the widespread participation in gangs among many inner-city youth illustrates how such determinants may be historical (e.g. the loss of jobs in communities lead to high rates of unemployment and underemployment, local businesses close or move elsewhere, and the quality of schools deteriorates which results increase school failure); physical (e.g. a lack of safe and adequate housing, a paucity of public recreation area); social (e.g. racism, a sense of isolation among neighbourhood residents instead of a strong sense of community or social embeddedness) or they may be political and/or socio-economic (e.g. cuts in public spending that result in day care shortages.
increased homelessness, loss of job training. The neglect of these multiple layers of behavioural
determinants was at the heart of the critique of mainstream psychology articulated by community
psychological writing during the fields formative years. Several authors (Trickett et. al., 1985) have
noted with concern the failure of academic researchers to adequately consider contextual factors that
shape the behaviour of people in communities, and have observed that this neglect of context has
frequently given rise to an overemphasis on individual determinants and a dangerous, if perhaps
unintended, practice of concluding that failure and hardship reflect the functioning or more precisely
the malfunctioning of precisely these intra-individual factors.

Qualitative research methods – focus group, observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews,
participation in the daily life of community residents, and document analysis are ideally suited to
helping community researchers counter this traditional neglect of context. Such methods allow the
development of a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) a detailed examination of specific behaviours and
the settings in which they occur.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that qualitative researchers are more likely than quantitative
researchers to confront the constraints of the everyday social world. They see this world in action and
embed their findings in it. Specific types of qualitative research further illustrate this point. Boyle
(1994) described a central assumption of ethnography as being that peoples’ behaviour can be
understood only in context. In the process of analysis and abstraction, the ethnographer cannot separate
elements of human behaviour from their relevant contexts of meaning and purpose. During the
fieldwork process, researchers interact with participants in their natural settings rather than in the
laboratory. This permits observation of the context in which particular phenomena occur.
An example of this is provided by Nations and Rebhun (1988), who took issue with the findings of Scheper-Hughes (1992) that poor women in north-eastern Brazil coped with the poverty related deaths of their children by selectively attaching to those most likely to survive and consequently did not grieve deeply the loss of their more sickly off-spring. This conclusion was based at least partly on Scheper-Hughes observation that the supposedly bereaved mothers did not appear to cry or to experience outward signs of grief in the wake of their children’s deaths. Using in-depth interviews with a similar sample of Brazilian mothers, Nations and Rebhun (1988) discovered a popular folk belief which held that a mother’s fear would weigh down the wings of her child’s angel-spirit as it ascended to heaven. Women after woman revealed to the researchers the private anguish they experienced following the loss of any of their children and the terrible, private struggle they engaged in to avoid any outward expression of their grief. It was only through phenomenological interviews that the women’s apparent lack of maternal grief was made comprehensible to the researchers, as the cultural determinants of their behaviour were revealed. Undeniably, the incorporation of ethnographic methods can be time consuming, however the risks entailed by failing to understand important ecological determinants of behaviour can lead to inaccurate and potentially destructive conclusions.

3.2.1.3 Empowerment

In addition to the values discussed above community psychology also embraces the notion of empowerment. Rappaport (1990) outlined a number of dimensions of empowerment research including giving voice to the experiences and the strengths of disenfranchised groups and facilitating collaboration with research participants. Closely linked to this is the community psychology value of
social change and action. Rappaport (1990) further maintains that qualitative research is instrumental in documenting the voices of participants.

Mishler (1986) stated that the effort to empower respondents and the study of their responses as narratives are closely linked. They are connected through the assumption that one of the significant ways through which individuals make sense of and give meaning to their experiences is to organize them in a narrative form. Various attempts to restructure the interviewee – interviewer relationship so as to empower respondents are designed to encourage them to find and speak in their own voices.

3.2.1.4 Opportunities for empowerment and transformation

Qualitative research is empowering for the researched in that knowledge and theory is constructed and jointly negotiated between researched and researcher. Rather than coming from researchers outside of academic contexts and with alternative project goals such as publish or perish, Casey (1994) suggests that the knowledge produced in collaboration, such as life history research, will be contextualized rather than decontextualized. The knowledge developed will speak to the researched community because it comes partially from them. It is research that is in the informant’s own voice. Other researchers speak to the issue of silenced voices, (Harvey 1989; Casey 1994; Lincoln 1993). Casey (1994) claims that past research paradigms of, for example, forced choice surveys, continue to silence voices or support a notion of managerialism and prescription. Further, Casey claims that an instrumental view of the researched exists in which they are treated as objects which can be controlled and manipulated for the sake of the research. Qualitative research methods such as a life history, do not delegate voices to the shadows but instead support and celebrate them for the contributions they can
make to reform and change efforts of their own and other communities. They are potentially transformative.

Lincoln (1993) addresses the notions of transformative and empowering research when she considers the relationship between the researched and the researcher. She claims that through the collaborative nature of research, the researched can come to terms with historical, social and cultural contexts of their communities and their position in those contexts. The researcher, on the other hand can take "an activist stance, forgoing the disinterested observer" role demanded by traditional research, and undertake consciousness-raising activities (community seminars, community-building activities, public meetings, group research design work, and the like) which enable the silenced to come to terms with their own "historical and personal locations" (p.43). It is also through the joint decision making of data collection, analysis and writing that the researched will become empowered. The researched become "the agents and instrument of their own change processes" (p.43).

In conclusion qualitative research methods benefit both the researched and researcher communities in diverse ways. The researched become agents of knowledge, co-creators scrutinizing the authenticity of texts, while researchers have a mode of textual and inter-contextual analysis and are privy to processes which have ethical safeguards. Researchers therefore have the opportunity to develop a wider understanding of learning and individual choices through collaborative research.
3.2.2 Qualitative methods are a powerful set of tools for understanding the "why" of human behaviour.

Qualitative research can help us tell "the rest of the story" regarding the issues and problems that concern us in our research and interventions. There is growing sense that perhaps quantitative measures no matter how culturally sensitive, simply cannot tell the whole story of the issues that affect the individuals and communities with which we work.

A unique strength of qualitative methods is their capacity to permit an exploration of life events, the personal meanings they create and the feelings and cognitions that underlie and result from the meaning-making process. Such methods offer research participants the opportunity to share their experiences using whatever words and metaphors they choose, rather than having to reduce their experience so that it fits into a range of pre-defined answer choices.

3.3 THE SETTING

Community psychology is defined by Orford (1992) as the psychology of people in their own settings and contexts. In his paper on “Social action through self-help groups in Zululand, South Africa” Edwards (1999:53) maintains “The Zululand and South African context has been one of accelerating social action and transformation. Mass democratic movements within the country, coupled with international sanctions and pressure from political exiles lead to the overthrow of the unjust Apartheid system. The first full democratic elections on 27 April 1994 and the presidency of Nelson Mandela heralded an unprecedented process of social change. The country is richer politically but poorer
economically. Despite increasing democracy, liberation and international recognition, the legacy and sequelae of years of colonialism, Apartheid, structural, oppressive, reactive and revolutionary violence will remain for some time.”

In his recent work on the practice of community psychology in Zululand, South Africa, Edwards (2000) maintains that there are both highly developed modernized areas in Zululand such as Richards Bay as well as areas that are generally rural and economically underdeveloped.

There is a labour pool in Richards Bay which is on the premises of the offices of the department of labour. This is where hundreds of men and women wait under the trees for any kind of employment, part time, temporary or one day jobs. Their despair is signified by the move of the crowd each time a vehicle comes inside the premises of the labour pool. Their hope is that the car is to hire people for work.

3.4 THE SAMPLING METHOD

There are a variety of sampling techniques available to the qualitative researcher. The population from which the incidental sample was drawn and represented, was that of unemployed people at Richards Bay labour pool. The people “under the trees” waiting for employment were informed that the purpose of the visit was not to offer employment but rather to explore alternate ways of making a living.
3.4.1 Method

The mobilization of mutual aid groups as a methodology for community psychology was effectively used. The following diagram illustrates procedures and hard raw data concerning the interactional component of empowerment which was achieved through critical awareness of the sociopolitical environment, decision making and problem solving skills.

3.4.1.1 Procedure 1.

FIG. 1. Researcher and group seen in three dimensional spirals in terms of diversity, empowerment and setting.

Procedure 1 illustrates the increasing occupational diversity of mutual aid groups formed in accordance to the groups interests. The spiraling methodology illustrates that both the researcher and the group are honouring a privilege of mutual benefit.
3.4.1.2 Procedure 2.

The following narrative process is a faithful reflection of field notes taken during the initial mobilizing phase. An essential holistic profile is narrated. Hard raw data in the form of selected videotapes accounts are available.

**FIG. 2.** Description of mobilizing as perceived by the larger group. It represent faithfulness, credibility, authenticity of raw data as evidenced.

![Diagram with the following terms: COMPETENCY (ukulolongisiseka), MEETING (indaba), RITUAL (umsebenzi), EMPOWER (imbizo), LETS PULL TOGETHER (isixaxambijii), STRATEGIZE (ubunyoninco), GATHER (imbizo), FOCUS GROUP (iqoqo).]
3.5 THE PROCESS OF FORMING MUTUAL AID GROUPS WITH PERSONS BECOMING ATTACHED AND AFFILIATED TO GROUPS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR HAVING EXPRESSED AND EXPLORED ALTERNATIVE OCCUPATIONAL INTERESTS

The researcher was one of a group of community psychologists who visited the labour pool as part of an ongoing community internship to fulfil practical coursework requirements for the doctoral programme in community psychology.

No jobs were offered but opportunities for self discovery, identification of unused skills, discovery of talents, opportunities for improved social support and higher self-esteem were encouraged. The actual
process of facilitating and forming groups was extremely easy owing to the unemployed persons' openness and willingness to grasp any opportunity to improve their condition. Consciousness with regard to untapped resources was readily raised and energies mobilized in the direction of their expressed interests.

3.5.1 The group interview

An unstructured phenomenologically driven interview format was adopted in order to maximize the articulation of the respondent's own stories. Such an interview format follows the issues and concerns as they emerge from the informants, allowing group members' perspectives, personal descriptions and lived meaning of the phenomenon to emerge.

Group members were encouraged to express themselves freely. The general experience was that group members readily formed cohesive associations. Their vulnerability, openness and motivation to find employment and any occupation to transcend the traumatic experience of unemployment, depression and associated severe lowered self-esteem, were able to be mobilized as facilitative sources of change. The length of the interview with the group depended on the amount of self-reflection the participants felt comfortable with.

One focus of this practical work was to form mutual aid groups of unemployed people. This process was facilitated by grouping persons together in the basis of their having expressed and explored alternative occupational interests. Eventual groups which materialized consisted of persons formed on the basis of the following interests:
(i) Catering for local schools
(ii) Sewing uniforms for local schools
(iii) Singing
(iv) Poultry and farming
(v) Nursery and creche
(vi) Specializing in traditional dance for tourist
(vii) Catering traditional food for tourist and urbanized generations
(viii) Sewing curtains and bedding
(ix) Hair styling
(x) Computer literacy
(xi) Specializing in baking
(xii) Lawn mower

3.6 RESUME

This section has been concerned with the qualitative action research methodology employed in this thesis. From the above it is noticed that in such applied social and health services much research work is driven, not by the theoretical stance of the researcher but by a specific practical problem when turned into a research question. Carey (1995) states that there is not necessarily a one to one correspondence between epistemology and methodology. The choice of method and procedure can perfectly well be matched to what is being studied rather than to the disciplinary or methodological leanings of the researcher. It is therefore possible to envisage deductive pieces of qualitative research.
4.0 INTRODUCTION

Mutual aid groups operated by and for unemployed people were used in this study as a form of empowering unemployed people in Richards Bay, Zululand. Empowerment is acknowledged as the major purpose and goal of the mutual aid groups method in this study.

A number of different definitions of empowerment are found in the literature on mutual aid groups. The most common definitions are ones that follow the eclectic perspective provided by Rappaport (1987), who defines empowerment as the degree to which individuals, groups, or communities are changed so that people gain individual and collective control over their community life. This definition allows two different methods for accomplishing this goal – individual change and social change. Rappaport recognizes this duality when he says that empowerment may promote a psychological sense of personal control or influence and concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights.

Itzhaky and York (2000) maintain that empowerment deals with processes within communities including removing blocks or barriers to empower oppressed people.
### 4.1 Nomological Network for Psychological Empowerment

Fig. 1 Nomological Network for Psychological Empowerment (Zimmerman 1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrapersonal Component</th>
<th>Interactional Component</th>
<th>Behavioural Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Domain specific perceived control</td>
<td>* Critical awareness</td>
<td>* Community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Domain specific self-efficacy</td>
<td>* Understanding causal agents</td>
<td>* Organizational participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Motivation control</td>
<td>* Skills development</td>
<td>* Coping behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Perceived control</td>
<td>* Skills transfer</td>
<td>* Across life domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Resource mobilization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Zimmerman’s (1995) model is based upon Cronbach and Meehl (1955) description of a process for construct validation that is theoretically driven and empirically tested. Cronbach and Meehl (1955) suggest that a construct is open-ended and requires the specification of interrelationships among observable phenomena that represent abstract concepts. They referred to this interlocking system of relationships as a nomological network that can be tested empirically once concrete operations for the construct in the network are specified. The open-ended nature of many psychological constructs implies that the facts and rules used to represent a construct may change over time and depend upon the context in which it is measured.

Several researchers have found connections among perceived control variables, skill development and measures of participation and community involvement (Wandersman, 1981; Kieffer, 1984; Stone and Levine, 1985; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988). These constructs are all consistent with empowerment theory.

4.1.1 The intrapersonal component

Fig. 1 indicates the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment, which includes perceptions as basic elements that provide people with the initiative to engage in behaviours to influence desired outcomes. These include perceptions of control, competence and efficacy.

It is unlikely that individuals who do not believe that they have the capability to achieve goals would learn about what it takes to accomplish them.
This intrapersonal component was measured on the unemployed at an individual level during initial group interview and the outcome was measured when groups were operating.

4.1.2 The interactional component

Critical awareness refers to one's understanding of the resources needed to achieve a desired goal, knowledge of how to acquire these resources and skills for managing resources, once they are obtained (Kieffer, 1984; Freire, 1973). This ability to mobilize resources is an essential aspect of the interactional component, which suggests environmental mastery. Understanding causal agents refers to an appreciation of the factors that may influence those people, objects or events seen to either inhibit or enhance one's efforts to exert control in the socio political environment (Sue and Zane, 1980). Decision-making, problem-solving and leadership skills may be developed in settings where participation is a responsibility. It is these critical skills that help individuals become independent, enable them to control events in their lives and lead them to become their own advocates. The interactional component provides the bridge between perceived control and taking action to exert control. The interactional component includes both cognitive understanding and learning about one's environment, which factors may be considered preparatory to participation because they are indirectly linked to the behaviours needed to influence outcomes. Interactional components were measured on the unemployed to observe the level of interaction of the groups in their everyday practical functioning.
4.1.3 The behavioural component

The behavioural component is an expression of a person who believes that he/she has the capability to influence a given context (intrapersonal component) and understand how the system works in that context (intractional component). The behavioural component is concerned with exerting control in a particular context.

4.2 MUTUAL AID GROUPS FOR ENHANCING EMPOWERMENT

Mutual aid groups are becoming an important method for conducting qualitative research in community psychology. This strategy enables information to be gathered on the perceptions, beliefs and values of a group's participants and is particularly well suited to addressing cultural characteristics that impact on communities' health status. In mutual aid groups there is flow of information based on the opinions and interactions within the group, which is recorded and later transcribed and analyzed.

It has been explained in the methodology section how the mutual aid groups were formed. Through the collaboration with members, the researcher realized that to enhance the efficacy of the initial group phase and the ultimate success, it was important that preparation of members included a conversation about expectations inherent in group work. This was particularly relevant for the unemployed where the first expectation was of funding. Funding issues was clearly stated from the onset. The contract clearly stated that there was no funding to be offered.
4.3 COMMITMENT TO THE MUTUAL AID GROUPS

It was significant that the researcher communicate the purposeful nature of the group. The aim was to let the members know that the group was not a random gathering of individuals who meet with no specific aim. Thus the rationale behind the group, the needs it aimed to meet and why it existed were important variables to explain and explore with members. Ventilation of past experiences and clarification of inappropriate or unrealistic expectation helped to solidify ways in which the group was a safe and helpful environment for catharsis.

4.4 CONCERNS IN THE ANALYSIS OF MUTUAL AID GROUP DATA

The most frequent concern in qualitative research is an inadequate description of the analysis process, and the consequent limitation on credibility and usefulness of the results. Of all aspects of using the mutual aid group method—advantages and limitations, logistics, implementation and interpreting and reporting of results, the process of analysis is the least agreed on and the least well developed. A frequent question is “how to do” analysis of mutual aid group data. Definitive, mutually agreed on techniques do not exist. Decisions in analysis depend on many factors. The researcher in this study aims to improve and develop the way to do data analysis.

4.5 COMPLEXITY OF GROUP DATA

Appreciation of the complexity of the data is necessary to consider in planning and implementing analysis. With the goal of understanding the mutual aid group members’ interpretation of social
reality” (Silverman 1993), maintains that the researcher needs to include an understanding of the richness of mutual aid group data. The group effect is on especially integral component that cannot be left out. A concern in analysis is over-dependence on transcripts without incorporation of the nonverbal, sequential nature of interaction, and psychological effects that are embedded in-group data (Carey and Smith, 1994).

In earlier focus group literature, the group as the unit of analysis was studied without much evidence of understanding or application. If the unit of analysis is limited to the group, then the evolving interaction of members and the impact on opinions will be unobserved. Because the interaction within the group will affect the data elicited, an appropriate description of the nature of the group dynamics is necessary to incorporate in analysis – for example, heated discussion, a dominant member, little agreement.

Censoring and conformity are a concern in a group setting because members often adjust their comments in response to their own needs and to their understanding of their appropriate roles in the groups. In the process of censoring, a member withholds potential comments, often due to lack of trust in other members and the leaders, or concern with the future use of the data collected. If members are requested to narrate or tell their experienced story they perceive this opportunity as the one for telling the happy and painful story which is therapeutic for group members.
4.6 ANALYSIS

With the goal of exploring members concepts and perceptions, the researcher is cautioned against trying to pin down exactly the "real reality." In general there is not one, stable, exact reality to be discovered when the mutual aid group technique is used. Especially with more complex and ego central topics, one's goal is to explore and discover the variations in perceptions (Silverman, 1994).

Most analytic procedure originated in rules of thumb or heuristics derived from experience and they often draw on conceptual frameworks in the social sciences. In considering selection of a technique for making sense of rich data collected, the researcher will consider the purposes and limitations of a range of techniques as well as the needs and expectations of the research audience(s). Of interest may be: phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990), grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), content analysis and narrative analysis (Reissman and Bay 1992).

Narrative analysis is the technique which is relevant for this specific study on empowering the unemployed through mutual aid groups.

Analysis begins in the planning stage and continues during the session, as the researcher processes on-line the plausibility of each comment and probes for clarification or verification. Also in this study the researcher gained much data through reviewing with the group members a summary of the discussion. The researcher summarized at the close of the session and welcomed correction and additions. This was often a time for the most interesting data to arise. Description of group interaction and non-verbal behaviour were also useful in helping to interpret the transcripts.
4.7 PREPARING MEMBERS FOR THE EXPECTATIONS OF GROUP WORK

The researcher engaged the mutual aid group in mutual aid pre-group preparation.

Mcgowan (1997) enlarged upon the criteria for measurement of engagement. In Mcgowan's contracting there are seven distinct dimensions of engagement:

- contracting
- attendance
- contributing
- relating to the group leader
- relating to group members
- working on one's own problems
- working on the problems of others

Mcgowan posits that for a person-in-group to be fully engaged all seven dimensions must be satisfied. Engagement is a multidimensional construct which suggests that a member may be engaged in one dimension and not in others. However, a group member is not fully engaged in-group work until there is minimal evidence of engagement in all seven dimensions. Thus, a member is engaged in group work when there is evidence of attendance, verbal contribution, and or participation in group activities, support for the work of the researcher, interaction with members, adoption of the mutual contract, work on one's own problems and helping other members in their work on their problems.
Work with unemployed people had dimensions of engagement that are similar to those presented by Mcgowen. They were:

1) contracting procedures
2) attendance and work requirements
3) contributing in specific objects
4) working on one's own problems through discussion and group activities
5) relating to the researcher and relating to other group members.

4.8 INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL OF THE INITIAL UNEMPLOYED GROUP AT RICHARDS BAY LABOUR POOL

Researcher: “I am pleased you chose to talk to me about the mutual aid group we are starting to gather in our concern with unemployment. I would like to start by asking you a question. Do you know what competence means?”

Respondent: “Well I know what incompetence means.”

Researcher: “Good! So tell me what incompetence means’?”

Respondent: “Well, it’s like not being able to do something or like not knowing something, I think.”

Researcher: “Exacting and competence is simply the opposite of all that!”

Researcher: “Could we have another response from someone else?”

Respondent: “Competence is about what you are good at – your abilities and talents. When we do things well, we feel competent and that is what this group is about.”
Researcher: “Good! The group will use something you do well, creative expression to help the members feel good about themselves. Can you tell us anything that you think you do well?”

Respondents: (Common interests from individuals) – “I like catering,” “I like sewing,” “I like singing,” “I like farming,” “I like caring for children.”

Respondent: “I grew up on a farm and I like traditional dancing. Do you think it can help?”

Researcher: “Everything and anything is worth doing!”

Respondent: “I like cooking traditional food and I know most people in townships like traditional food but they cannot cook it. I noted that when our relatives visited us here in our rural area they appreciated this kind of food.”

Researcher: “That is correct and it is a good idea.”

Respondents: “I like and I am able to do different hair styles,” “I won a computer and I am computer literate,” “I like specializing in baking.

Researcher: “Well I think we have mentioned our interests and our creative activities which are important. They help build our confidence, which can help us in other areas of our lives.”

Respondent: “Are you going to organize employment for us using these areas of interest and creativities?”

Researcher: “I want you to understand that we are forming mutual-aid groups. There is no employment. We are going to be bosses of ourselves. We will run our small group which will develop if we are co-operative and if we think positively. That is part of what this group is about. We will approach organizations where there is a need e.g. for training specifically poultry and farming, hands on skills for crèche experience.”
Respondent: “Well I am used to doing things alone at home. I do not know about doing it in front of other people or with people.”

Researcher: “OK! It is different than doing it alone, but the members will be there to support each other. That is an important part of the group.”

Respondent: “Some amongst us believe in religion and praying, others believe in traditional ritual carrying. I am wondering what will happen amongst us which one will be our source of strength.

Researcher: “That’s one of your great qualities! You will do well in this group because you value other’s beliefs. I guess groups can seem like a waste of time if you do not understand what it’s about. I think this group can be fun and it’s going to be productive. I also hope you are beginning to understand how you can benefit and contribute. You know, though sometimes people disagree in groups and that is OK. I will be there to help the group work it through.”

Researcher: “What is a recent difficult situation or type of stressor that made you decide to seek for a job at this labour pool?”

Respondents: Types of stressors mentioned by groups were:

- housing problems
- children problems (parents are concerned about paying school fees)
- food
- shorter related stress (marital problems)
- interpersonal problems (usually for ritual purpose)
- self-stress (alcohol and substance abuse problem)
- medical/health problems
- being viewed negatively/stereotyped by others
- transportation problems
- employment problems

Researcher: What is your survival strategy concerning this difficult situation you find yourself in?"

Respondent: - Do something to confront the problem
- Get social support
- Patient endurance
- Think positively
- Think about the problem
- Distance yourself from problem
- Let your feelings out
- Pray
- Focus on the future
- Focus on children
4.9 FINDINGS FROM NARRATIVES (THEMES)

4.9.1 The web of stress

A variety of types of stress emerged from participants' responses to the sharing of stories. These included housing problems, lack of money, interpersonal stress, including experiences with partners' violence and difficulties with their children. This caused a need to conduct rituals for luck to come to them. Participants described pressures they put on themselves when for example they felt they did not live up to their own expectations. A subject also mentioned the stress of having to deal with disrespect because of stereotypes others heard about unemployed people. Groups also narrated the negative perceptions of friends and families who “looked down upon them.” The stressors that the unemployed shared occurred on many different levels including individual, family, social and community. They seemed to combine to create both heavy burdens of stress and constraints as possible responses.

4.9.2 Experience of distress

In addition to people’s descriptions of situations they struggled with, the group had a great deal to narrate about the emotional costs exacted by these stressors. They mentioned contending daily with such negative effects as frustrations, sadness, fatigue and depression. They also mentioned a dire need for carrying out rituals.
4.9.3 Survival strategies

Analyses of themes in the interviews provided interesting information about coping and survival strategies. These themes included actions like directly confronting the problem, relationship with others, the use of patience and thinking positively. Although there were many unique coping responses that demonstrated interesting variability among the unemployed, current discussion is limited to those themes that were most prevalent. Analysis of the relative effectiveness of various strategies is an important direction for future research and intervention.

4.9.4 Directly confronting the problem

One of the major themes that ran through the interviews was the use of behavioural strategies to confront problems directly. All unemployed people who participated in the current study mentioned taking some form of direct action in response to daily stressful situations in a variety of contents. The main reason for taking action was to wake up everyday in the morning looking for a job. The participants agreed in one voice that upon joining mutual aid groups the sense of “I” changed to “we”.

Several other categories of coping responses were behavioural actions which seemed important to include in the theme. These included thinking about the problem and thinking about past experiences. In the context of describing their coping responses, participants specifically mentioned thinking about the problem in terms of trying to understand and make sense of what was going on, getting information, and making some kind of plan of action.
4.9.5 Coping in connection with others

In addition to taking action on their own, the unemployed often mentioned their connection to others in their coping responses. Getting social support from other people, including family, friends, neighbours and other community members was something that the unemployed spontaneously mentioned as a strategy that they used to cope with everything from housing to interpersonal difficulties.

Several other categories of coping responses used by various unemployed subjects also seemed related to this larger theme of coping in connection and revealed some unique sources of support. These included the use of a connection to spirituality through religion as well as coping through the formulation of a type of group identity with other unemployed in the labour pool (around shared circumstances).

Prayer was used to give the unemployed the strength to make and follow through on difficult decisions. It gave many of the unemployed some needed space in which to think about their situation in a quiet moment of prayer in their room or some time spent away from their shelter in church. Church seemed to help relieve their burden of frustration and stress. The most important subject of unemployed group prayer was to seek comfort, which provided a feeling that they were not alone as well as perhaps helping them to find a larger meaning in their experiences.

Unemployed people mentioned making some kind of group identification with other unemployed in the labour pool in the context of discussing how they were coping with being homeless or living in the shelter. These statements were labeled as identification with the group because they seemed to go
beyond simply having other unemployed around to talk to. The unemployed were able to see their own situation in the lives of others and to gain a sense of comfort or strength from that. The unemployed described how connecting with other unemployed in the same position helped to reduce such feelings of isolation and marginalization.

4.10 PROTOCOLS DURING GROUP FUNCTIONING (ANALYZING THEMES)

Researcher: “How are you doing this far within your group.”

Unemployed people who were already within groups reported coping emotionally by taking one day at a time and trying not to dwell on circumstances beyond their control. The statements from groups were more like what Moos (1996) has termed “dormancy” where the unemployed group essentially reserved their energy until such a time that it could be used most effectively.

Group members reported how much they perceived themselves as worthwhile through group participation. They reported gains of self-esteem, positive thinking and improved sense of self.

They reported that they were able to deal with landlords, social services, friends, families, neighbours and were able to overcome their problem of substance abuse.

Researcher: “What has changed?”
Group response: Emotional coping and self statements to reassure oneself lessened the impact of the stressor and helped to preserve enough hope and self-esteem allowed action to be taken in other areas.

Unemployed group members reported using a combination of what seem to be emotion and problem focused coping in dealing with at least one of the situations they described as stressful. For example the unemployed typically embraced both modern Christian religion as well as carrying out traditional African rituals to ensure ancestral help to cope with their situation (being unemployed was considered as anger for punishment from their ancestors).

Combining rituals and religion accounted for the fact that they were not sure of what would be useful in their situation of being unemployed.

Researcher: “What barriers did you experience in working within mutual aid groups?”

Barriers mentioned by group members were:

- absenteeism of group members
- other members wanting to dominate
- too many diverse ideas
- failure to raise a basic sum of money to put in a project
- failure to discipline those who could not keep time
Researcher: “What would you regard as strengths of belonging in mutual aid groups?”

Group Response: support from group members - just to know you are not alone in the situation

- reduced depression - although there was no immediate income or tangible gain you lived in hope

- increased self-esteem - people look down upon you if you are financially powerless but immediately you are involved in some sort of work they regard you as a person.

- more personal contact - if you are alone in the problem you become lonely, even emotionally, I now have relationships through mutual aid groups.

4.11 THE RESEARCHERS EXPERIENTIAL JOURNEY (MY OWN STORY)

The researchers involvement in this study was part of the requirement for a doctoral thesis. The present work is based on community psychology. Community psychology emphasizes working with people in their own settings and contents. This study aimed at addressing the development of a psychology geared towards “the Zululand community” as part of a process of transformation of South African Society.

I find theorizing about these issues of transformation and involvement with communities easy but practically leaving the office was a heavy task. Moving out to the local organization in Richards Bay was quite an experience on its own. Coming from a relaxed environment, the first noted reaction from
company people was that they did not have much time to spare, especially if they learnt that there was no productivity or deliverance for them.

4.11.1 Procedures

4.11.1.1 Entry

Whether or not researchers gain access, both physical and interpersonal, to a setting is largely determined by how they establish contact and present themselves. In this case, physical entry was facilitated by the researcher's dissertation promoter who had a strong relationship with ZCBF (Zululand Chamber Business Foundation) in Richards Bay. This relationship introduced the researcher to one administrator who requested the researcher to come up with a solution to prevent crime in Richards Bay. Upon discussion and meetings with (ZCBF) administrators the researcher came up with an idea that unemployment was a key variable which perpetrated crime.

The researcher was accompanied and introduced to the labour department administrators. They were welcoming and supportive. However they were concerned that unemployed people were a different group to work with and they were demotivated. The urge to work with unemployed people had already developed. I promised myself to go all out of my way to develop mutual aid groups which would allow people to re-gain their self-esteem and also be life worthy rather than waiting under the trees for employers to randomly pick them up.
I was overwhelmed to see men and women of all ages standing and waiting patiently, for what I would call a “miracle.” People were throwing themselves into any car that entered the labour pool. What I noted was that within the large groups waiting there were smaller groups of people engaging in different activities. Some were selling to each other; some were playing cards; some were playing quizz and some were selling fruit, biscuits etc., to each other. I found the group of unemployed people working under the tree loud compared to the other group of retrenched individuals I have worked with. The difference between the two groups might have been due to the fact that with the unemployed it was simply comforting to know that they are not alone but rather that you were swimming in a large pool together, sharing the same problem.

When groups were formed and running in different sites, it was emotionally fulfilling to me as a researcher. For each day I felt I had contributed more to the many out there then merely sitting in my office and seeing individuals. The weather conditions in Zululand are hot and this is one problem situation that I experienced visiting different sites to observe progress and share concerns. I am still connected to people of these groups and when I look back to where I come from with them compared to where they are now at present, it is a dream come true for me and to my innovative supervisor.

4.11.2 Support Systems

I realized that I needed some specialized expertise to teach my groups the financial, banking and management of business. With the permission from departments on campus I requested post-graduate students to assist. This was helpful I distanced myself from the group deliberately, indicating that I was not in power and that they were in charge of their projects themselves. This also empowered economic
honours students to engage practically in community work at a tender age. Also the students from agriculture department had a great impact on poultry and farming in teaching and sharing information and expertise that they had.

The other department was home economics. They were involved with groups who were interested in baking and those who were catering. These groups changed markedly. Likewise students enjoyed interacting and sharing their newly learned skills e.g. baking birthday cakes, wedding cakes, interior designing etc.

Lastly the researcher has been continuously using psychology honours students for conflict resolution, time management skills, dealing with losses e.g. depression where there were barriers and a whole collection of life skills. This kind of work counted in their practical work as a credit and motivation. All students who were involved in the project reported satisfaction.

My (researcher) evaluation of the project is that professionals or lectures do not involve students sufficiently in practical community work. Students have much untapped energy which needs to be utilized. By so doing their talents are noticed and recognized at a tender age and they proceed to the world of work with lived and exercised skills and maturity. If properly managed this empowers students, lecturers, senior lecturers and heads of departments (Cascade model) with flow of allocation of duties.
4.11.3 Evaluation of the work by the Promoter

When the group were in function in their own sites, the professor suggested as the promoter that we should visit and observe the groups in function at work. We went out with a journalist and a cameraman for photographs. I was the only black person. Visits were successful in documenting the tremendous amount of work people were engaged as well as what had already been achieved.

However on the next visit to monitor the groups by myself people voiced out that they were not comfortable about the video taping and photographs. People suspected that there was funding involved which would be enjoyed by the researcher and the photographers. I was upset and wanted to lose hope about the issue of trust, however, I synthesized the whole process through probing their comments which proved to be one form of empowerment to me, that they had guts to question political issues. In this way and in the contextualizing the whole process of empowerment was gained and achieved by people.

4.11.4 Individual Story

The researcher observed many different successful groups. The most successful group, in terms of growth and turnover included a lady who came out with the idea of lawn mowing. She was the only one in the group who had been retrenched from a company as a labourer. She volunteered the idea that when her money was available she would buy lawn mowers and start to mow people’s yards in the township at R30 per yard. She subsequently employed people who were unemployed to cut grass and
remove wastage. She also had troubles with her husband who was working for a local company as a labourer and had been diagnosed for a chronic terminal illness. She started with one mower and towards the end of the project, had acquired 10 mowers. She also opened a “Spaza shop” tuck shop. The ill husband stopped working to look after the “Spaza shop”. From being unemployed and participating in mutual aid group, she has now bought a small van to remove wastage and is also tendering for the municipality. She expressed the view that her situation of being unemployed could actually have been an advantage which put her and the other group of unemployed people where they are today.

4.11.5 Interview

An unstructured, phenomenologically driven interview format was adopted in order to maximize the articulation of the respondent’s own stories. Interviews followed issues and concerns as they emerged from the informants, allowing for the informants’ perspective and their own description of the phenomenon and its meaning in their life to emerge. At the beginning of each interview, informants were told that the purpose of this study was to understand empowerment and its role in mutual aid groups. Informants were asked the following questions.

4.11.6 TABLE 1 - The targeted interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What does it mean to work within mutual aid group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Evaluate the programme you are presently involved in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What does this study mean to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What has been valuable about what we have done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. How empowered do you feel on a scale of 1 to 10?

The interviewer took as non-directive a role as possible, allowing the respondents to lead the interview. Although this approach did not necessarily gather the information required to compare and contrast empowerment stories across informants, without significantly disrupting the emergence of the informant's perspective, the researcher ensured that the targeted research questions were addressed at some point during the interviews. To accomplish this, during each interview, the researcher checked off each question, and paraphrased what she had heard from the informant. Before concluding the interview, the researcher directly asked the informant those questions that had not been discussed during the dialogue. Interviews lasted 30 minutes to 2 hours, with the average interview lasting 1 hour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 11</th>
<th>Converging evidence for empowerment from interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does it mean to work within mutual aid groups?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomy:</strong></td>
<td>“Having control and influence over how you do your job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation:</strong></td>
<td>“To know that what you are doing belongs to you as “people who have suffered in the political struggle.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decisive:</strong></td>
<td>“The ability to figure out what needs to be done, what is the priority of the day, prioritize my own work and to set my own agenda.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Self-esteem:** “If you wake up early in the morning you know that you are going to do something. You are like your own boss, you at least able to tell people that you are working.”

**Support system:** “Mutual aid groups are a support system in life. We are not only going to work but we get to know relatives, relationships and we play “stokkvels.” There is a lot of caring if you lose a family member. We now gain great respect from our family members because we have work.”

**Better life:** “Sometimes you do not engage in crime e.g. not stealing because you want to but what else can you do if you are not working? You find yourself tempted to follow those who take chances. “I drank heavily because I wanted to forget about my problem.” “I do not see a need now I am busy.” “I slept around because I needed money, thanks to God because I have no HIV/AIDS.” “If one pays you after drinking they refuse using condoms.” “I feel dirty if I look back.”

**TABLE III** - *Converging evidence for empowerment from interview questions.*

Evaluate the programme you are presently involved in.

**Knowledge:** “Having and gaining the information and resources you need to do your job.” “Information gained from the students is invaluable. In fact we never thought we are worth working with such “important people.”
Knowing: “This programme made us “know our area”; “know our people”; “know what’s needed”; “know what you have”; “know what you don’t have”; “know that you still worth contributing in life.”

Trust and Respect: “At the beginning we were not sure that something worth this would happen, but just faith said let’s give it a try. We have developed trust through this programme. We are also trusted by the community members. We had inside anger and hatred. Now we have learnt to resolve our conflict in a decent way.” “Before I felt like I would drink and swear at people and want to vandalize e.g. telephones so that we all suffer.” “Injury to one, injury to all.”

Benefited the many: “This programme has not only benefited us but the community at large. The people we are serving are “our clients” at reasonable prices.” “We are now well behaved.” “We do not steal from our neighbours.”

Creativity: “This has made us to have support and freedom to take risks and be innovative.”

TABLE IV - Converging evidence for empowerment from interview questions.

What does this study mean to you?
**Fulfillment:** “Experiencing success on the job and helping others succeed. We are happy that the researcher informed us that if we do well she will benefit too and pass, as we have benefited a lot from her.”

“We are able to solve problems. We are able to create a solution for a need. This is when I felt most empowered.”

“The flexibility and the support to be innovative and to be able to provide the services in your community that you feel need to be provided, we feel empowered when we know we can do something about something.” “At least I am not jealous anymore, we have been taught about sharing.”

---

**TABLE V** - Converging evidence for empowerment from interview questions

**What has been valuable about what we have done?**

**Humanity:** “Standing and doing nothing for the whole day is a matter of the past that nearly made us mad.

**Family:** “We are confident that even if we are not rich, we are able to feed our families and our children are able to go to school.”
**Level of Education:** "We did not have a chance to proceed with our education but what we have done up to this far does not discriminate us in accordance to our level of education. It is valuable that all this "important" people who worked with and taught us, did not mind our level of education." "I hated educated people, I thought they are selfish. Now I have changed."

**Finance:** "Even today we cannot believe that these mutual aid groups were free to join. Even if you tell others they think you are lying. We are sometimes scared that someone will charge us. The researcher keeps on saying this is our own work. Also it was started by us."

**Ritual:** "The Lord has been with us up until now and also our ancestors. There were barriers which nearly made us not to participate but we overcame all that."

---

**TABLE VI** - **Converging evidence for empowerment from interview questions.**

**How empowered do you feel right now on a scale of 1 - 10?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mutual Aid Group</th>
<th>Scale of 1 – 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specializing in traditional dance for tourist</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering traditional food for tourists and urbanized</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sewing curtains and bedding 10
Specializing in baking 10
Nursery and Creché 09
Poultry and farming 10
Computer literacy 09
Singing 10
Hair styling 10
Sewing uniforms for local schools 09
Catering for local schools 10
Lawn mowing 10

4.12 DISCUSSION

The current exploratory study used qualitatively analyzed interviews to understand and describe coping in a sample of the unemployed. In story telling the unemployed reported a variety of interconnected stressors that were part of their daily lives as mentioned above. The strategies used to cope with thinking positively and these events included taking direct action and getting solid, spiritual support.

Theories of coping with stress predict that individuals will use a variety of coping strategies in dealing with any one stressful event and these responses will include both problem – and emotion – focused techniques (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). The findings of this current study are consistent with this view. The unemployed narrative revealed that they used a number of different strategies to address
daily events. These responses included themes of direct action as well as those that were more cognitively or emotionally based (thinking positively).

General descriptions of the coping process that emerged from narratives were consistent with predictions from the coping literature. The qualitative nature of the data gives a rich picture of this texture of the stress and coping process for the unemployed.

Empowered outcomes refer to specific evaluative operations that may be used to study the effects of interventions designed to empower participants, investigate empowering processes and mechanisms and generate a body of empirical literature that will help develop empowerment theory. Empowerment autonomy is one consequence of empowering processes (Zimmerman, 1995).

The researcher in this study refers to a nomological network for psychological empowerment by Zimmerman (1995). Psychological empowerment includes a sense of motivation to control or influence events. This “intrapersonal component” was achieved through unemployed people joining mutual aid groups and, being prepared to be in control of the groups.

Decision making and problem solving skills and a critical awareness of one’s sociopolitical environment was achieved as psychological empowering in the interactional component. This was during group functioning. This is when skills development was achieved through training e.g. training for farming, poultry and developing a creche.
The last behavioural component achieved psychological empowerment through the group networking with each other. Their coping behaviours which they displayed when there were barriers and their ability of participating within organizations and networking at community involvement through working with the communities.

4.13 RESUME

The main finding in this study is that research and practice both benefit from a narrative approach that links process to practice and attends to the voices of the people of interest. Narrative theory and methods tends to open the field to a more inclusive attitude as to the data and to cross disciplinary insights as well as community collaboration.

When we do our community work, it becomes clear that viewpoints and interests of community members are neither obvious nor easily expressed because there is often no place for them to be expressed. Our work requires privileging the voices of the people studied.

From the present study it became clear that culture tends to prescribe certain ways of acting which can be referred to as prescribed stories. However, the narrative approach used here does not claim that culturally prescribed stories are either good or bad nor does it take a moral or evaluative position on the dominant narratives in communities.
CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to empower unemployed people through mutual aid groups. This is within the field of community psychology, as the researcher focused on balancing the imbalances of the past. These unjust imbalances left people poor, demotivated and lacking resources. This chapter concludes the present study, on empowering unemployed people through mutual aid groups. Participatory action research was used as an intervention in this study. It recognized the need for persons that were studied to be included as far as possible in the design and conduct of all phases of the research. Mobilized mutual aid groups were a useful methodology for this study.

The tools that were used by the researcher included focus groups, interviews, personal participation, videos, photographs and observation. These groups gave the people a chance to narrate the untold experiences in their own voices which was seen to be therapeutic in itself. This was a safe environment as they shared the same problem.

The mutual aid group is viewed as a development in action research for community psychology, as a "methodological invention" addressing practical and methodological difficulties of empowerment research.
The participatory action research concepts of collaboration, acquisition of theoretical knowledge, community, organizational feedback, intervention and evaluation provided a useful framework for analysis.

The mutual aid group technique was a "methodological intervention" that addressed practical and methodological difficulties of conducting research on empowerment of the unemployed. This was achieved through the opportunity it offered to access large numbers and diverse individuals which produced established mutually beneficial relationships within groups. The success of empowerment was based on understanding, and investing in the needs of the focus groups in their geographic area. The combinations of access to groups and concern about their well being can make possible high-quality research that is sensitive to the needs and the autonomy of mutual aid groups (Meissen, Gleeson and Embrie, 1991).

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

5.1.1 Narrative – People’s account of being unemployed in the form of stories

In this particular study the narrative approach had utility to account for action. It calls for an organizing principle that is faithful to the complexities observed when human beings engage in intentional performances to realize their often-unarticulated goals. Contained in the meaning of “action” is the notion of goals, purposes, and intentions.
The narrative approach was relevant for the researcher to understand the behaviour of the unemployed in a temporal context in which events and their participants have histories which have implications toward futures. All temporal events had a place in the storied constructions of the participants’ account of their conduct.

In using the narrative approach in this study, speech was taken to be evocative of relationships both alive within the researcher and also in which the researcher was embedded. These relationships were thought to effect and be effected by other relationships, which were grounded in larger contexts of discourse, between and among persons, their storied constructions of reality and the narrative routines provided by culture. Such storied constructions of reality are typically contextualized according to a person’s position in the social arenas that are simultaneously shaped by and formative of that culture.

5.2 DRAWINGS FROM THIS RESEARCH

The specific relationships found in this study apply only to the mutual aid group that were examined. However, there are a number of conclusions we can draw from this research that can apply generally to other mutual aid groups. The research lists these here in the form of suggestions to group leaders, consultants and members.

- First meetings are important. It is clear that characteristics of the group and group members at the very first meeting can strongly affect later participation. Be aware of how your group appears to the newcomer and also how your group might react differently to different types of potential members. (My experience of this, as a researcher having been involved with different
mutual aid groups, is that groups tended to close for new members. They were not welcoming because they had created trust, understanding and acceptance, and were suspicious to any newcomers. This rigid attitude was dealt with successfully. I (the researcher) noted that if openness were emphasized from the first meeting, there would be a difference.

- Be clear about who your group is. Every group is intended for certain types of people. Make sure that this is clear to potential members. If this is clear, the group will be able to focus more of its limited resources on persons who are appropriate members. A better person-group match from the outset will help to insure higher participation rates. In the first meetings the focused mutual aid groups were genuinely formed in terms of interests, abilities and competencies. There are variables which automatically drove types of people e.g. level of education accounted for computer groups, crèche, etc but it was not a criterion required for one to join such a special group. When newcomers from the second chain of meetings were formed to be fitted in existing groups, the researcher noted that there was a sort of bias, with people wanting to fit themselves into the already existing groups for the sake of success. However this concern was dealt with appropriately and successfully.

- Find out more about why people are joining or not. If you ask first-time attendees about their impressions, you might be able to discover important information about your group and the obstacles to becoming a group member. This can be done either informally by talking to the person or group or more formally with a questionnaire. In this study this was helpful in assisting the researcher with regard to the expectations of members. This was evidence when asking people to define empowerment themselves and their expectations of being empowered.
Many answers came out by members defining what empowerment meant for them. This also assisted the researcher to understand the level of function e.g. intellectual, emotional and social of members.

- Recognize the need for change. If you discover a problem, it will not disappear until you do something about it. For example, conflicts rose on issues like absenteeism, gender issues, finance. The researcher readily decided to educate members about the importance of life skills e.g. consistency, conforming to group (norms), group think and leadership. Group members learned much from post graduate students on business plans, handling of financial issues, gains and losses etc. Greater awareness led to fewer negative attendance effects.

- It is noted that as the self movement continues to grow through mutual aid groups and provide more settings for personal change in this country, more and more people are making the decision to join a group. The more we know about mutual aid group participation, the more we can help groups continue to provide rich tools for tackling social exclusion and promoting social cohesion in deprived urban neighborhoods.

**Barriers noted in this study with regard to participation in mutual aid groups**

Evaluating the character and magnitude of mutual aid amongst deprived populations at Richards Bay Labour pool, this study identifies barriers that are currently preventing the unemployed from helping themselves through participating in the mutual aid group. These barriers are narrated by group members when they look back at the barriers they have crossed in forming mutual aid groups. They
narrate what was their concern which is reported collectively. The first barrier is economic in that poor populations lack the money to acquire the goods and resources necessary to engage in mutual aid groups e.g. lack money to commute to the areas where resources are, lack money to purchase sewing material, to purchase material needed for poultry, to buy computers etc.

The second barrier to participation is social in that unemployed people have few people they can call upon for help. This can be explained by the fact that the reduction in the size of social networks means that the unemployed have fewer opportunities to engage in mutual aid. The given that the long-term unemployed mix with other long-term unemployed and have relatively few friends or acquaintances who can connect them with resources, explains how difficult it is for the unemployed to “climb up the ladder” using social networks within groups.

The third barrier to participation is social. The unemployed lack skills. Besides lacking economic and social capital, it can be argued that many perceive themselves to lack the human capital necessary to engage in such activity. One can argue that if their skills are inappropriate for finding formal employment, there seems little reason to believe that they can sell or exchange them on the informal labour market, if their skills are unused they will become more demotivated.

The fourth barrier to engaging in mutual aid groups which is environmental or geographical, concerns the type of area in which they live. The unemployed adopt the attitude of “keeping themselves to themselves” due to lack of trust, community and sense of well being around them. Many unemployed do wish to join mutual aid groups but do not owing to the perceived danger of some geographical areas.
In summary, the overall evaluation of people’s concern is that they are all interested in mutual aid groups. The principal constraints preventing them are money, skills and equipment. If these barriers to participation in mutual aid groups are addressed, then there would be an opportunity for the growth of such activity.

Members collectively agreed on two important gains

1) members are more interested in the collective benefit produced by the group than in any commodity they can enjoy alone

2) the collective benefit is not divisible into individual “units.” It can only be enjoyed in common and nobody can abscond with the benefits. Intervention was aimed to take place in people’s communities and in their own context to promote communalism.

Researchers opinions – the benefits of groups

People got involved in mutual aid groups out of self-interest. Practice in dealing with mutual aid groups, was a mutual gain to the researcher and to group members.

There was every reason during the researcher’s participation to believe the optimistic conclusion that “helping and support” are intrinsically rewarding. In mutual aid support groups, members helped others by giving advice, and they derived satisfaction and self-esteem from being the helpers.
The giving of help was especially helpful to the giver. This is one of the most important principles of mutual aid groups, the helper-therapy principle. It was observed that people wanted to be helped in mutual aid groups, but they also wanted to return that help to someone else in the group for the added benefit of the helper's initiative. This encouraged the creation of a social network of members who wanted to enter.

Mutual aid groups produced for and by people themselves increase the common good that the members enjoy. This was empowering. They were not "clients" of "consumers" of a service (such as paid psychotherapy help) for each to absorb personally. Rather the consumer was seen to be intimately involved in the production of the collective good. Mutual aid groups obviously benefited the communities around Zululand as form of making a living.

5.3 EMPOWERMENT

In this study empowerment was viewed as an intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. The mutual aid groups formed a method of conducting qualitative research in this study.

Mutual and groups may be viewed as specific evaluative operations used to study effects of interventions designed to empower. Psychological empowerment includes a sense of and motivation to control or influence events. In this study Zimmerman's (1995) theoretical framework of a nomological
network for psychological empowerment was used. This network included interpersonal, interactional and behavioural components.

Concerning the "intrapersonal component" empowerment was achieved through unemployed people responding positively to the formation of mutual aid group and being prepared to be in control of the groups.

Regarding the interactional component, empowerment was achieved through decision-making, problem solving skills and awareness of people’s sociopolitical environment. Skills development was achieved through training e.g. training for farming poultry and developing a crèche.

The behavioural component of empowerment was achieved through the group networking with each other. The unemployed displayed coping behaviours when there were barriers and showed their ability to participate within organizations and networking.

5.4 MUTUAL AID GROUPS AS A USEFUL EMPOWERING METHODOLOGY

In this particular study the researcher went out to the Zululand Richards Bay Labour pool to canvas for people who were interested to work within mutual aid groups. Mutual aid groups were used as a qualitative research method.
This study introduced mutual aid group methodology. Mutual aid groups as a methodology gave advice on group composition, running the groups and analyzing the results. Mutual aid groups have advantages that were noted in this particular study. They do not discriminate against people who cannot read or write and they encouraged participation from people who reported that they would have been reluctant to be interviewed on their own (individually) or who felt they had nothing to say.

The idea behind mutual aid groups was that group processes helped unemployed people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be difficult in one to one interviews. The researcher had a series of open ended questions and wished to encourage research participants to explore the issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, generating their own questions and pursuing their own priorities. From the sub-groups formed the researcher worked alongside the participants, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions.

Mutual aid groups helped the researcher tap into different forms of communication that grass roots unemployed people used in day to day interaction, including jokes, anecdotes, teasing and arguing. Mutual aid groups allowed unemployed people to engage in everyday forms of communication which told us much about what people know or experience. In this sense mutual aid groups as a method reached areas that other methods could not reach, revealing dimensions of understanding that remain untapped by most conventional data collection techniques.

Tapping into such interpersonal communications was important because this highlighted (sub) cultural values or group norms. Through analyzing the operation of humour, consensus and dissent as well as
examining different types of narrative used within the group, the researcher could identify shared and common knowledge.

Mutual aid groups were seen to actively facilitate the discussion of taboo topics (that of being unemployed) because the less inhibited members of the group break ice for shyer participants. Participants provided mutual support in expressing feelings that were common to their group but which they considered to deviate from mainstream culture (or the assumed culture of the researcher).

5.5 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This research is limited to facilitating small groups of unemployed people using mutual aid groups as a methodology. This is only one type of many forms of social transformation needed in the country in order to empower poor people. On the other hand mutual aid groups network with each other collectively to produce a powerful force for change.

Another limitation was that unemployment is a national problem but this study has focused only in the Zululand Richards Bay area because of proximity, lack of funds and resources to reach other areas.
5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made:

- Unemployment is a national problem. Mutual aid groups of this kind should be formed all over the country, to empower the unemployed in making a further living and for being gainfully occupied in addition to formal employment.

- The academic community must be taught that mutual aid groups do not empower the poor, needy communities only, but that the relationship is reciprocal where both groups benefit from one another.

- Professionals who work with the unemployed should be alert and understand that it is not only the unemployment issue that is resolved but also the high crime rate will reduce if people are engaged in several work activities.

- Unemployment results in depression and low self-esteem. The government should be sensitized about the importance of mental health promotion and prevention programmes and fund these programmes financially. Such groups as those that promote skills development for the unemployed and impact positively on mental health should be encouraged.
• The business sector should be made aware and encouraged to assist in providing any resources that might be needed to empower unemployed people.

• Empowerment occurs within the community psychology field and uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative research inquiry addresses issues of authority, interpretation and reinterpretation in the construction of accounts as authentic texts which appropriately represent the researched. The voice of the researched is valued and given a central place in qualitative research inquiry. Researchers are advised to acquaint themselves with analysis and interpretation of data.

• Research and practice both benefit from a narrative approach that links process to practice and attends to the voices of the people of interest. Researchers are encouraged to ensure that through research they privilege voices of the people studied.

5.7 RESUME

Mutual aid group methods are appropriate for those conducting action research and those concerned to “empower” research participants because the participants become an active part of the process of analysis. Group participants may actually develop particular perspectives as a consequence of talking with other people who have similar experiences. For example, in this specific study mutual aid groups allowed for a shift from personal, self-blaming psychological explanations “I am unfortunate not to secure a job”, “I should have been marketable to employers)” to the exploration of structural solutions “If we can come together we can do something worth it”, “I can still make a living besides being
employed.” “How empowered do I feel? Well, it would depend on the situation. Sometimes I feel like I have a lot (of control), sometimes I don’t.”

In this study it was clear that empowerment refers to the process of gaining influence over events and outcomes of importance to an individual or group. Embedded within this definition is the assumption that empowerment can mean different things to different people and vary in form across settings and time (Zimmerman, 1995).

A universal and global evaluation may confuse our understanding of empowerment because the construct may be inappropriately conceptualized as a static personality trait instead of a more dynamic contextually driven construct. The evaluation of psychological empowerment in community settings for the unemployed was successful. This was because it was connected to the experience of the research participants as they stated it and contextually grounded in their life experiences. Research on empowerment theory is not unique in this regard and the development of any theory requires programmatic research that builds a body of knowledge. The ideas presented in this study are intended to help other researchers grow in that direction.
REFERENCES


Psychological Bulletin, 52, 281-302.


Rappeport, J. (1990). Research methods and empowerment social agenda


113


