

# A RESILIENCE-WELL-BEING PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION

A Resilience-Well-being Psychosocial Intervention with Young Jobseekers.

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to test the hypothesis that a psychosocial (PS) intervention comprising exercises demonstrated to facilitate a sense of well-being, self-efficacy and resilience would increase employment outcomes for unemployed young people. The design of the intervention (five 3-hour workshops) is detailed, as well as delivery to 75 unemployed young people (aged 16 to 25 years) in South East Queensland, Australia. A comparison group of 246 young jobseekers (aged 15-25) was established in the same region through the same employment services provider at the same time, who received only Treatment as Usual (TAU, such as job search, interview and resume-writing training). Job and education placement and 13-week sustained outcomes were tracked as measures of efficacy. PS intervention participants were 2.5 times (OR = 2.56) more likely to achieve an education or employment placement than the treatment as usual comparison group, and 2.4 times (OR = 2.48) more likely to achieve a sustained placement outcome of 13 weeks. Despite limitations, this finding supports the hypothesis that a PS intervention containing well-being-, resilience- and self-efficacy-building exercises shows promise as an effective support strategy for unemployed young people.

*Keywords:* well-being, youth unemployment, psychosocial intervention.

## **Introduction**

Despite emergence from the global financial crisis or ‘Great Recession’ of 2007-2009, unemployment rates for the long-term (>12 months) unemployed and youth remain higher than the pre-recession rates. While Australia did not officially enter this century’s economic recession, Australia’s pre-recession (2007) youth unemployment rate was ~9%. It rose to ~12% during the recession (2009) and remains at ~12% in 2018. By comparison, Australia’s pre-recession (2007) general unemployment rate was ~4.5%. It rose slightly to ~5.5% during the recession (2009) and remains at ~5.5% in 2018 (ABS, 2018). This higher youth unemployment rate relative to the general unemployment rate appears to be a worldwide trend, with youth unemployment rates generally double the overall unemployment rate in many regions (Bell & Blanchflower, 2009, 2011; O’Higgins, 2001; Parodi, Pastore, Tanveer Choudhry, Marelli, & Signorelli, 2012), including middle-income countries such as Mexico, South Africa and Bulgaria (Cho & Newhouse, 2013). The reasons for the general increase in youth unemployment in Western nations remain unclear. It could be due to a combination of issues, including changes in young people’s attitudes, evolving employer requirements, increased demographic competition from returning mothers and later retirement (Clark & Summers, 1982; Scarpetta, Sonnet, & Manfredi, 2010).

Young people face specific challenges during the transition from compulsory school education to employment and/or further education. From a developmental perspective, the transition to employment occurs during a crucial period, between late adolescence and young adulthood, a phase in which young adults are continuing to undergo rapid cognitive, emotional and physical changes (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006). Coupled with this, young people are required to adjust physically and psychologically to their newfound adult social roles and responsibilities, which requires elements of resilience and mental toughness that might not have been developed during the course of their school education or

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in their family environments (Burt & Paysnick, 2012). Ultimately, the manner in which this stage of development is navigated can strongly influence the future direction and success of their adult lives (Allen & Miga, 2010). While many thrive and adapt successfully, those who are disadvantaged are likely to be more at risk of becoming totally disconnected, to suffer a decline in mental health and be less psychologically prepared for workforce participation (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005).

Many unemployed young people come from a place of disadvantage and are often marginalised, with little or no education. Furthermore, their backgrounds are often characterised by norm-based multi-generational unemployment, family violence, abuse, poverty or homelessness (Cull & Citymission, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Thern, de Munter, Hemmingsson, & Rasmussen, 2017). Moreover, the negative mental health impact of unemployment is present and possibly compounded in young unemployed adults (Bryer, Torres Stone, Kostova, & Logan, 2017; Paul, 2018; Paul & Moser, 2009b; Tonelle, Davies, Rich, & Perkins, 2017). Many find the transition between school and work a huge challenge, particularly those who leave school at the earliest opportunity or lack a positive parental role model for successful transition (Kalil & Wightman, 2010; Sissons & Jones, 2012).

Research has shown that young adults who have greater psychological well-being are more likely to transition to full time employment or education successfully (Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004). Indeed, studies have suggested that interventions to address the negative mental health issues generally experienced during unemployment may help to drive re-employment. Higher levels of well-being, self-efficacy and resilience have been shown to be a predictor of successful return-to-work. In light of this, the aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a PS intervention programme that aimed to support and build well-being, self-efficacy and resilience in unemployed citizens. The researchers hypothesised that the PS intervention would improve education and employment placement and outcomes

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over 13 weeks for the treatment group versus a TAU only cohort. Thus, the primary research question was: would delivering interventions to boost these three elements of psychological capital (well-being, self-efficacy and resilience) *before* re-employment improve employment outcomes?

A youth cohort was selected for three reasons: i) Employment Services Queensland was willing to participate and make a group of their young unemployed participants available; ii) it has been demonstrated that unemployed youth constitute a difficult target group, both in terms of mental health complexities and higher rates of unemployment (Hammarström & Janlert, 2002; Thern et al., 2017); and iii) it was considered a good pilot group of tough but classroom familiar participants for the classroom-based PS intervention workshops. If the PS intervention worked for young jobseekers, then the likelihood of success when rolled-out to a larger sample of unemployed participants from the general population would have been reinforced (Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner, & McCaughey, 2005; Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005; Mangum & Walsh, 1978). As such, this paper has three components. The first is a literature review of the psychological impact of unemployment and drivers of re-employment, which identifies well-being, self-efficacy and resilience as psychological constructs to focus upon. The second part addresses the context and content of the PS intervention. The third applies the PS intervention to young jobseekers, after which the results (job or education placements and 13-week outcomes) are evaluated against a comparison group that did not receive the PS intervention.

### **The High Mental Cost of Unemployment**

Disadvantage and exclusion from the labour market could present significant problems for the well-being of young citizens. Unemployment has been shown to have a detrimental effect on a young person's psychological well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Waddell & Burton, 2006; Wanberg, 2012). McKee et al. (2005) reported in their meta-

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analysis of 104 studies that long-term unemployment has ‘significant negative impacts on well-being’. In cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, unemployment was linked to stress, anxiety and depression, decreased life-satisfaction, suicide, financial strain, lower self-esteem and sense of identity, and a disruption to their significant relationships (Paul, Hassel, & Moser, 2018; Paul & Moser, 2009a; Paul, Vastamäki, & Moser, 2016) Notably, it has been found that a school leaver’s psychological well-being is more impacted by unemployment than an adult’s due to the ‘extra burden of establishing their occupational identity’ (Hammarström & Janlert, 1997, 2002). The link between depression and unemployment was further evidenced in a longitudinal study of social support and depression in unemployed men’ that found that:

The...20 originally unemployed men [who] were still without work...were significantly more depressed than the employed. Five of these 20, but no employed men, had become clinically depressed. (Bolton & Oatley, 1987, p. 453)

An international study found that unemployment leads to depression, perhaps due to financial strain and a loss of status, isolation, time structure and collective activities, indicating that there is a need for psychological interventions for the unemployed (Jefferis et al., 2011). Other studies also provide evidence that unemployment raises levels of psychological distress (Graetz, 1993; Morrell, Taylor, Quine, Kerr, & Western, 1994; Murphy & Athanasou, 1999). Further, a longer duration of unemployment is reported to have a negative impact upon subsequent mental health (Hämäläinen et al., 2005; Mossakowski, 2009; Stankunas, Kalediene, Starkuviene, & Kapustinskiene, 2006).

In a 15-year longitudinal study on the impact of unemployment on a life satisfaction ‘set point’, the reaction and adaptation to unemployment was examined among more than 24,000 individuals living in Germany (5,184 of whom were unemployed at some stage during the study). The data suggested that, in the case of men, it takes longer to return to a set-point

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of life satisfaction from unemployment than it does from becoming widowed (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004).

Specific to young people, several scholars have found evidence that unemployment while young has harmful effects that might extend for many years, including impacting job satisfaction, wages, happiness and health (Gregg & Tominey, 2005; Mroz & Savage, 2006).

School-leavers who were unemployed were found to be more depressed and more anxious than those in work and showed a higher incidence of minor psychiatric morbidity. Unemployed young people had lower self-esteem than their employed peers and poorer subjective well-being. They were also found to be less well socially adjusted. (Donovan & Oddy, 1982).

It has been noted that disadvantage and a lower sense of well-being before leaving school predisposed some young people to disadvantage in the labour market (Creed, Machin, & Hicks, 1999; Creed, Muller, & Patton, 2003). It was found that adolescents who do not find work directly after leaving school did not struggle with psychological issues to the same extent as adults. They are familiar with living at home and they might have greater financial support than an independent adult (Broomhall & Winefield, 1990; Rowley & Feather, 1987). Morrell et al found that young people who were initially psychologically “normal” experienced significant psychological disturbance when they became unemployed (Morrell et al., 1994).

Participation in work can play a vital role in recovery for many people with mental health problems. It is vital for recovery from mental health problems (Borg & Kristiansen, 2008; Shepherd, Boardman, & Slade, 2008). There appears to be consensus that 70-90% of people with mental health problems say that they want to work (Grove, 1999; Secker, 2001).

Influential psychologist Marie Jahoda (Jahoda, 1981, 1982) theorised that employment improves well-being by providing a time structure (leisure is valued only when

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scarce), enlarging relationships (beyond just family), providing meaning (through the shared purpose of a group) and assigning social status (does not have to be high but offers the prospect of accomplishment). Seligman and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania further identified five contributors to long-lasting well-being, namely positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2012).

### **Potential Drivers of Re-employment**

Interventions to support unemployed citizens, including young adults (15-25 years old) predominantly address practical job search skills such as interview techniques, résumé writing, assisted job searches and application writing (DOJ, 2018; Krueger & Mueller, 2011). However, these vital and practical activities do not directly address the psychological issues that the unemployed citizen might be facing. Moreover, the above interventions are *action-oriented*, and it has been shown that only a 32% of jobseekers are actually in the *action* stage of change in terms of proactively seeking employment and wanting to implement the job search skills identified above (Coppin, 2017). A number of studies have demonstrated improved jobseeking intensity and success as a result of implementing workshops and exercises with jobseekers that aimed to build self-efficacy, inoculation against setbacks, resilience, well-being and a sense of control (Audhoe, Hoving, Sluiter, & Frings-Dresen, 2010; Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992; Vinokur & Price, 1999, 2015; Vinokur & Schul, 1997).

### **Well-being.**

Studies have demonstrated that jobseeking activity may increase well-being in unemployed citizens (Vuori & Vesalainen, 1999), but relatively few have explicitly found that improving well-being in jobseekers correlates with improved re-employment rates. The promise of the above Vinokur-led studies relating to the Michigan JOBS intervention programs have been reinforced by relatively small-scale studies (N<100) that found that higher well-being and mental health, was related to the likelihood of jobseeking success



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(Taris, 2002). This study aimed to add to the modest volume of evidence that well-being interventions may enhance re-employment.

### **Self-efficacy.**

A meta-analysis of job search interventions indicated that those including self-efficacy-boosting activities positively moderated employment outcomes (OR 3.25,  $p < .01$ ) (Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014). Self-efficacy has been shown to be the most quoted word in well-being- and positive psychology-related papers (Rusk & Waters, 2013). Bandura's set-out the definition of self-efficacy and how the construct might be improved (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Dweck suggests in her book *Mindset* (2012) that self-efficacy may be built through the development of belief in one's own capabilities. Self-efficacy is commonly defined as belief in one's ability to achieve a goal or deal with challenges in life. In light of the importance of self-efficacy in the literature, a number of evidence-based ways of building self-efficacy were included in the structure and function of the PS intervention that was developed for this study, including teaching specific improvement strategies, capitalising on an individual's strengths and encouraging accurate attributions (Bandura, 1990; Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

### **Resilience and Positive Psychology.**

Resilience has also been shown to play a significant role in supporting the mental health of the unemployed and in terms of a successful return to work (Jackson & Warr, 1987; Moorhouse & Caltabiano, 2007; Silva, 2016; Stolove, Galatzer-Levy, & Bonanno, 2017). Resilient adults 81.4% are more likely to return to work after losing their jobs (Stolove et al., 2017). The work of Shatté (who formerly worked in Australia's Commonwealth Employment Service), Gillham and Reivich identified seven pillars of resilience. The first, *emotional regulation*, is largely supported by the cognitive behavioural therapy work of Beck and Ellis (Beck, 1991; Ellis, 1980, 1991). *Causal analysis* and *impulse control* were

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identified by of Shatté, Gillham and Reivitch's research on an individual's ability to accurately attribute the causes of good and bad things that happen to an individual (Gillham, Shatte, Reivich, & Seligman, 2001). Further elements of resilience, each of which can be taught and enhanced in individuals were *reaching out*, *realistic optimism*, *empathy* and *self-efficacy* (Gillham et al., 2007; Reivich, Gillham, Chaplin, & Seligman, 2013; Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). These publications included explorations of imparting the resilience skills and qualities through PS interventions to the US Army. This initiative, Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, is a source of pragmatic resilience exercise delivery techniques for classroom settings to deal with potentially resistant attendees (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011).

Studies in 'positive psychology' provide many exercises and positive psychological interventions (PPIs) that have been demonstrated to improve well-being, resilience and self-efficacy. The term was championed by Professor Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania) (Seligman, 2004). While having a great many factors in common with ancient Greek stoicism (Irvine, 2008), the scientific approach to improving many of the facets of resilience was applicable to working with unemployed citizens (Seligman, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005) One of Seligman's early scientific studies included the systematic identification of a condition known as *learned helplessness* and his association of this condition with unemployed citizens (Miller & Seligman, 1975; Seligman, 1975). Learned helplessness investigations across many animal species, including humans, indicate that in the face of repeated adversity over which one seem to have no control, a natural response for approximately two-thirds of participants is to give-up and conserve energy. One-third of participants remained optimistic. When an opportunity to escape the adversity was available, two-thirds of those in the learned helplessness condition did not take the opportunity. Research on unemployed jobseekers'

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intent to proactively try to return to work suggested a correlation, with the same proportions existing. One-third of jobseekers were proactively seeking reemployment, while two-thirds were not proactive, perhaps lacking the desire or confidence to enter employment (Coppin, 2017).

Waters led a meta-analysis of PPIs with school children and found an overwhelmingly positive impact upon educational, emotional and psychological outcomes (Waters, 2011). Another meta-analysis of PPIs demonstrated a significant enhancement of well-being and a decrease in depressive symptoms. The effectiveness of the PPIs was enhanced in younger participants (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

### **Methodology**

A quasi-experimental design was used to evaluate the effect of the PS intervention on job placement and sustained job outcomes among young unemployed Australians. The independent variable was the type of intervention, in this case a PS intervention, in addition to TAU, versus TAU-only. The dependent measures were job placements and sustained employment (13-week) outcomes. As part of standard operating procedures, data on participants are collected by employment service providers on their reporting systems to facilitate funding from the Department of Employment. Each participant has a Jobseeker ID number, and the employment service provider's secure data system includes some demographic data and outcome tracking (employment or education placement, sustained placements for 13 weeks). Employment outcomes of the experimental group was collected from each employment office branch approximately 12 months after the first programmes were completed. Data were captured and transferred on Excel spreadsheets, anonymised (identification and address data removed), password protected, and stored on secure servers, in accordance with the set ethics approved standards. Data analysis was undertaken through the R software for statistical computing. Chi-square and logistic regressions were used to

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explore the relationship between PS intervention and job/education placement and sustained outcomes (the participant was still in employment/education at the 13-week point).

### **Rationale of the Psychosocial Intervention Design**

A great deal of literature indicated promising interventions to alleviate the depressive symptoms associated with unemployment and to build self-efficacy and proactivity.

However, I cautiously noted that many of the above studies and meta-analyses were undertaken with compliant groups such as military personnel, school children, students and even paying corporate customers. These samples may be more likely to do what they are told to do or are already invested in the theory and process. By contrast, in the current study an attempt was made to undertake interventions with young adults who were under no obligation to remain within the intervention setting. They could simply stand up and walk out of the group sessions if they wished to do so. We were particularly conscious of potentially higher levels of embarrassment and awkwardness in coaching young people (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010; Noonan, 2002). As such, the interventions were labelled 'Resilience Workshops' due to the challenge of defining well-being (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012).

Eighteen months was spent researching, contextualising and trialling a variety of interventions that purported to improve well-being, lower depressive symptoms, build self-efficacy and enhance resilience among employment service staff and jobseekers. As an applied study, there were several practical factors to be considered. These included the time permitted (in light of funding limitations) to work directly with each young unemployed adult. This resulted in grouping unemployed young adults into workshops to complement their TAU one-to-one sessions with their case manager. Ideally a single intervention might be sufficient to help move the young unemployed clients into proactive and successful job searching, but the literature suggests that no such 'golden bullet' exists. It also appears that a

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‘shotgun’ approach, in which individuals practice multiple PPI activities, may be more effective than engaging in only one activity (Fordyce, 1977; Seligman et al., 2005).

Accordingly, practitioners may see the most benefit in their clients when assigning multiple and different positive activities. (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 483)

The participating, government-funded employment service organisation, Employment Services Queensland (ESQ), facilitated 15 hours of group workshops, delivered over five 3-hour sessions across three weeks. The focus of the workshop content was on what appeared to be the most logical and efficacious exercises to build well-being, resilience and self-efficacy. They were categorised into five distinct ‘chapters’ to reflect the five sessions available: *strengths, positivity, mental toughness, mindset* and *character & goals* (detailed in this thesis under Chapter 4). The aim of the study was to determine the scalability of the PS intervention. This meant the ability to deliver to many thousands of general unemployed participants. Government funding for such activities does not usually facilitate the use of qualified psychologists, so a general trainer, with no mental health training, was trained in the delivery of the PS intervention, supported with scripts, PowerPoints and handout content. ‘The Harkness Methodology’ of delivery was encouraged in this environment of young adults. This methodology often sees students sitting around a table and interacting through discussion. They reason among each other and do not follow a teacher’s lead. The teacher’s role is to facilitate and guide the discussion (Tisch, 2016).

The intervention-facilitating organisation, ESQ, was conscious of the dangers of using ‘positive affect as [a] coercive strategy’ (Friedli & Stearn, 2015). In other words, the workshops were to enhance the clients’ existing personalities and strengths, rather than promote a possibly false ideal of a working citizen (Gorz, Handyside, & Turner, 1989).

### **Participants**

A total of 75 unemployed young adults participated in the PS Treatment (PS) in

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addition to the usual interventions, with a comparison group of 247 young adults who received only TAU. There was stronger female representation in the PS Treatment group, with 67% female and 33% male, compared to the TAU group with 45% female and 55% male participants. The ages of the participants ranged from 15 to 25, with a mean age of 19.2 years old, (SD = 1.84) in the PS group and 18.8 (SD = 1.67) in the TAU cohort. The participants were existing clients of an employment services provider, Employment Services Queensland (ESQ) in Queensland. The PS Treatment participants came from two sites in Southeast Queensland, approximately 30 kilometres from the city of Brisbane. The comparison group also came from towns close to the city of Brisbane, as well as regional centres such as Toowoomba, Ipswich and Rockhampton.

The participants were also categorised by jobseeker 'stream'. The Australian government utilises a Jobseeker Classification Instrument (JSCI), a largely demographic assessment of 18 to 49 questions, through which jobseekers are referred to one of four streams of support. Those jobseekers identified as most 'job-ready' are allocated to Stream 1, while jobseekers with increasing needs are allocated to Streams 2, 3 and 4. Stream 4 refers to those jobseekers with the greatest need of assistance. Employment service provider payments are higher for more disadvantaged jobseekers, reflecting both the additional effort required to obtain job placements for these jobseekers and the policy of encouraging services providers to give intense support to disadvantaged jobseekers. The JSCI is a form of unemployed citizen segmentation to help inform more personalised and efficient jobseeker support and employment service provider payments (the more difficult the jobseeker, the higher the payments for supporting successful return-to-work) (Jarvie & Mercer, 2018). There were differences in the PS Treatment vs TAU groups, as seen in Table 1, that were likely to have an impact upon jobseeking success.

**Table 1. Jobseeker Stream, Treatment as Usual vs PS Treatment**

Jobseeker Classification	Treatment as Usual (N = 247)	PS Treatment (N = 75)
Stream 1	10.5%	5.3%
Stream 2	59.5%	57.3%
Stream 3	10.1%	8.0%
Stream 4	19.8%	29.3%

Table 1 indicates that the TAU group contained nearly twice the proportion of Stream 1 participants, those most job ready, compared to the PS treatment group. Additionally, the PS treatment group comprised significantly more Stream 4 youths, those least job ready, compared to the comparison group. One might conclude that the PS Treatment group were a ‘tougher’ cohort to work with than the comparison group, which might suppress the results from the PS Treatment.

### **Sampling Procedure**

The ‘Resilience Workshop’ PS intervention was delivered in August and September 2013 in two outer suburbs of Brisbane, Southeast Queensland. All young adults who were scheduled to start a support programme with Employment Services Queensland in August and September at those two locations, who met the age, unemployed status and location (Australian resident) criteria were invited to attend a programme launch day, where they were provided with information about the Resilience Workshops. Participation was voluntary and the young adults were given a choice whether to participate in the programme or not. None declined. Participants attended the PS intervention, five half-day group workshops, in training rooms at their respective unemployment offices. Competent facilitators, trained by the researcher, delivered all of the workshops, with no particular psychology or mental health background. The theory was presented via PowerPoint presentations (images and text) with matching narrative facilitator notes and handouts for some exercises. Following the PS intervention, participants met with their employment advisor for treatment as usual,

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comprising weekly or fortnightly one-on-one sessions and soft skill workshops, both covering typical employment interventions, including interview techniques, marketing oneself, employer ethics, résumé/cover letter writing, etc.

The comparison group were young unemployed participants referred to Employment Services Queensland under exactly the same employment support programme. They attended throughout June to September 2013, with the only one overlap site, with eight participants attending in June and July (the PS intervention groups attended in August and September). The profile of the comparison group was similar in age, and more evenly balanced in gender (PS Treatment group was 33% female while the TAU group was 45% female). The gender difference did not reflect the overall profile of the cohort at the treatment locations; it was simply a coincidence that more females started with ESQ in August and September in the two Southeast Queensland sites.

### Results

The chi-square test found the relationship between psychosocial intervention (PS) and job/education placement to be statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 322) = 9.86, p < .01$ . The observed frequencies for the four cells can be found in Table 2. As indexed by Cramer's V statistic, the strength of the relationship was .18. This indicates that the jobseekers who attended the PS workshops were more likely than the jobseekers who participated in standard job seeking activities to obtain either an employment or education placement.

**Table 2. Employment or Education Placement**

Placement	Treatment as Usual	PS Intervention	Total
No	140	27	167
Yes	107	48	155
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>322</b>

Similarly, the chi-square test found the relationship between the psychosocial intervention (PS) and sustained job outcomes after 13 weeks and was statistically significant,



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$\chi^2 (1, N = 322) = 11.78, p < .01$ . The observed frequencies for the four cells can be found in Table 3. As indexed by Cramer's V statistic, the strength of the relationship was .19. This indicates that the jobseekers who undertook the PS workshops were more likely than those who participated in TAU only to continue in a job after 13 weeks.

**Table 3. Sustained Placement Outcome**

13-Week Outcome	Treatment as Usual	PS Intervention	Total
No	186 (75.3%)	41 (54.7%)	227
Yes	61 (24.7%)	34 (45.3%)	95
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>322</b>

We next looked at the percentages of jobseekers who participated in the PS intervention and those jobseekers who participated in standard job seeking activities, and how they were classified into streams. The PS intervention group included 5.3% of individuals in Stream 1, those most job ready, compared to 10.5% of the TAU group. Additionally, the PS Treatment group comprised 29.3% Stream 4s, those least job ready, compared to 19.8% in the comparison group. A chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between the PS intervention and job streams, and found the relationship to be non-significant,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 322) = 4.33, p > .05$ . A chi-square test of the relationship between job Streams and employment/education placement was non-significant,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 322) = 3.90, p > .05$ . Similarly, a chi-square test of the relationship between job Streams and sustained job outcomes (13 weeks) was found to be non-significant,  $\chi^2 (3, N = 322) = 0.36, p > .05$ . Table 4 below details the full breakdown of jobseekers across gender, age and JSCI Stream. We found no significant differences between Stream and treatment groups, nor gender and treatment groups. Age was also a non-significant factor in explaining both job placement and job outcomes after 13 weeks. Both the experimental and comparison group interventions revealed employment outcomes (work placements). However, the proportion of participants in the Resilience Workshop programme progressing into employment was higher. We

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undertook further analysis below to determine any significance by examining the odds ratios of the interactions.

**Table 4. Characteristics of Participants. PS Intervention Treatment vs Treatment as Usual (N = 322)**

Characteristic	TAU Comparison (N = 247)						PS Intervention (N = 75)							
	TOTAL	RTW		13 Wk Outcome		Not RTW		TOTAL	RTW		13 Wk Outcome		Not RTW	
		N	%	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	N	%
All	247	107	43.3%	61	24.7%	140	56.7%	75	48	64.0%	34	70.8%	27	36.0%
Gender														
Male	136	54	39.7%	36	66.7%	82	60.3%	25	16	21.3%	11	68.8%	9	81.8%
Female	111	53	47.7%	25	47.2%	58	52.3%	50	32	42.7%	23	71.9%	18	24.0%
Age														
15-17	52	22	42.3%	9	40.9%	30	57.7%	11	6	54.5%	5	83.3%	5	45.5%
18-21	188	82	43.6%	52	63.4%	106	56.4%	54	34	63.0%	25	73.5%	20	37.0%
22-25	7	3	42.9%	0	0.0%	4	57.1%	10	8	80.0%	4	50.0%	2	20.0%
Stream														
Stream 1	26	15	57.7%	6	40.0%	11	42.3%	4	4	100.0%	3	75.0%	0	0.0%
Stream 2	147	63	42.9%	37	58.7%	84	57.1%	43	29	67.4%	21	72.4%	14	32.6%
Stream 3	25	11	44.0%	6	54.5%	14	56.0%	6	3	50.0%	2	66.7%	3	50.0%
Stream 4	49	18	36.7%	12	66.7%	31	63.3%	22	12	54.5%	8	66.7%	10	45.5%

RTW = Return to Work (employment/education placement). Not RTW = Did not achieve a placement.

TAU = Treatment as Usual (usual employment support activities). PS Intervention (5 3-hour Resilience Workshops)

Using logistic regression analyses, we next examined the intervention effects whilst controlling for key covariates (gender, age and stream). The results suggest that when controlling for other variables, the intervention was effective. Young jobseekers who undertook the psychosocial interventions were 2.5 times more likely to gain a job placement, regardless which stream, gender or how old they were (OR = 2.56, 95% CI: 1.48-4.49,  $p < 0.01$ ). Controlling for covariates (gender, age and Stream), youth receiving the psychosocial intervention were more likely to be employed after 13 weeks (OR = 2.48, 95% CI: 1.43-4.31,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results suggest that youth who undertook the psychosocial interventions were 2.4 times more likely to stay employed after 13 weeks, regardless of Stream, gender or how old they were.

## Discussion

We set out to evaluate a PS program for improving employment and education placements in a youth cohort that is extremely vulnerable to issues associated with

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disadvantage, disengagement, poor school to work transitions and mental health problems, among other challenges (Cull & Citymission, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Sissons & Jones, 2012). It is suggested in the literature that not every young adult is psychologically ready to work, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds and affected by low self-esteem, self-efficacy and mental toughness, depression, intergenerational employment norms and learned helplessness (Creed et al., 2003; Donovan & Oddy, 1982; Hammarström & Janlert, 1997). Perhaps young adults are more susceptible than unemployed citizens over the age of 25 to responding positively to interventions that aim to build psychosocial life skills.

The data in this study support the notion that young adults, if provided with the tools to help build their own self-efficacy, resilience, well-being and desire to improve their lives, are more successful in their job search than young adults who had not been provided with the theory and tools (Bandura, 1994; Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Paul and Moser noted that job searching was linked to higher psychological distress (Paul & Moser, 2009a). The PS intervention might help to mediate the negative impacts of such a period. The higher employment outcomes effect of this PS intervention is consistent with the findings of a recent meta-analysis, which revealed that educational outcomes improved following the application of positive psychology interventions (PPIs) that were designed to teach students how to build positive emotions, resilience and character strengths (Waters, 2011). PPIs are defined as interventions that aim to build positive factors rather than focus only upon negative factors (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Previous research indicates the substantial negative impact on well-being from being unemployed (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). This paper provides evidence that interventions to build well-being while unemployed might significantly improve the likelihood of gaining sustained employment. This paper has encouraging implications for the future direction of youth reemployment initiatives.

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The implication of this study for young adults, despite the limitations, is significant, particularly given the vulnerability of the cohort and youth unemployment statistics.

Stimulating well-being means that young adults might be more psychologically ready to work, they can negotiate the school-to-work transition more smoothly and perhaps break down any multi-generational norms of unemployment. From a mental health perspective, the now-employed young participants involved in this study will continue to reap improvements in terms of their psychological and financial well-being due to the participation in work and social inclusion (Borg & Kristiansen, 2008; Jahoda, 1982; Shepherd et al., 2008).

### **Limitations**

This study was limited by the fact that a perfect, randomised and controlled trial environment was not provided. The key issue with non-random assignment is that there might be pre-existing differences between groups driving the observed changes, making it hard to absolutely attribute changes to the intervention. This was due to the real-world application of the study and operational practicalities. The researcher attempted to ensure that the groups were “equalized” at the beginning of the study to mitigate this concern to some degree. The treatment and comparison cohorts were very similar in terms of age (PS treatment mean age 19.2 years vs TAU mean age of 18.8) and did not differ in the criteria of employment programme and location. In addition, we controlled for gender, age, and stream, so that these differences could not account for the intervention effects. Even so, cohorts were allocated on the basis of time (i.e. all the participants in August and September at two locations), rather than perfectly random allocation to treatment and comparison groups. The researchers acknowledge that in the absence of random assignment, confounding factors such as attitudes towards employment, gender (the PS intervention group comprised 33% Female participants, whilst the TAU group consisted of 45% Female participants), and education level could have the potential to skew the employment outcomes.

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The impact of each of the 31 individual interventions that made up the PS intervention was not measured. It could be the case that one or two exercises accounted for all of the impact, making it hard to attribute the observed changes to specific “ingredients” in the intervention. Also, the content mix of interventions vary from one source study to another, making it difficult to identify key processes driving observed changes. Measuring the pre- and post-intervention levels of well-being, self-efficacy or resilience would help to identify whether interventions that purported to build those psychological assets did actually improve individual’s levels of well-being etc, and would help establish the extent to which each of those constructs moderated return-to-work outcomes. This is certainly an area for further research, as is further study applying the psychosocial intervention to over 25-year-old adults and a wider geographical area.

### **Conclusion**

This study comprised an investigation of whether a psychosocial intervention comprising well-being, self-efficacy and resilience interventions delivered in group workshops could improve young adults’ progress into employment. The relative efficacy of the intervention was compared to employment services as usual (résumé-writing, interview skills and job search skills) for the young jobseekers. The impact of the intervention was measured purely in employment outcomes (work placements and sustained employment) rather than any specific change in behaviour or psychological construct.

The hypothesis that well-being interventions would increase an unemployed young person’s likelihood of successfully entering employment is supported by this study’s results. Young adults who undertook the PS intervention were 2.5 times more likely to progress into sustainable employment than those who did not. From a welfare policy-informing perspective, this study evidences the efficacy of psychosocial interventions, delivered by non-mental health professionals, to facilitate re-employment for a vulnerable cohort which will in

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turn deliver fiscal returns to government. While the researchers acknowledge the importance of practical job search interventions to help unemployed young people gain employment, undertaking such action-oriented activities *before* psychological resilience and well-being is addressed, might be a case of ‘putting the cart before the horse’.

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