

Unemployment in Greek Cypriot Families: Psychosocial Impact, Coping Strategies, and Grassroots-level Solutions

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Abstract

The recession of the Cyprus economy began in 2009 and culminated in the island experiencing the third highest unemployment rate in the European Union in the years 2013, 2014, and 2015 (Statista, 2015). To sketch out the profile of the Greek Cypriot unemployed, determine the psychosocial impact of unemployment, and identify risk and protective factors germane to this context, a telephone survey was conducted with 120 Greek Cypriot unemployed adults (a response rate of 72%). It was further hypothesised that long-term unemployment has more pervasive destructive psychosocial effects on both the unemployed and their families and that the latter effects are exacerbated by poverty and mitigated by social support and religiosity. A last focus of the study was to generate grassroots-level solutions to the problem of unemployment with implications for social policy development. Findings partially support the research hypotheses and provide insight into various government, legal, church, and society-level interventions that may help deflate the problem. Implications for knowledge development, future research, and social policy are discussed.

Keywords: unemployment, Cyprus, psychosocial impact, risk and protective factors, coping mechanisms, solutions, social policy

Following the 2012–2013 banking crisis and subsequent financial collapse of Cyprus, unemployment recently peaked at an unprecedented rate of 13.9% to 17.5%, the highest recent increase for a European member state (Eurostat, 2014). Unemployment engenders calamitous psychosocial effects on the unemployed including severe mental health challenges (McKee *et al.*, 2005), substance abuse (Backhans *et al.*, 2012), risky sexual behaviours (Madianos *et al.*, 2014), interpersonal violence (van Dolen *et al.*, 2013), crime (Saridakis and Spengler, 2012), physical health complications (Helgesson *et al.*, 2013),

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decreased life expectancy (Sullivan and Wachter, 2009) and suicide (Madianos *et al.*, 2014; Page *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, unemployment reverberates through the entire family system sometimes leaving indelible marks (Appelbaum, 2012). Consequently, it has been associated with couple conflict (Duke *et al.*, 2013), spousal abuse (Vahid *et al.*, 2011), elder victimisation (Maxwell and Maxwell, 1992), child maltreatment (Liu *et al.*, 2013) and for the children of the unemployed school failures and bullying (Magklara *et al.*, 2012) and other emotional and behavioural problems (Harland *et al.*, 2002). Nonetheless, a note of caution is warranted in that the magnitude and nature of these unemployment effects may be culture-specific in some cases.

The evidence on the relationship between unemployment and divorce appears equivocal. In a multinational time series study examining the period 1950–1985, Lester (1996) found a strong positive correlation between unemployment and divorce. Notwithstanding, in a US study examining data for the period 1960–2005, Amato and Beattie (2011) cautioned that the unemployment–divorce correlation is both period- and state-specific. The latter authors concluded that unemployment is negatively associated with divorce after 1980. This observation may relate to sociocultural changes such as the wider entrance of women into the workforce (Colley, 2013) and the associated progressive transformation of gender roles (Eisikovits and Bailey, 2011).

Interestingly, Sherman (2009) points out that those unemployed parents with more flexible gender roles could experience less strife and tension in the home. Gough and Killewald (2011) also note that unemployment relates to greater involvement with household chores especially for unemployed wives. As expected, the longer the unemployment lasts, the more pervasive its destructive consequences (Aaronson *et al.*, 2010; Nichols *et al.*, 2013) with educational level having a moderating effect on psychological maladjustment (Galic, 2007).

A noteworthy covariant with unemployment is social stigma. The latter, impregnated by myths and stereotypes, tends to ravage the unemployed and their families (Belcher and DeForge, 2012) particularly when unemployment is longer in duration (Daly and Delaney, 2013), making it much harder for the unemployed to regain employment (Karren and Sherman, 2012). Regrettably, research has consistently shown that society often espouses *blaming the victim* dispositions (Ryan, 1976) when it comes to the unemployed (Letkemann, 2002; Liem and Liem, 1996) much to the latter's dissatisfaction and despair.

Theories on the Psychosocial Effects of Unemployment

Several theories speak to the potentially severe psychosocial aftermaths of unemployment. For example, *stages theory* (Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld, 1938) advances that there are certain stages that unemployed people typically undergo as they tackle their situation. Specifically,

'First there is shock, which is followed by an active hunt for a job, during which the individual is still optimistic and unresigned; he still maintains an unbroken attitude. Second, when all efforts fail, the individual becomes pessimistic, anxious, and suffers active distress; this is the most crucial stage of all. And third, the individual becomes fatalistic and adapts himself to his new state but with a narrower scope. He now has a broken attitude' (p. 378).

Fryer (1985) criticised *stages theory* for assuming that all unemployed go through the same stages in a similar fashion thus undermining the uniqueness of each individual's personal circumstances and traits. Heavily influenced by the Great Depression, *frustration theory* (Dollard *et al.*, 1939) suggests that frustration resulting from unemployment tends to predict aggression and anti-social behaviours. Moreover, according to *lifespan developmental theory* (Erikson, 1959), humans go through eight stages of development each with associated conflicts that need resolution for healthy psychosocial development. During adolescence, the individual is striving to develop identity and make a decision about a future career. Therefore, unemployment may repress one's occupational identity and yield severe psychosocial crisis.

Freud suggested that work represents our strongest connection to reality. Jahoda (1981) took it a step further and proposed *deprivation theory*, which claims that unemployed people are not only deprived of the manifest benefits of employment (e.g. earning a living) but also latent benefits such as time structure, social contact, external goals, status and identity, and enforced activity. On the other hand, *agency restriction theory* (Fryer, 1986; Fryer and Payne, 1984) purports that the negative effects of unemployment occur because resulting economic deprivation disallows people to plan and organise personally satisfying lifestyles.

Role theory (Parsons, 1951) suggests that individuals are assigned certain roles in society and their happiness depends on how well they are able to fulfil their roles. For instance, in this regard an unemployed father may become depressed because he is not able to provide for his family. *Life chances theory* (Max Weber) has also relevance here. This theory suggests that the unemployed may become pessimistic about his/her life when experiencing prolonged unemployment which in turn could lead to self-destructive behaviours. Contrastingly, *self-efficacy theory* (Bandura, 1989) reminds us that the unemployed may manage their situation differently based on the level of confidence that they have in themselves. Finally, *income inequality theory* (Wilkinson, 1996) maintains that increased income inequality such as the one caused by unemployment has destructive social consequences including crime, decreased productivity, poor health, and so forth.

The Socio-Economic Context of Cyprus and Unemployment

Following its independence from British Colonisation in 1960, and despite the devastating effects of the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974 which has continued to this day, the Cyprus economy had grown impressively to the extent that many have described it as a 'financial miracle' (Pashardes and Hajispyrou, 2003) up until 2009 when its deep recession began (Pashardes, 2014). In 2013 it became the fifth EU nation to be rescued from the European creditors who imposed not just, 'austerity and reforms but an unfamiliar demand for a banking "bail-in" – getting debt holders and uninsured depositors to absorb bank losses and to stump up new capital' (*The Economist*, 2014). Austerity measures enacted for fiscal consolidation target high incomes primarily in the public sector while salaries in the private sector are reduced due to the recession (Pashardes, 2014).

Most Greek Cypriots are Greek Orthodox. The Christian Orthodox Church in Cyprus retains considerable economic power and political influence. Following the 2013 banking crisis, the Cyprus Government created a solidarity fund which the church pledged to support. The church even promised to take out mortgages on its properties and loan money to the Government to save the economy from bankruptcy (DW, 2013). Nevertheless, throughout the years the Church of Cyprus has been criticised for corruption (Drake, 1998) with about half the population losing trust in the Cyprus Church (Kambas, 2014). Family is regarded paramount in Cypriot society. It is considered by many as the bedrock for the nurture and support of children (European Youth Centre – Council of Europe, 2007). Authoritarian relationships tend to be seen both in the home as well as at work (Epaminonda, 2014) with parents exercising significant influence even in the selection of a spouse (Apostolou, 2014). Economic, social, and political power is held primarily by men, and only men are permitted to become religious functionaries. Women are rarely seen in political offices, although they are joining the labour in increasing numbers. Even so, women tend to hold less prestigious positions and earn less money than men (Countries and their Cultures, 2015).

Cyprus entertains a strong and effective presence of trade unions, which have successfully defended and promoted workers' rights (*ibid.*). The working class has kept pace with the elevation of living standards resulting in a large middle class with very few exceptions of destitution and homelessness primarily due to the full-employment status of most Greek Cypriots prior to the recession (*ibid.*). The strong growth of the economy over the period 2000–2009 gave rise to a booming labour market associated with high wages and high employment. Today, however, poverty is on the increase as unemployment has skyrocketed in the last four years presenting the biggest social challenge in the country (Pashardes, 2014). The unemployment benefit scheme in Cyprus is presently administered by the Social Insurance Service Department of the Ministry of Labour and

Social Insurance in cooperation with the advisory Social Insurance Board and the Director of Social Insurance Services. The beneficiaries can be persons who have lost jobs and who belong to one of the following categories: (a) persons aged between 16 to 63 who have been legally employed in the Republic of Cyprus; (b) persons aged between 64 to 65 who have been legally employed in the Republic of Cyprus and do not qualify for old-age pension; (c) voluntary contributors who have worked abroad for a Cypriot employer. Self-employed persons are not entitled to unemployment (Info Cyprus, 2015). To be eligible for unemployment benefit the applicant must: (a) have been insured for at least 26 consecutive weeks up to the date of unemployment; have paid social insurance contributions during the employment period of not less than 26 times the weekly amount of basic insurable earnings; and (c) have paid and/or collected social insurance contributions of at least 20 times the weekly amount of basic insurable earnings (*ibid*).

The Minimum Wage Order of 2012 is applicable only to certain jobs (shop assistants, clerks, child-care workers (assistant baby and child minders), personal care workers (nursing assistants). Furthermore, the Order provides for a minimum hourly rate of pay for security guards, and cleaners of business/corporate premises. The normal working hours of shop assistants, according to the relevant Law, must not exceed 38 hours weekly and 8 hours daily, whilst for clerks the working hours should not exceed 44 hours in total per week (including any overtime) or 8 hours daily (Cyprus Ministry of Labour, Welfare, and Social Insurance, 2015). Despite this Order, the financial exploitation of foreign workers who are paid far less than employed Greek Cypriots is widespread on the island according to a report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Christou, 2015).

Research Aims

There is a dearth of unemployment studies in Cyprus. Thus, it is unclear what the socio-demographic sketch of the Greek Cypriot unemployed is, how Greek Cypriots withstand unemployment, and what risk factors and resiliencies lie in the Cyprus socio-cultural context exacerbating or buffering the mortifying repercussions of unemployment. It is also ambiguous as to what the exact psychosocial side effects of unemployment are in this terrain and how these are contoured by the time span of unemployment. Another flawed area in the literature pertains to the type of solutions and interventions that are witnessed by the unemployed as imperative to deflate the problem. Further, it is not entirely clear to what extent the theories mentioned previously are bolstered by current empirical evidence and in different geographic contexts.

Addressing the aforementioned gaps in knowledge, this study ventured out to investigate the following seven research hypotheses:

- (1) In line with stages theory and life chances theory, the long-term unemployed experience more pessimism, shame, suicidal ideation, immigration intent, and alcohol abuse than those unemployed for shorter periods.
- (2) In accordance with frustration theory, unemployed individuals are prone to aggression and intra-familial tension and conflict.
- (3) In compliance with life span development theory, unemployment spurs an identity crisis resulting in increased psychological stress and depression.
- (4) In agreement with deprivation and agency restriction theory, the psychological and economic stressors of unemployment are conducive to social isolation and lessened outdoor social activity.
- (5) In conformity with income inequality theory, the unemployed and their families are stigmatised in their social milieus as they fare worse in emotional health and material possessions than their mainstream counterparts.
- (6) In parallel with prior empirical evidence, the destructive effects of unemployment are exacerbated by low socio-economic status but mitigated by social support systems, religious faith, and/or spirituality;
- (7) In conformity with role theory, the toxicity of the negative effects of unemployment is higher for males and older individuals barring individuals nearing retirement.

The study also scanned the socio-demographic profile of the unemployed, primary coping mechanisms used to tackle its ill-effects, and grassroots-level solutions to this social malice. The rationale for these latter analyses relays to their inherent implications for other geographical contexts and further knowledge development in this field.

Method

Sampling Procedure

All respondents were Greek Cypriot adults who have been unemployed for at least one month. The study included a combination of a random and a snowball sample. Specifically, the District of Nicosia telephone directory was initially used to identify respondents. The pages of the phone directory were numbered and a page was randomly selected using the random number generating engine² with the total number of pages in the directory being used as the requested range. Then the listings on the selected page were numbered and again a random number was generated to identify the home called. This procedure proved to be a cumbersome exercise as several homes called claimed to have no unemployed individuals. Nonetheless, 104 unemployed individuals were

² The random number generating engine is available at [www.random.org].

identified this way, of which 76 agreed to partake in the phone survey. These individuals together with those who were called and reported no unemployed individuals in the household as well as other contacts the researcher located in the community helped to identify a further 63 unemployed individuals with their phone numbers. When these individuals were called, 19 refused participation.

Overall, 167 unemployed individuals were called and 120 individuals agreed to complete the phone survey. The final response rate of this study was therefore 72%. Caution is nonetheless warranted here as it is unclear if during the screening process some individuals disguised their unemployment status. If this is true, then the response rate of this study may have been lower.

Data Collection Procedure

This study was pre-approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the author's affiliated institution prior to implementation. Data were collected via a structured phone interview created by the researcher after reviewing germane literature on unemployment (see Appendix, p. 88). The interview protocol initially entailed twenty questions but when it was pilot tested with three respondents it was realised that another question should have been included to enquire about age and this was done. All respondents were called between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. and also between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. everyday apart from Sundays in summer 2014.

All structured phone interviews were conducted in Greek. On average, it took respondents somewhere between 5 and 12 minutes to answer the questions. Some gave more lengthy answers than others with the longest interview lasting about 22 minutes. An introductory statement was read to all respondents to inform them: that participation in the study was voluntary and to explain how they were identified; that their data would be kept confidential and maintained in a locked cabinet and a password protected computer file (with all data destroyed after analyses); that they could skip any question they did not want to answer and/or discontinue participation at any point in the interview if they wished to do so. They were likewise notified that the researcher could make referrals to local psychological support services if at any point during the study or later they felt the need for them. Respondents were also informed that the intent of the study was to generate a research report for publication that could possibly inform public policy on the issue. In addition, anonymity was guaranteed and respondents were given the option to email the researcher in about a year's time if they wished to know the results of the study. All responses were typed verbatim in a word file by the researcher.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) file and various descriptive and correlation analyses were subsequently executed. Qualitative data

were content analysed. Specifically, the researcher reviewed all the data and noted the most prominent emerging themes. Frequencies and percentages were then computed for each emerging theme. A volunteer reviewed the data as well to ensure that the researcher did not miss any emerging theme and that all frequency computations were accurately completed.

Results

Sample

As can be seen from table 1 (below), the final sample comprised of 120 individuals of whom 67 (56%) were female and 53 (44%) were male. The mean age of respondents was 42 years (SD = 11.27, range = 21–63 years). About half of the respondents were married, engaged or in a serious relationship (52%) and the remaining (48%) were either single, divorced/separated, or widowed and had on average 2 children (SD = 1.44). Six in every ten respondents had at least tertiary education with only one respondent in every ten not completing high school and about half reporting living in dire straits.

Table 1: Basic Socio-demographics

<i>Age</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	Mean = 42 years; SD = 11.27, Range = 21–63 years
21–35 yrs.	40	33	
36–50	43	36	
51–63	37	31	
<i>Gender</i>			
Males	53	44	
Females	67	56	
<i>Education</i>			
Less than high school	9	8	
High school	46	37	
Tertiary Education Plus	65	55	
<i>Socioeconomic Status</i>			
Low	54	45	
Mediocre	55	46	
High	11	9	
<i>Marital Status</i>			
Married *	62	52	
Single**	58	48	
<i>Number of Children</i>	Mean = 2; SD = 1.44; Range = 0–5 children		

*Also, engaged or in serious relationship; **Also, divorced, separated, or widowed

Table 2 (below) indicates unemployment length and some of the consequences of unemployment as experienced by respondents. On average, respondents were without work for 22 months (SD = 14.3, range = 2–62 months). Even though none of the respondents reported thinking about committing suicide at the time of the study, one in every five respondents shared the fact that at some point after becoming unemployed they had thought about harming themselves. When asked if they needed a referral to a psychological support centre all respondents stated that they did not desire such help. Eight out of every ten respondents reported feeling shame about their unemployment; two-thirds were pessimistic about their future, and about half seriously thought about migrating to another country. One-quarter of male respondents and none of the female respondents had abused alcohol to get by.

Table 2: Unemployment Length and Some Consequences

<i>Unemployment Length</i>	*Mean = 22 months; Range = 2–62 months	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
<i>Optimism about Future</i>		
Yes	39	33
No	81	67
<i>**Feeling Shame about Unemployment</i>		
Yes	91	76
No	26	22
<i>Past Suicidal Ideation</i>		
Yes	25	21
No	95	79
<i>Thoughts about Migrating to another Country</i>		
Yes	58	48
No	62	52

*(1 outlier removed = 120 months); ** Missing data 3 respondents

Table 3 (p. 74) highlights the main strategies used by respondents to cope. Their main support came from family and friends, the government (for only the first 6 months of their unemployment), their relentless job search, involvement with personal hobbies, prayer, humour and volunteerism. Sadly, some respondents resorted to alcohol to self-medicate their depression.

Table 3: Coping Mechanisms

<i>Coping Mechanism Type</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Family and Friends' Support	76	63
Government Support (Only for Six Months)	62	52
Applying for Jobs (Never Give Up)	44	37
Involvement with Hobbies (Drawing, Gardening, Sports, Cooking, Watching Movies, Listening to Music)	38	32
Prayer	32	27
Humour	17	14
Volunteerism	15	13
Drinking Alcohol *	13	11
Acquiring New Skills to Increase Employability	8	7
Borrowing Money	5	4
Receiving Assistance from Various Charities/Organisations	4	3
Exercising	3	3
Anti-Depressant Medication	3	3

*all males, no females

Table 4 (p. 75) exhibits the impact of unemployment on 'self' and the family as reported by the respondents. As can be seen, the most frequently cited negative consequences of unemployment were in order of importance: humiliation and social embarrassment, self-isolation, depression, aggression, relationship challenges, intense/neurotic budgeting (austerity), and sleeping difficulties. Less frequent consequences but still major causes for concern were: drinking and smoking, weight gain, suicidal ideation, and physical health problems.

Table 5 (p. 76) cites significant correlations of unemployment duration with various variables of interest. As can be seen, unemployment length correlated positively with age, intent to migrate, suicidal ideation, shame, and alcohol abuse. Unemployment duration correlated negatively with socioeconomic status, optimism, education, and Christian faith strength.

Finally, table 6 (p. 77) delineates the solutions professed by respondents for ameliorating and/or eradicating the social evil of unemployment. These solutions are classified as government, legal, church, and society solutions.

Discussion

The first question set out by this study touched upon the socio-demographic portrait of the Greek Cypriot unemployed. According to the Central Intelligence Agency – The World Factbook (2014), the Cyprus population is completely evenly distributed based on gender (males = 49.5%; females 50.5%). However, in this study 56% of the respondents

were female. This may appear to suggest that females may have a slightly higher proclivity for unemployment but caution is warranted with this conclusion because female Cypriots tend to respond at a higher frequency to phone surveys [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] and/or are more likely to stay home due to gender socialisation in Greek culture (Pateraki and Roussi, 2013). However, *Eurostat* (2015) reports that male unemployment in Cyprus was at 17.1% in 2014 compared to 15.1% for females, namely 2% higher for males compared to females.

Table 4: Impact of Unemployment on ‘Self’ and Family

<i>Impact on Self</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Humiliation/Social Embarrassment	91	76
Self-Isolation	43	36
Depression	41	34
Suicidal Ideation	25	21
Aggression	21	18
Relationship Difficulties	19	16
Intense/Neurotic Budgeting (austerity)	16	13
Sleeping Difficulties	14	12
Drinking	13	11
Smoking	11	9
Weight Gain	9	8
Physical Health Challenges	6	5
Intense Worrying about Future	4	3
Agoraphobia	3	3
<i>Impact on Family</i>		
Children Feeling Depressed	33	28
Children not having all Necessities & Entertainment Opportunities	29	24
Elders Feeling Depressed about Unemployed Child/Grandchildren	26	22
Intergenerational Unemployment Deeply Devastating	17	14
Intra-familial Tension/Conflict & Chronic Stress	15	13
Children Feeling Stigmatised at School/Neighbourhood	13	11
Decreased Quality of Food (high protein food often unaffordable)	11	9
Children Having School Problems	9	8
Necessary House Repairs Postponed	7	6
Temperature Problems in Home (Unaffordable Electricity)	5	4
Children Experiencing Sleeping Problems	2	2

Respondents represented equally all age groups below retirement age but when the data of middle and pre-retirement middle adulthood groups are aggregated it can be determined that two-thirds of the respondents were middle age adults compared to only one-third being young adults. There are many different interpretations of this observation. For example, it could be that unemployed young adults are more likely to migrate to other countries as they are not raising families in Cyprus and are more resilient to risk and unpredictability. Another possibility is that young adults may be more likely to answer cell phones as opposed to home lines (most of the numbers called in this study were home lines).

Table 5: Correlations with Unemployment Length

	<u>Unemployment Length</u>
<i>Age</i>	r (Pearson) = .70*
<i>Migration Intent</i>	r (Spearman) = .69*
<i>Suicidal Ideation</i>	r (Spearman) = .64*
<i>Socioeconomic Status</i>	r (Spearman) = -.57*
<i>Optimism</i>	r (Spearman) = -.55*
<i>Shame</i>	r (Spearman) = .52*
<i>Alcohol Abuse</i>	r (Spearman) = .45*
<i>Education</i>	r (Spearman) = -.28*
<i>Christian Faith Strength</i>	r (Spearman) = -.27*

* p < .01

The fact that nine out of ten respondents had high school education and almost six of every ten respondents had college education suggests that education is not necessarily a protective factor for unemployment in Cyprus. One explanation of this finding could be the absence of meritocracy in employment practices in Cyprus [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] and/or the fact that more educated individuals may have higher salary expectations. Moreover, in accordance with expectation, only about one in ten respondents was of high socioeconomic status. It is possible that high socioeconomic status individuals have private businesses or strong social connections that afford them highly privileged positions in society. Furthermore, the fact that half of the respondents were single and not in a serious relationship could suggest that these people did not afford the financial costs associated with being in a serious relationship (such as paying for outings, buying gifts or raising children) or that shame may have led them to social isolation and/or depression thus reducing their drive to seek out partners and/or

future spouses. Moreover, the finding that on average respondents had at least two children is quite disturbing as it suggests that many children are plagued by the negative effects of unemployment.

Table 6: Proposed Solutions

<i>Government Solutions</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Increase the Unemployment Assistance Period to European Levels	37	31
Open New Positions related to recent Humongous Natural Gas Discoveries	26	22
Reinforce Transition Programs to Employment/ Training in in Non-Saturated Fields	18	15
Provide Tax Incentives for Businesses to Hire Unemployed People	12	10
Reduce Taxes on Unemployed Families	8	7
Lessen Salaries of High Earning Public Employees/ Invest Savings in New Jobs	7	6
Create Support Programs for the Children of Unemployed at School	4	3
Initiate Public Education Campaigns to Mitigate Social Stigma	3	3
<i>Legal Solutions</i>		
Law Criminalising the Hiring of Foreigners at Below Greek Cypriot Salaries	48	40
Strengthen Employment Laws to Reduce Employee Terminations	19	16
Promote Anti-Discrimination Legislation in the Hiring of the Unemployed	8	7
Enforce Legal quotas that Prevent Over-Hiring of Foreigners	6	5
Provide Free public Legal Services to All Employees Terminated/ Laid Off	4	3
<i>Church Solutions</i>		
Investment of Part of its Vast Available Wealth to Support the Unemployed and their Families	24	20
Spiritually Strengthen/Reach out to the Unemployed	18	15
Advocate for More Humanistic Governmental Policies for the Unemployed	17	14
Create New Jobs for the Unemployed	15	13
Promote Public Education Campaign to Dispel Myths/ Stereotypes	6	5
<i>Society Solutions</i>		
Exert Pressure on Government and the Legislative Branch to Provide Support	17	14
Realise Anyone Could Become Unemployed/Reduce Social Stigma	14	12
Reach out to the Unemployed / Support them/ Volunteer Time and Resources	11	9
Promote Support Groups for the Unemployed	3	3

The average length of unemployment experienced by respondents was twenty-two months. Given that governmental unemployment assistance lasts only for the first six months of unemployment, it can be concluded that, on average, respondents were left without any income for at least sixteen months. This is a particularly long period especially for those who had to support families and/or had very mediocre means to get by. Two-thirds of respondents were not optimistic about their future and over three-quarters of them felt shame about their situation. It could be that respondents internalised the social stigma associated with unemployment (Daly and Delaney, 2013) or that they were overwhelmed by the negative perceptions of others once they heard of their status. Shame may increase one's social isolation (Reneflot and Evensen, 2014) and should therefore be taken seriously into account by intervention in this context.

One in five respondents had thought about suicide in the past and about half seriously contemplated migrating to another country. Madianos, Alexiou, Patelakis and Economou (2014) reported much more acute suicidal tendencies for their sample in Greece. This may suggest that there could be particular socio-cultural factors in Cyprus that protect against suicide and/or that the respondents were disinclined to disclose their authentic suicidal impulses. The fact that half of respondents were ready to migrate to another country for survival is consistent historically with previous research showing migration to be a progressive reaction to adversity for a significant number of Greeks (Georgas *et al.*, 1996).

In reference to coping mechanisms mobilised by respondents to fend off the intrinsic ills of unemployment, six in every ten respondents relied heavily on support from family and friends to make ends meet. Government support was helpful but very short-lived. One in three respondents spent time exercising his/her hobbies which seemed to have protective benefits on social isolation and despair. Some of the cultural strengths (as emerged from the data) mitigating adversity in this context should be noted here such as music and gardening (due to all year round good weather). Music and gardening have been found in other contexts to be sources of empowerment in calamity too (Myers, 1998; Travis, 2013).

Half of the respondents continued to seek out employment opportunities despite bleak prospects which may at least partly verify the initial phase of *stages theory* (Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld, 1938). More research is needed to explain why certain unemployed individuals show higher motivation to seek out new employment opportunities than others. It is possible that the more active job seekers are those with a higher sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989). Another evident cultural strength emerging from the data is the protective nature of the Greek Orthodox faith. One in every four respondents turned to their faith to find paramount support and encouragement. This observation corroborates previous research not only in the Greek cultural context (Fouka *et al.*, 2012) but also in other contexts (Patton and Donohue, 1998).

Concerning the impact of unemployment on the respondents, three-quarters of respondents felt humiliation and embarrassment, one-third experienced social isolation and depression, and one-fifth suffered suicidal ideation. It appears that in the small society of Cyprus, shame and humiliation are high risk factors which may be conducive to social isolation and suicidal ideation. Similar impact on unemployed people has been found in other studies (Pelzer *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, males had a higher chance of resorting to alcohol abuse which may confirm *role theory* with males in the Cyprus context expected to be the family providers; being unable to successfully perform such roles may have led some of these respondents to self-medicating and/or to self-destructive tendencies such as alcohol abuse.

Additionally, the data show that unemployment may devastate emotionally the children and elders in the family. Furthermore, children's access to school necessities and mainstream entertainment opportunities may be restricted. Malnutrition and sleeping problems in children can result and may make the children more vulnerable to discrimination by peers; it may fertilise intra-familial tension and conflict too in some cases. As this study illustrates, the adverse side effects of unemployment tend to be fortified when intergenerational unemployment is evident in the family. Many of these troubling ramifications of unemployment on the entire family system have been witnessed by other studies as well (Broman *et al.*, 1990).

A very significant positive correlation was found between unemployment duration and age in this study. Past research has shown that unemployment is particularly debilitating for older groups (Wight *et al.*, 2013). Young people are more likely to migrate to other countries in search of employment. Longer unemployment predicted stronger immigration intent and suicidal ideation and was negatively correlated with socioeconomic status perhaps suggesting that more affluent individuals may have more mighty connections in the community that lead to further employment opportunities [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] and of course higher capability to launch new businesses. As hypothesised, longer unemployment was also associated with more shame and less optimism (a finding perhaps supporting the *stages theory* of unemployment), more alcohol abuse (a finding perhaps supporting the *life chances theory*), plus it was negatively associated with educational level. The latter finding may be explained by *self-efficacy theory* (Bandura, 1989) with more educated people having greater self-confidence to either regain employment or migrate to another country offering more generous job opportunities.

Reflecting on the solutions envisioned by respondents, the foregoing circled around four primary pillars: *Government*, *Legal*, *Church*, and *Society*. The fact that no solutions targeted the self-level may suggest that the respondents did not blame themselves for their unemployment and instead regarded it as a product of sociocultural dynamics and

injustice. At the government level, the respondents expounded that the time span of public unemployment insurance was too short. It did not match general European standards and had to therefore be amplified. They too declared that the government should take full advantage of the vast natural gas fields recently found trapped below the ocean floor of Cyprus plus open new positions in this terrain together with sponsoring employment training in these and supplementary non-saturated occupational fields, and not least to furnish employers with alluring tax incentives to enlist the unemployed.

At the legal level, they held out for new legislation to criminalise the engagement of foreigners at salaries subordinate to those offered to Greek Cypriots and to enforce tougher restrictions on uncalled for employee terminations. What is more, they also affirmed that the church should have a more explicit role in strengthening the morale of the unemployed; bringing them closer to Faith, meeting their primary needs, and using its clout to sway the government to introduce more humanistic social policies to relieve the unemployed. In conclusion, the respondents asserted that society needs to be more actively involved in social campaigns to support the unemployed, apply influence on the government and politicians to kick-start effectual interventions that will reduce unemployment and stop it from distancing itself and blaming the victims for their plight.

Research Hypotheses

In response to the research hypotheses theorised by the study, the following observations are concluded:

Hypothesis 1: In line with stages theory and life chances theory, the long term unemployed experience more pessimism, shame, suicidal ideation, immigration intent, and alcohol abuse than those unemployed for shorter periods

Clearly the present data support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: In accordance with frustration theory, unemployed individuals are prone to aggression and intra-familial tension and conflict

Qualitative analysis indicated that the long-term unemployed as a group experienced more intra-familial conflict but individuals with stronger faith and those involved more in social activities were not at risk for aggression. This finding underscores the importance of churches in supporting the unemployed as well as the need to create opportunities for unemployed populations for social interaction and exchange. These may take the form of support groups, volunteer opportunities, free of charge self and professional development seminars, and so on.

Hypothesis 3: In compliance with life span development theory, unemployment gives genesis to an identity crisis resulting in increased psychological stress and depression

This hypothesis is partially supported by the current data. Even though over one-third of respondents suffered deep depression as a result of their unemployment status, individual and socio-cultural strengths and resiliencies tended to counterbalance such negative mental health effects. More research is needed in this area to discern the particular socio-cultural dynamics that serve as protective factors in unemployment. In the present study, these related mostly to social support systems, spirituality and/or church involvement, higher socio-economic status, and being older yet unemployed for a shorter period.

Hypothesis 4: In agreement with deprivation and agency restriction theory, the psychological and economic stressors associated with unemployment are conducive to social isolation and lessened outdoor social activity

This hypothesis is at least partially supported by the present data. Over one-third of respondents felt extreme social isolation and confinement to their homes. The primary reasons for their social isolation were unaffordability of social outings and depression. More research needs to be conducted into other causes for the social isolation of the unemployed including social discrimination, pity displayed by certain social strata, self-esteem complications, and so on.

Hypothesis 5: In conformity with income inequality theory, the unemployed and their families are stigmatised in their social milieus as they fare worse in emotional health and material possessions than their mainstream counterparts

This hypothesis is fairly supported by the present data too. Three-quarters of the respondents experienced social stigma and associated social embarrassment *vis-à-vis* their unemployment status. Stigmatisation even though to a much lesser degree was also evident in the lives of one-tenth of the children of the unemployed population at school.

Hypothesis 6: In parallel with prior empirical evidence, the destructive effects of unemployment are exacerbated by low socio-economic status but mitigated by social support systems, religious faith, and/or spirituality

This hypothesis is very strongly supported by the current data. Low socio-economic status was a high risk factor for pessimism, depression, suicidal ideation, and alcohol abuse thereby confirming life chances theory as well: Protective factors for these ill effects included short-term unemployment, social and church support and spirituality.

Hypothesis 7: In conformity with role theory, the toxicity of the negative effects of unemployment is higher for males and older individuals barring individuals nearing retirement

Clearly, the data confirm this hypothesis. Males viewed unemployment as a more disastrous event than females and they found the time harder to fill in their empty hours. They felt more destitute and pitiable about themselves too, especially when they were

older and suffering from unemployment for longer periods. Some sensed that they were an embarrassment to their families and bad role models for their own children. They also worried excessively about the future of their own children and were not able to see any light at the end of the tunnel.

Study Limitations

The sample of this study was relatively small and did not include individuals that did not have phone numbers. As a result, the most under-privileged unemployed did not have an equal opportunity to participate in this study. The additional snowball method employed to increase the sample size introduced sampling bias in that select individuals had a higher chance to be represented. Another limitation of the study is that it entailed only Nicosia residents and did not include foreign citizens of Cyprus who are unemployed and may have differing needs and experiences compared to the mainstream Greek Cypriot population. Last of all, the self-report nature of the data in this study opens it up to the criticism that respondents may have been dispensing disingenuous responses in an effort to protect their facade.

Conclusion

This study represents the first research undertaking to look into the complex dynamics typifying unemployment in Cyprus together with risk factors, resiliency factors and the destructive consequences of unemployment in this context. The study concludes that unemployment affects all strata of society and places a heavy burden not only on the unemployed person but on entire family systems too. As such, it highlights the need for clinical services provided by systemically trained helping professionals such as marriage and family therapists and social workers. Even though certain cultural strengths such as strong kinship and friendship networks, a community orientation, spirituality, laid back attitudes (as seen in a passionate love of music) and good climatic conditions may serve as protective factors for the deleterious effects of unemployment, other cultural aspects such as shame and traditional gender roles may compound the problem. Importantly, the study also finds strong support for stages theory, deprivation theory, life chances theory, life span development theory, agency restriction theory, and role theory and partial support for income inequality theory in the context of unemployment. Future research can further illuminate the specific social processes and thinking patterns that associate with both positive and negative socio-emotional outcomes in unemployment and protective parameters for these.

This study expands knowledge on grassroots-level governmental, legal, religious and social solutions to unemployment that may be transferable in a diversity of geographic

contexts as promising venues to mitigate the perplexities of unemployment. Future research with a larger representative sample should provide more insight into the experiences of the unemployed based on various socio-demographic attributes such as gender, age, ethnic origin, education, physical location, and so on. Among other aspects, public opinions about unemployment should likewise be investigated to determine the nature of extant social stigma as well as contracting/appointment attitudes and intentions of prospective employers. School interventions with the children of the unemployed should similarly be pursued and evaluated to determine best practices for supporting these multi-stressed populations.

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