Experiences of unemployment and formal and informal employment brokers among emerging/young adults: A socio-ecological perspective

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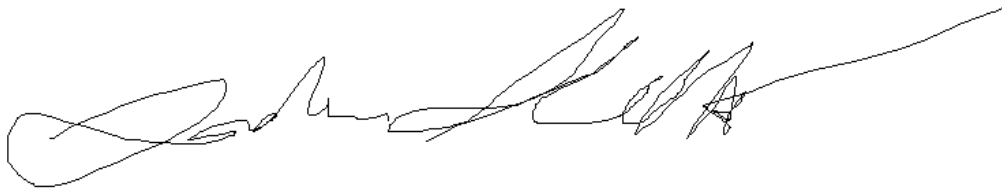
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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for Doctor of Philosophy (Translational Health),

27 June 2022

Statement of authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this, or any other institution.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my participants. I thank you for taking the time to share your stories

with me.

Acknowledgments

To my supervisory panel: Professor Janette Perz and Dr Elizabeth Conroy for their support and guidance on this journey, for providing opportunities to sound out my ideas to my colleagues and for supporting my development regarding the use of research methods, and also Dr Vanessa Rose for giving me the opportunity to work in this area of inquiry.

To my colleagues at the Translational Health Research Institute, Dr Chloe Parton, Dr Alexandra J. Hawkey, and Dr Zelalem Mengesha. Your camaraderie and advice have been invaluable. I must also acknowledge my supporters in the School of Medicine, Western Sydney University: Dr Brahm Marjadi and Dr Sowbhagya Micheal.

And finally, to all my family, especially my wife Maral. I thank you for supporting me throughout this endeavour. Also to my son Rylan, for joining me midway along this journey.

I also acknowledge the services of Sarah Endacott, of edit or die, who performed copy-editing and formatting on this document, according to the principles and standards of the Australian Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd).

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Abstract

Youth unemployment, besides having economic and social impacts, is a significant health concern. It is of particular concern because it occurs at a time of development and transition; thus, the health risks associated with unemployment can create long-term vulnerabilities. Organisational brokers, agents who are in one way or another engaged in building links between unemployed youths and work, skills education, health services or social services, support young people to achieve their employment goals. A positive brokering relationship can have enduring psychological benefits, setting up a young person for development of a clear work identity and greater resiliency, and thus a better chance of finding work and holding employment. On the other hand, a negative relationship can have disruptive effects, potentially hampering a young person's development (individually, socially and vocationally) and impacting their future engagement in the workforce and their wellbeing. Therefore, the way that brokers and youth experience and construct youth unemployment needs to be taken into account in developing appropriate job-seeking supports for young people. This study explores the experiences and constructions of both youths and brokers regarding youth unemployment. Unemployed youths are defined as young people aged 17–25 looking for work. The methodology comprised qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis). A total of 17 youths and 14 organisational brokers were interviewed.

The results were analysed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (2007) socio-ecological model, which accounts for how influences on health can occur at different levels of the social environment, and which conceptualises health and wellbeing as existing within multiple nested ecosystems. A thematic analysis of youths' accounts of unemployment and employment describes a number of themes at several levels of the model.

The themes identified include the impact of unemployment on mental health, the development of vocational identity, positive and negative experiences in the family setting, the impact of the educational setting and its influence on the transition to employment, negative experiences with employers, and housing and transport barriers. These accounts are compared with brokers accounts of youth unemployment and their response to the young people. The key themes in brokers' accounts highlight the importance of mental wellbeing and vocational awareness, responses to youths who had dropped out of school, the impact of intergenerational unemployment and housing barriers, the attitudes of employers toward unemployed youths, and cultural awareness in brokerage. The findings illustrate that the main areas of convergence in the youths' and brokers' accounts were on the issues of housing, employer experiences and importance of support during the school years immediately prior to entering the workforce.

The results support previous findings on the mental health impacts of unemployment and highlight the role of identity and youth transition processes, the role of social support among unemployed youths in wellbeing, and identify the unique role of flexible learning options for the support of unemployed youths. They also highlight the role of transport and housing within the context of the participants, located in Western Sydney, chosen specifically for its larger geographical area and its higher rates of unemployment compared to the rest of Sydney. The research extends these approaches by illustrating how they apply to the issue of employment, within the structural influences of the employment service provider system in Australia and appropriately in the specific social and cultural context of Western Sydney

There are several implications of the findings for understanding and responding to the impact of job loss on young people. Brokers need to be flexible if they are to deliver quality outcomes for unemployed youths effectively. Different influences among emerging adults, related to their vocational identities (which may be foreclosed, fluid or emerging), their previous work experience and cultural context, which are associated with different mental health impacts, require different responses from brokers. Brokers need to be able to tailor their approach to account for the emerging nature of youth constructions of unemployment, and the context in which they are situated. Links with existing theory and the implications for interpreting the results in the wake of the recent COVID-19 pandemic are also discussed.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Unemployment in general poses a serious problem for health and wellbeing. In the Australian context, the relationship of youth unemployment to health has historically been examined in relation to several aspects of health (Morrell et al., 1998). First, unemployment has been associated with several health risk behaviours (AIHW, 2019; Hammer, 1992; Milner et al., 2013; Norström et al., 2017; Power & Estaugh, 1990; Scarpetta et al., 2010b). Second, unemployment is understood to be associated with poorer mental health.

Research interest in the topic is maintained on the one hand because of an increasing awareness of the issues of suicide, youth mental health, and how unemployment contributes to this (Butterworth et al., 2006; Butterworth et al., 2013; Crowe et al., 2016; Too et al., 2019). Various mechanisms of how unemployment relates to mental health have also been tested (Creed & Muller, 2006; Muller et al., 2005). Researchers have recognised that being affected by mental illness is associated with a variety of factors (such as reliance on welfare, homelessness, drug use, disengagement with education), which makes it difficult for youths to secure employment, to the detriment of overall productivity, social cohesion and social inclusion (Butterworth et al., 2013; Harris, 2016). Thus, unemployment and health are characterised as interrelated, with both individual and social implications. Therefore, the issue of how young people contend with this problem is a focus for further research. Repeated economic downturns and global events fuel research interest in the topic; for example, reflecting on the impact of the 2008 financial crisis on youth (Carvalho, 2015); and more recently, but perhaps less clearly understood, the impact of the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic (Deady et al., 2020).

Currently, the way unemployment affects health and health impacts unemployment is well understood (Dooley, 2003; Fergusson et al., 2001; Stauder, 2019). Unemployment has been linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes (Flint et al., 2013; Kim & von Dem Knesebeck, 2015; Wanberg, 2012). The literature supporting this link points to the importance of employment to development, health and wellbeing (Ahn et al., 2004; Feather, 2012; Goldsmith et al., 1997). Past research has focused on the psychological dimension of unemployment, with particular emphasis on the benefits of work for psychological wellbeing (Jahoda, 1982; Paul et al., 2007; Selenko et al., 2011). The absence of the benefits of work has been associated with distress (Creed & Macintyre, 2001; Creed & Muller, 2006). The body of literature also focuses on the importance of autonomy, suggesting that restrictions on self-determination are detrimental to wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Fryer, 1986; 2013; Fryer & Fagan, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2004). Wellbeing is defined here as a state of equilibrium that can be affected by challenges across the lifespan; for example, unemployment (Dodge et al., 2012). Adolescent wellbeing, with which this thesis is concerned, is conceptualised as comprising both positive feelings, and positive relationships with others (Gennings et al., 2021). In terms of wellbeing, it is understood that work carries psychological benefits, and that unemployment is associated with psychological detriments (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938; Jahoda, 1979) with psychological distress recognised as a correlate of unemployment (Jackson et al., 1983; Paul & Moser, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 1993; Warr et al., 1979). Research has, in general, made use of quantitative scale measures of work aspects and individual dimensions of wellbeing such as self-efficacy, or the extent to which individuals feel capable of effectively controlling their environment; the extent to which individuals feel capable of effectively controlling their environment (Bandura, 1988) and self-mastery, or the extent to which invividuals feel in control of events in their life; the extent to which

inviduals feel in control of events in their life (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). These constructs have a negative relationship to distress, meaning that individuals who report higher levels of self-efficacy and mastery will tend to score lower on measures of psychological distress. Having good coping strategies and self-efficacy can help moderate the relationship (Creed et al., 2009; Leana & Feldman, 1988; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Muller et al., 2006; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). The role of social support in reducing the detriments of unemployment is also well understood (Brydsten et al., 2018; Faria et al., 2020; Hiswåls et al., 2017; Norström et al., 2017; Strandh et al., 2014). Vocational counselling is a key part of this (Blustein, 2013b), and is particularly important at transitional times; for example, leaving school. The impact of unemployment in general on young people at such times is well understood (Bartelink et al., 2020; Erikson, 1968; Schaufeli & VanYperen, 1992; Strandh et al., 2015), as is the associated issue of school dropout (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2021; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Studies on the transition from school, and disengagement from education, form a distinct but related strand of research in the issue of youth unemployment (White et al., 2008).

Educational outcomes affect later employment, but less is known about the qualitative processes by which this occurs (Bessant, 2002; Te Riele, 2006; Te Riele et al., 2017). Research indicates that the formation of career narratives may have implications for unemployed youths (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019; Van Lill & Bakker, 2021). This highlights the importance of narratives generally (Gergen & Gergen, 1986), because they involve a process of self-reflection, which in itself is important for employment. A number of studies have examined how young people make meaning of their experiences through narratives (Murray, 2018), and in doing so, identify areas of concern, targets for intervention, potential relationships between psychological constructs, and contrast narratives of youths and lived experience. For example, comparative grounded theory analysis, which compares different

investigators identification of themes in interview data, has been used to show how adolescents in urban settings view employment in terms of its extrinsic rewards, rather than as a means to realise their self-concept (Chaves et al., 2004). Narrative methods have been used to explore how young adults imagine their future mobility in the world (Cuzzocrea & Mandich, 2016). They have also been used to show how the self-positioning of homeless youths can relate to their sense of agency and resilience (Toolis & Hammack, 2015). In the context of youth unemployment, narrative methods have been used to identify the developmental impact of unemployment on young people's transitions to adulthood (Van Lill & Bakker, 2021). Conceptual analysis has also drawn attention to the way youth unemployment itself is socially constructed, permeating the broader level of how societies, institutions and governments constitute young people as productive subjects (Fryer, 2020). These studies extend our understanding of the employment–wellbeing dynamic by illustrating the complexities of the experience of young people with unemployment. These studies highlight the need for qualitative methods which can address this dimension (Dillahunt & Hsiao, 2020).

Similar to some developed countries, Australia has a social security system in place to administer welfare to unemployed people and to support youths to gain education and training. However, a feature of the Australian system is that a combination of not-for-profit providers and private-for-profit providers are contracted to provide employment services by the government (Considine et al., 2011; Considine et al., 2020) to people who are unemployed. If they are in receipt of social security benefits unemployed youths and young adults are obliged to attend interviews with employment service providers (employment brokers) to discuss their employment and training options. Formal employment brokers have a dual function: they assist young people to find work, and simultaneously they play a role in

regulating young people's compliance with social security obligations. Additionally, numerous not-for-profit services also exist that support unemployed youths by mentoring (Hawke, 2015), providing community services (Butcher & Gilchrist, 2016) and co-locating multiple human services (Hart, 2018).

Those who work with youths in educational and employment contexts are in a unique position both to observe and manage youth transitions to employment. While the majority of research, both quantitative and qualitative, has predominantly focused on the experiences of unemployed youths, less research has focused on the role of employment brokers, counsellors and others in the youth's social support network. However, there is evidence to suggest that these interactions are an important, perhaps integral part of youth transition to employment and therefore to the development of autonomy, self-efficacy and self-mastery (Moore, 2019; O'Halloran et al., 2021; Patulny et al., 2019; Ramia et al., 2020). For unemployed youths who access the state welfare system, there is some research about their experience as clients of the system more broadly (Carter & Whitworth, 2015; Considine et al., 2003; Davidson, 2002; Laliberte Rudman & Aldrich, 2016; McGann et al., 2020), but research is lacking in terms of their experiences in informal settings or as individuals. More research is needed on the relationships in these settings between youth and those who assist them to find employment, referred to here as employment brokers, particularly in geographical areas of higher unemployment (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2018; Fagan & O'Neill, 2015). It is clear from research that that the style of employment brokering is important for various reasons (for example, culture) (Davies et al., 2017; Maru & Davies, 2011; Stovel & Shaw, 2012), but less about the styles actually used in youths. It is also clear that the role of employment brokering is often filled in by not-for-profit organisations (Moore, 2019).

Given the importance of these networks, and their overlap with the youth experience of unemployment, the present study aims at a broader conceptualisation of how social issues of disadvantage are implicated in small interactions experienced by unemployed youths, and in the relationship networks of which they form a part. It explores the views and experiences of those who work with youths, how to they account for youth unemployment and the implications of these accounts for their practice, and the strategies they use with young people, in the education, welfare and other various settings. The study also compares the experiences of unemployed youths alongside those of their employment brokers. There is substantial research on youth unemployment, and on employment service providers in limited contexts, but more research is needed to compare the two groups, given the importance for social support and development already described. This involves addressing three research questions:

1. How do unemployed youths in Western Sydney experience and construct un/employment and what are the main influences on their wellbeing?
2. How do formal and informal employment brokers across a variety of settings experience and construct working with unemployed youths, and how does it shape their interactions with unemployed youths?
3. How do the accounts of youths and brokers converge and diverge and what are the implications raised?

By addressing these questions, the current study contributes to the body of knowledge on youth unemployment in several ways. First, it examines whether, in general, young unemployed people have positive or negative experiences with their employment brokers. It focuses on the way that experiences with formal and informal employment brokers underpin the formation or dismantling of relationships of trust between youths and brokers, with

potential implications for youths' wellbeing with respect to autonomy, employment and health. Brokerage as a concept is used to show how a range of professionals can be positioned as brokers, irrespective of their official titles, because of the role they play in young people's formative employment experiences and linking youth into employment, education and support.

Second, the study identifies the particular styles or approaches of brokers that might be conducive to achieving an employment outcome, or those that show promise. Third, it examines which brokerage experiences might be associated with positive mental wellbeing. Fourth, and in terms of the convergence question, the study describes how either party positions themselves in their accounts, and how this might be relevant to the employment brokering experience. Finally, the study describes the external factors that might inhibit or facilitate quality employment brokering, and, given that the research shows that employment is significantly tied to global events, how such events factor in the accounts of both parties.

Third, the study focuses on the Western Sydney region, identified as a significant one for the issue of youth unemployment for a number of reasons. It is an ethnically and linguistically diverse region, highlighting the need to examine the multiple perspectives of diverse youths (Centre for Western Sydney, 2018; WESTIR, 2017). Second, Western Sydney is geographically large, with transport likely to play a key role in how youth experience employment (Fagan & O'Neill, 2015). Third, it is a rapidly developing region with large construction projects in progress (Morrison & Van Den Nouwelant, 2020), shaping the work opportunities for youths. Last, the region has been reported to have higher levels of unemployment than other parts of Sydney (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2018).

In line with the scope and contribution outlined above, the study utilised qualitative methods to generate the accounts of young people and service providers. This is consistent with the theoretical stance and methodological approach of the study. This study adopted a critical realist epistemology (Bhaskar, 1998). Critical realism recognises the materiality of physical bodies and economic factors; however, as an epistemology, it also conceptualises this materiality as being shaped by language and social practices (Mingers, 2004; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007; Stevens, 2020).

This is appropriate for the topic of youth unemployment because the literature identifies that while many of the health impacts associated with youth unemployment are most strongly correlated with material concerns (such as financial deprivation, lack of access or other long-term functional concerns), the meaning and purpose of unemployment is socially constructed. Meaning, purpose, agency and autonomy have been identified by research as key predictors of wellbeing of unemployed young people, in addition to purely financial concerns.

In line with this epistemological stance and the research questions, the present study uses qualitative methods. Because the beliefs and behaviour of youths shape and are shaped by the different social ecosystems they inhabit, this study investigates the self-positioning of youths in relation to employment. This is particularly relevant to the third research question concerning the convergence or divergence of the accounts of the two groups of interest. Therefore, the study uses positioning theory, as advanced by Davies and Harré (1990), to interpret accounts of unemployment given by unemployed youths and the employment brokers who work with them. Positioning theory is useful in showing how individual selves shift and negotiate through particular issues, adopting or resisting discourses to deal with the needs of the social situation at hand. The assumption of this theory is that accounts generated in interviews are not to be taken as corresponding to some absolute mental state of the

speaker, but instead as drawing on multiple views of reality as needed to position the speaker as authoritative, passive, resistant or otherwise. This has implications both for the speaker in terms of their subjectivity, and for the interpretation of the results. Positioning theory can be drawn on to explain how speakers position others in their accounts, in this case, unemployed youths, emerging young adults and employment brokers. This recognises that when young people formulate their ideas about employment and careers, they do so in a relational context. That is, formulating a vocation, or career identity, takes place in relation to others and involves interpersonal and intrapersonal domains (Blustein et al., 2004). Thus, the career identities they choose are also shifting, and they can position themselves in multiple ways.

Research shows how vocational teachers might position themselves as more concerned than employers for young people in vocational education (Robson et al., 2004). This may serve to positively influence their own experience, but this might also have implications for young people. Positioning theory has been used in the unemployment context to investigate how unemployed people position themselves in relation to health services targeted toward unemployed people (Romppainen, 2018). The different positions they adopted can influence how they perceive their rights and duties in health practices and help-seeking. How young people position themselves in relation to employment services is also important because it may impact their engagement with the service.

The study uses the term un/employment to describe the experiences of both employment and unemployment at this age (17–25 years), for a number of reasons. First, it acknowledges the dynamic, demonstrated in the literature, between the benefits of employment and the detriments of unemployment. Second, it recognises that young people in transition often move in and out of employment several times in their formative years, and so acknowledges this aspect of experience.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

A narrative review follows in Chapter 2, which principally examines the literature concerning youth unemployment and its relationship to health and wellbeing. First, the review examines the literature on the general relationship between unemployment and health. Second, it examines how psychology has theorised the relationship of youth unemployment to relevant psychological constructs such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. Third, the review points to critiques of existing research which argue for a consideration of the multidimensional character of youth unemployment, the utilisation of qualitative methods to examine youth unemployment, and the context of brokering in which un/employment is experienced by youths and young adults. In Chapter 3, the methodology and procedure of the study is described.

To briefly outline, the study utilises a qualitative design with two participant groups. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young people aged 17–25, addressing experiences of unemployment, employment, functional barriers and the meaning of work. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with organisational brokers engaged with youth unemployed addressing experiences with unemployed youths, education and training, barriers faced by youths and services, and interpretations of youth unemployment. The interviews were coded and analysed thematically.

Chapter 4 describes the data analysis, which emphasise the multiplicity of influences on youths' experience of un/employment (that is, both unemployment and formative experiences of work) at the individual, family, community and social levels. The experiences of brokers are compared and contrasted with those of youths to create a detailed account of where brokers and youths had similar concerns and interpretations, and where they diverged.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the analysis of the youths' interviews. It covers the way in which family, school and experiences of personal identity were prevalent in youths' and young adults' experiences of un/employment. It also compares their experiences of employment brokering.

Chapter 6 describes the results from the broker sample. This section principally addresses the practices and processes involved in their interactions with youths and young adults, and their construction of youth unemployment in general. In both Chapters 5 and 6, a socio-ecological lens is adopted to examine both datasets.

Chapter 7 presents a discussion of where the youths' and brokers' data intersect or diverge and the interpretation of these findings, principally through the lens of the socio-ecological model. The chapter discusses the implications for employment brokering and makes recommendations for the provision of support to youths and young adults in transition to work and further research in this field.

The Appendices contain the relevant ethics documentation, demographic survey items, consent forms and information sheets for both participant groups, and the interview schedules used for data collection.

Chapter 2 Youth unemployment, health and employment brokering: A narrative review

This narrative review examines the literature on youth unemployment from a historical and a psychological perspective. According to Grant and Booth (2009), a narrative review provides an examination of the current literature within a field, including research findings that have been peer reviewed, and makes an analysis of the contribution of the research to its particular field. A narrative review is flexible, and in analysis and structure it can be chronological, thematic or conceptual. As such, it has the capacity to draw together diverse fields that hold a common theme, though the methodologies used for individual research across those fields may differ. A narrative review of the literature surrounding youth unemployment is therefore appropriate, because the subject matter stands at the intersection of literature on developmental and social psychology, education, employment policy and public health. In the case of youth unemployment, a narrative review permits an examination of the way that research has shifted over time, and of how sub-domains of these fields contribute to our understanding. The review begins by outlining the context of unemployment in Australia and by describing how the relationship between unemployment and ill-health is the background for this area of research. Second, the review examines seminal theories of why unemployment is related to poorer mental health outcomes. In light of these theories, the review then describes the psychological factors that mediate and moderate the statistical relationship between unemployment and distress. Fourth, it examines youth development and transitions studies, and the way that youth unemployment intersects with education. Fifth, it reviews the literature on employment brokering in general, with particular attention to employment brokering within the formalised context of contracted employment services in Australia. The review concludes that to enlarge our understanding of youth unemployment,

and employment brokering in Western Sydney, in which unemployment is a significant issue, a qualitative approach is useful.

2.1 The relationship between unemployment and health

The relationship between unemployment and health has a long history in the health literature. Some early examples of the research on this topic include the studies of Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938), who examined the effects of unemployment on the US population during the depression of the 1930s, and the work of Jahoda (1981), who examined the experiences of mass layoff among factory workers in Marienthal, Austria, in the same decade (Jahoda et al., 1930). These studies highlight the various experiences of apathy, shame and self-consciousness that attached to those local populations whose communities were impacted and the responses of individuals and families.

In Australia, the unemployed are defined as those persons who are not currently employed but are readily available to accept work if they are offered it (Vandenbroek, 2018). This definition of unemployment does not include those who cannot work for various reasons, or those who are marginally attached to the labour force and who may have given up looking for work. In Australia in July 2021, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15–24 years was 9.9 per cent, representing over 209,000 young people, over two times higher than the total population rate of unemployment at 4.7 per cent (ABS, 2021). Historically, youth rates of unemployment in Australia have been consistently higher than the general rate of unemployment, and have followed general economic trends. For example, youth rates of unemployment have increased in times of global recession. Some of the reasons young people are more affected by unemployment include lower skill levels, lack of work experience and lack of secure contracts of employment (Carvalho, 2015).

First, the research suggests that unemployment may impact health. Unemployment is associated with a number of health risk behaviours, particularly among young people during economic recession (Scarpetta et al., 2010a). These behaviours are themselves associated with mental health problems. Unemployment is associated with increased likelihood of parasuicide (attempted suicide or self-harm) and suicide (Milner et al., 2013). Self-harm is becoming the second most non-violent injury in the US (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2020) and research indicates that the impact of unemployment on self-harm and suicide is similar for both men and women (Cunningham et al., 2021).

Australian studies support the finding that suicide is significantly associated with unemployment. For example, in a study of suicide in Australia between 1907 and 1990, using both population data and archival data from registries, Morell et al. (1994) found that unemployment accounted for 68 per cent of the variance in suicide rate for young people aged 15–24. This relationship was confirmed in a later study by Morell, Page and Taylor (2002), as well as a study by Milner et al. (2013), who found that the strongest relationship between unemployment and suicide was for males aged 15–24 experiencing longer duration of unemployment during periods of declining unemployment. Recent research highlights how preventing the impact of unemployment on suicide requires coordination across sectors as well as individual-level interventions, and the need for engaging new technologies to report suicide risk (Deady et al., 2020).

Second, research suggests that unemployment may impact health by increasing harmful health behaviour. Unemployment has long been associated with higher alcohol consumption among young people. For example, a two-year follow-up study of unemployed school leavers in the Swedish population found that alcohol use increased over time among "middle consumers" of alcohol (Hammarström et al., 1988). This finding is supported by a

longitudinal study of the British population which found that longer periods of unemployment (over six months) were associated with heavier alcohol consumption in males (Power & Estaugh, 1990). However, research by Hammer (1992) suggests that among youths who are already high consumers of alcohol, unemployment may lead to a decrease in alcohol consumption, potentially due to lower financial resources. The relationship between unemployment and alcohol use has been consistently supported to date in research from Scandinavia (Norström et al., 2019) and across OECD countries, also indicating that rises in alcoholism can be traced to unemployment as a negative economic event (Georgiou, 2013). Research has also focused on the relationship between unemployment and tobacco use. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 29.1 per cent of unemployed people over 18 were daily smokers (Welfare, 2020). This is particularly concerning, because increased tobacco use has been associated with physical and mental health problems later in life (Brook et al., 2002; Mathers et al., 2006). Hammarström and Janlert (1994) investigated tobacco habits among Swedish youths, both upon leaving high school and at five years afterwards. They found that the percentage of smokers was higher among female students than males at both time points. This study also found that tobacco use increased with length of unemployment, demonstrating a similar pattern to the findings on alcohol consumption. While rates of youth smoking and drinking have decreased overall (AIHW, 2019), there is evidence that the use of e-cigarettes is becoming more popular with 64 per cent of young people in the 18–24 years age group having tried them (AIHW, 2019).

Livingston et al. (2020) demonstrates how the recent trend is that young people are using substances later in their adolescence than in the past, showing how this might intersect with the age at which they experience unemployment. Increased alcohol use in adolescence has been linked with higher incidence of violent behaviour in males, and unwanted sexual

activity reported by females (Bonomo et al., 2001). However, the trend in unhealthy drinking

has decreased and engagement with work remained stable, possibly reflecting a general trend

of decreasing activities which might interfere with work (Vashishtha et al., 2021). In

summary, unemployment is related to health in complex ways, and reflects individual

reasoning and risk assessment, coping mechanisms and social and economic trends. The

above studies highlight the risky behaviours that unemployed youths may engage in. In order

to understand more about why they engage in these behaviours, research into their

experiences is needed to identify the sort of influences that they position as meaningful in this

respect. This would help to explain why poor health can impact on unemployment and how

unemployment might be a catalyst for poor health for some young people.

In view of the relationship between unemployment and health, research has sought to identify

the mechanisms by which unemployment impacts health and health impacts unemployment,

and this has received consistent attention (Dooley, 2003; Fergusson et al., 2001; Stauder,

2019). The selection and exposure hypotheses offer two possible explanations, among others,

by which unemployment is thought to impact on health. Support for the link between

unemployment and ill-health has sparked debate within the literature over whether ill-health

was the result of unemployment or vice versa. The exposure hypothesis suggests that

unemployment leads to poorer health because the experience of unemployment is associated

with deprivation of the means to access healthcare and deprivation of the inherent benefits of

work and activity. In contrast, the selection hypothesis suggests that people who are mentally

or physically ill are prevented from performing work by their illness and are thus selected for

unemployment; that is, whether their unemployment is essentially determined by their illness

(Stauder, 2019). Most research has adopted the exposure theory as a starting point, attempting

to control for "selection effects" or people drifting into unemployment because of existing

mental or physical illnesses (Dooley, 2003; Dooley et al., 1992). For example, a 21-year longitudinal study by Fergusson et al. (2001) addresses the question of whether young people who had adjustment problems (including, crime, illicit alcohol and drug use) might be "selected" for unemployment by controlling for psychosocial adjustment and criminal offending. This study found that there was no association between unemployment and depression after controlling for these variables, but found evidence that unemployment may lead to conviction and substance abuse. Using a different method, Graetz (1993) tested the exposure hypothesis by examining young people in transition from work to unemployment, finding evidence of higher distress after becoming unemployed. In a longitudinal study of students and unemployed adults, Schaufeli and VanYperen (1993) found some support for the selection hypothesis or "reverse causation" in that job orientation and coping style were associated with finding work. According to (Stauder, 2019), poorer mental health among the unemployed is due to selecting the unhealthy for unemployment. However, this study did find a weak causal effect or exposure among young people. Unemployment experienced earlier in life is likely to have a "scarring" effect and result in distress that gains momentum over time (Strandh et al., 2015). Clearly, distress is a significant factor in the mechanisms by which people become unemployed, but also on their health once unemployed. The following section will show how research has attempted to describe the relationship of distress to unemployment, to examine its extent and related factors which may moderate it.

2.1.1 The relationship of unemployment to distress

It is clear from the research literature that a key part of the association between unemployment and health is the experience of psychological distress. Since early studies of unemployment during the depression of the 1930s, unemployment has been identified with feelings of shame, apathy, and hopelessness (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938; Jahoda, 1979).

The balance of research shows how mental illness can follow the course of unemployment, and how the experience of it is associated with anxiety and depression. Whether this is due to the initial shock, or due to the drawn-out effects of long-term unemployment depend on the context, and the theory adopted in conceptualising the relationship. Subsequent studies have examined further the association between unemployment and psychological distress. In the UK in the 1980s there was substantial interest in the health implications of unemployment in the wake of changes in the economy and an increase to the unemployment rate (Warr et al., 1979; Warr & Jackson, 1983; 1984; 1985; Warr et al., 1988). Generally, these studies support the statistically positive relationship between unemployment and distress. Interestingly, these studies also found that participants reported some positive health effects of job loss, such as recovery from muscle and joint pain, and recovering from stomach ulcers and job stress. Such findings reflect a time when the workforce was less mobile and when workers tended to spend their lives performing the same job, with the corresponding health effects. Nevertheless, longitudinal studies have demonstrated that over time, unemployment predicted greater distress in adults overall (Paul & Moser, 2006; 2009), and less self-esteem among young people (Tiggemann et al., 1993; Winefeld et al., 1988). It has been demonstrated that being unemployed and yet being committed to work predicted higher distress (Creed et al., 2009; Creed et al., 1999; Creed & Macintyre, 2001). In recent years, research has shown that unemployment does not necessarily cause mental illness (Bartelink et al., 2020) however, in some youths who experience it early, the effects can be significant and persist across the lifespan (Strandh et al., 2014).

2.1.2 Models of unemployment distress: Deprivation of benefits and the restriction of agency due to unemployment

Within the field of research that examines the relationship between unemployment and distress, two main theoretical perspectives dominate. These are: 1) the latent and manifest benefits of employment theory (LAMB; Jahoda, 1981; 1982); and 2) the agency restriction theory (Fryer, 1986). The LAMB theory proposes that unemployed people are deprived of certain latent and manifest benefits of employment, and this accounts for their experiences of distress. Manifest or material benefits include income gained through employment; whereas latent benefits include social status, time management, social interaction, sense of identity and regular activity. The LAMB theory draws on Jahoda's studies of communities experiencing widespread unemployment in the 1930s (Jahoda, 1979). The theory looks at unemployment through the lens of the associated psychological benefits and draws on Freud's notion that work is what ties people to reality (Freud, 1930). According to Freud, work provides an opportunity for the individual to test theories about the world around them, share social knowledge with others, and remember their own experience. In addition to providing the latent individual benefits above, work has a collective or interactional potential to lift individuals from their family context, to assign social status and positions that can become enduring, and a potential either to humanise or demean an individual. For example, work can empower a person to make their voice heard, or position them as "just another set of hands" (Jahoda, 1982). Thus, the LAMB theory implies that work is not just a set of material benefits to the individual, such as regular exercise, or money, but a social process that requires the efforts of education and the interaction of individual motivation and external support. While this theory is not the only way of explaining the relationship of unemployment to distress, the LAMB theory has received support in various forms. First, the factors it identifies as the benefits of work (importance of time structure, social status and so

on) demonstrate reliability and consistency, with a scale having been developed to assess the extent to which unemployed individuals enjoy these benefits (Creed & Macintyre, 2001; Creed & Muller, 2006; Muller et al., 2005; Muller et al., 2006). The LAMB scale has been correlated with other measures of wellbeing and quality of life (Muller & Waters, 2012). The LAMB theory is also capable of distinguishing differences between employed, unemployed and out-of-the-labour-force groups. Studies have contrasted latent benefits with manifest benefits, showing that the deprivation of latent benefits is felt more acutely by those who are unemployed compared to those who are out of the labour force (Paul & Moser, 2009; Selenko et al., 2011).

Fryer (1986) proposes an alternative theory to the latent deprivation theory, known as the agency restriction model. According to this model, unemployment leads to restrictions on personal agency, and it is these limits on freedom of action that are responsible for higher distress among the unemployed. This relates to psychological as well as material or financial restriction. For example, the prospect of unemployment makes planning for the future difficult, and has a restricting effect (Fryer, 1995, cited in Creed & Klisch, 2005). In contrast to previous studies that examined the impact of unemployment in distressed samples, Fryer and Payne (1984) focus on people who were experiencing financial deprivation but not psychological deprivation while unemployed. This qualitative analysis suggested that these people's proactive behaviour and need to achieve or contribute enabled them to remain resilient throughout unemployment. The agency restriction theory draws attention to an assumption of the LAMB theory, which is that employment imposed to some extent from outside the individual, will assign benefits, and that unemployment will remove them, with limited reference to the agency of the individual involved.

Both these theories have utility and research support in explaining the impact of unemployment on individuals (Creed & Evans, 2002; Creed & Klisch, 2005; Creed & Macintyre, 2001; Creed & Muller, 2006). The deprivation model is useful, because it explains the shock that people experience upon losing the benefits of work. On the other hand, the agency restriction model can explain how an individual can become depressed over time, because their sense of control over their situation becomes diminished, possibly by insecure work, or negative experiences with training or employment agencies. The agency restriction model accounts for the finding that financial strain is among the biggest predictors of financial distress (Creed & Macintyre, 2001), as well as explaining how long-term unemployment may create an chronic lack of autonomy over time. The LAMB theory's strength is in its account of the initial shock of unemployment experienced by people that have come to depend on it for its benefits, meaning and purpose. While these two theories represent seminal ones in the field, the dynamic between unemployment and distress may change over time and other explanations may be appropriate.

2.1.3 Factors that influence the relationship between unemployment and distress

The literature makes clear that certain psychological factors can moderate the association between unemployment and distress. These factors show promise in ameliorating the impact of unemployment, and they become a focus for intervention and potential outcome variables by which the relative success of interventions with the unemployed can be measured or described. These include constructs such as coping, self-efficacy (particularly job-search self-efficacy), resilience, and perceived emotional intelligence.

In general, coping strategies have been a focus of research. Leana and Feldman (1988; 1991; 1995) and Leana et al. (1998) emphasise the role of coping strategies in the experience of distress. Coping strategies may be problem focused, engaging in behaviour designed to

remove or deal directly with a stressor, or they can be emotion focused, addressing the

symptoms of the stressor or trying to change any associated emotions (Carver et al., 1989).

Meta-analyses of job loss studies support the role of coping strategies and emphasise that

coping strategies play a stronger role in coping with job loss than coping resources such as

family support or financial resources (McKee-Ryan & Kinicki, 2002; McKee-Ryan et al.,

2005). In a Swedish study of unemployed people aged 22–63 years, Grossi (1999) addresses

coping style as a variable and found that problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping,

and psychological distress were all significantly higher among younger unemployed people,

and that engaging in problem-focused coping had a statistically negative relationship with

psychological distress. This role of the regulation of emotion in this context is supported in

terms of emotional intelligence. Unemployed people with higher perceived emotional

intelligence are likely to experience less distress (Berrios et al., 2016).

In addition to coping style, self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-mastery (Scheier et al., 1994)

have been identified as important resources in coping with unemployment (Danziger et al.,

2001; Vinokur & Schul, 1997; 2002; Wanberg, 1997). Self-efficacy refers to a person's

expectation that they have the ability to achieve a particular goal or perform a particular task

(Bandura, 1997). Vinokur and Schul (2002) found that both self-mastery and self-efficacy

were significantly associated with coping after a job loss in different ways. This study found

that self-efficacy was associated with a person's motivation to search for work, and that self-

mastery was associated with fewer depressive symptoms. Supporting earlier findings on

coping, self-mastery was also more strongly related to depressive symptoms than financial

strain was, suggesting coping resources may play as much a role in coping with

unemployment as financial resources do (Vinokur et al., 1995). Wade-Bohleber et al. (2020)

supports these findings, showing how chronic stress among unemployed youths is predicted

strongly by self-esteem. Coping self-efficacy (CSE) or confidence in one's ability to cope, is another dimension of this construct, and there is support for its moderating the impact of stressors such as unemployment and depression (McGee et al., 2021).

2.2 The role of social support and the broader context of unemployment

The literature on the importance of coping strategies, and psychological factors that mitigate unemployment distress, highlight the individual factors that unemployed people may have recourse to during their experience of unemployment. However, these psychological factors occur in relation to the social processes that surround them. Social support is an important factor in managing the distress of unemployment. Social support has been associated with less suicidal ideation during unemployment (Faria et al., 2020). One of the reasons for this association could be because individuals, when they are supported by those around them, feel more competent and confident to gain employment and can find meaning during unemployment. This explanation is supported by studies which demonstrate the interaction of coping self-efficacy with social support. Those with higher levels of social support report less distress, despite being unemployed (Hiswåls et al., 2017; Rey et al., 2016). Social support also extends beyond the family and friends an unemployed person has in their network. It is also manifested in the level of trust that unemployed people have in social institutions such as the government and social security system, and this mistrust may be partly responsible for differences in distress between the employed and unemployed in Sweden (Brydsten et al., 2018). This extends to the area of youth employment programs, with research indicating that the mental health benefits of such programs are greater when there is an active labour market policy underpinning them, at the broader social level (Strandh et al., 2015). Finally, the supportive effect of education could also be included as a form of social support, and research

has indicated that those with greater educational qualifications experience less distress while unemployed (Norström et al., 2017).

This focus on the wider social context of unemployment beyond the individual and psychological factors is articulated by Blustein's research (2013a) on vocational counselling and the psychology-of-working perspective (Blustein et al., 2008, p. 294294; Coutinho et al., 2008; Duffy et al., 2016). Broadening the research on the impact of unemployment to include career-development theories, Blustein argues for a combination of vocational counselling and psychotherapy. One purpose of this framework is to empower the individual with the kind of autonomy that the foregoing research has shown is crucial. However, another reason is that such an approach (in concert with other approaches) may be needed to meet the wider social challenges of the multiple meanings of work in a society characterised by a mobile workforce and destabilised career definitions (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001). The changes to society that have driven these changes to the nature of work have been the subject of the late-modernist sociology of Beck (1992). In reference to the global influences that shape the character of work, Beck (2014) suggests that the future of work may carry both benefits and risks. For example, the individualisation of work and more forms of self-employment might be characterised by more autonomy, but this might in turn lead to more isolation, loneliness and insecurity, which might itself be associated with distress (Matthews et al., 2019), particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheng et al., 2021; Munasinghe et al., 2020; Oswald et al., 2021).

The psychology-of-working perspective highlighted in Blustein's research expands the focus of research from individual factors such as coping, self-selection and work commitment to include a knowledge of how structural factors such as race, class, gender and the quality of work to inform both the impact and the meaning of employment and unemployment (Blustein

et al., 2016). In short, the framework considers accounts of personal efficacy and career objectives inseparable from the socially constructed dimensions of unemployment (Blustein et al., 2004). In terms of an increased overlap between the psychotherapist and the career or vocational counsellor, the psychology-of-working perspective (Blustein et al., 2012) takes in the interactional, as well as the intrapsychic aspects of how people engage with work. This has implications for career counselling practices. Importantly, it raises the question of the differing knowledge that is required by individuals such as unemployed young people, psychotherapists and vocational counsellors and how that knowledge is translated. For example, the psychotherapist is integral to managing existing mental health problems and putting coping strategies in place to manage changes to employment status; whereas the career counsellor has a knowledge of which opportunities and social resources are likely to be available and beneficial. In the case of youths, the vocational counsellor has the important knowledge of how and where a young adult can make a successful entry to the labour force, leverage their social capital and access any support they need while they do so.

Beyond the long-term effects of scarring that an early experience of unemployment can have (Strandh et al., 2015; Strandh et al., 2014), what is concerning is the possibility that young people give up on employment or "self-select" for unemployment, even before they have finished secondary school. This process was examined in the Dutch context by Schaufeli and VanYperen (1992), who compared the distress and labour market outcomes of students and unemployed. Schaufeli and VanYperen (1992) found that recent graduates with low distress were more successful in finding work, and those with lower distress upon graduation were more likely to find employment, in contrast to those with higher distress. These studies illustrate that, at an early stage of development, youths' assumptions about their own self-worth and approach to dealing with problems may be associated with unemployment. The

less someone feels in control of their destiny, or positive about their chances of success, the more distress they will experience. Hence, it is also important to study unemployment within the context of transition from school. Transitions research has shown much from an educational lens about the pathways that youths take, but more research is needed as to what happens in school to influence how self-selection occurs. This invites questions about the type of employment support available even before young people have left school in terms of preparation, whether in the school or community setting.

2.2.1 Transition and development

The previous sections have considered the relationship between wellbeing and un/employment, demonstrated the range of personal and social factors associated with the relationship, and described the role of autonomy and agency. It is now important to consider how the experience of un/employment among young people takes place in the context of development and while they are in a period of transition. Considering the unique psychological and mental health impacts of unemployment on young people, it is important to note that youths are in transition in terms of education and work, but also developmentally and psychologically too. According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1959), several psychological conflicts occur across the lifespan of an individual. The theory holds that development to the next stage of life rests on the satisfactory resolution of these life conflicts. For example, even an infant has to resolve a basic conflict about trust versus mistrust of other individuals around them, and as they resolve this conflict, they move to a new stage of development which ushers in a conflict between autonomy versus dependence. In the context of younger unemployed people, they are conceptualised as being at a particular phase of development (a well-defined identity versus identity confusion) where their commitment to norms of employment and their self-concept is being formed.

The transition from youth to adulthood is a significant issue in relation to youth unemployment. This period of transition is protracted, young people negotiate it differently and it is shaped in part by generational changes. The Smith Family, a national independent charity which assists disadvantaged Australians, notes that the "transition to work" involves "the coming-of-age events which all young people experience as they leave school, consolidate skills, develop a sense of job readiness and make decisions about life and career" (The Smith Family, 2014, p. 1). Wyn and Woodman (2006) make the cautionary point that to see "transition" as simply that phase between school and work is misleading, and narrow. Considering what is occurring to society in other countries in the West, they argue we are seeing an "extended transition" to adulthood. This refers to the protracted period of transition young people face as they endeavour to become autonomous adults in a changing society. The research literature that speaks of youth transitions emphasises several influences on how youths make this transition. First, youths face a longer transition to adulthood brought on by global changes to education and labour markets (Carvalho, 2015; Furlong, 2009; Jones, 2009). Second, education remains a key and recurring feature of this extended transition. Different education patterns destabilise the concept of a linear path from school to work, and educational processes may themselves be affected. Third, an emphasis on engagement with education comes with particular challenges, for example, how to facilitate employment among those who may experience marginalisation within the school system (Bessant, 2002; Te Riele, 2006).

Transitions research faces a number of challenges, as outlined by White et al. (2008). First, constructing youth and age independently of social context is problematic. Research needs to examine how place, adulthood, and work can have different meanings. Second, the shape of the adulthood facing many youths today is one in which the value of their educational

qualifications may not be realised in the labour market until into their 20s; whereas previously this might have occurred sooner in life (Cuervo & Chesters, 2019; Cuervo & Wyn, 2016). It is therefore of importance to investigate the impact of unemployment among youths who have various trajectories. In summary, the transitions field deals with an important strand of youth un/employment. It adds to the social dimension of youth and unemployment research, highlighting the dynamics between education and work.

2.3 Qualitative approaches to youth unemployment research

The foregoing sections have described how unemployment has various impacts on health and wellbeing. Notably it is associated with distress, lack of autonomy and coping in ways that can also be detrimental to health. Agency and deprivation processes have been suggested as mechanisms for unemployment distress. The relationship between unemployment and distress is related is associated with psychological constructs such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and coping strategies. This relationship is influenced by the level of social support available. Youths are also in a period of transition, on the individual, social and generational levels. This may explain why some youths' "self-select" for unemployment, even during the school years. In view of these multiple influences on youths' experience, there have consistently been calls in the literature over time for more qualitative studies, which can account for the meaning employment holds for young people (Ezzy, 2001; Fryer, 1998; Paul & Moser, 2006). Ezzy (2001) suggests that qualitative methods are useful for accounting for the way in which unemployed people make meaning of their experience, with clear implications for their agency and health. This can be illustrated by an example from Fryer (1998), who draws a comparison between an unemployed person who experiences repeated short intervals of unemployment and movement between training schemes, under threat of losing their welfare payment, and a person who has been unemployed for a long period, and

has had a chance to learn how to cope with it. Qualitative methods are therefore suited to exploring the constructions of unemployment that are associated with such experiences. In recent years, there have been several studies which have used qualitative methods to explore several different facets of the experience of unemployed youths. The utility of qualitative approaches to studying youth unemployment has been demonstrated by Eckersley (2011), Van Lill and Bakker (2021; 2022), Schoon et al. (2017) and Schoon and Heckhausen (2019). For example, narrative research in South Africa using interview data indicate that unemployed young people's subjective wellbeing was influenced by uncertainty they were going to reach their life goals (Van Lill & Bakker, 2022). Narrative approaches differ from thematic approaches in that they detail a plotline of whether or not an individual's goals have been realised and a comparison of how they progress or regress toward their goals (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). One limitation of this approach is that accounts of personal goals need to be supplemented by an investigation of the factors at the organisational and community level that impede or facilitate coping. Qualitative research using the socio-ecological model in the UK has addressed this somewhat, examining what the changes to one's goals look like in terms of apprenticeship preference, or engagement with a different employment program (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019; Schoon et al., 2017). The studies suggest that in order for young people's individual goals to be realised, a process of enacting them and progressively revising them has to occur, in "an interplay of structure and agency" (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019; p. 144). In this process, elements of positive feedback (from trusted others) and individual self-reflection, are both necessary (Dillahunt & Hsiao, 2020). The utility of studying unemployment through a qualitative and socio-ecological lens is also being recognised after the effects of COVID-19. As Barbieri and Fraccaroli (2021) note, in order to

study unemployment we need to take it into account as part of a global and social network rather than an isolated event.

A key question now concerning youth unemployment is how young people make meaning of the experience of un/employment. As the research above demonstrates, people's constructions of unemployment are not fixed, but shift in relation to the researcher, employment brokers, the pattern of the unemployment, or one's self-categorisations. As David Fryer suggests, "There is a tiny flame of freedom between the enormous boulders of determinism from the outside, by social structure, and determination from the inside, by the biological material from which we are made" (Fryer, 1998, p. 92). Another key question surrounds those people in the young unemployed person's social network, who interact with them as they go through the process of re-evaluating their plans. This is important, given what the research suggests about the influence of social support on distress. This includes those who function as employment brokers. The research makes clear that brokers, in general, assist by the mechanisms of social capital to create the material and social conditions which contribute to what sort of experience a young person might have while unemployed.

2.4 Employment Brokering – formal and informal

The concept of employment brokering concerns how unemployed youths form networks and relationships across a range of individuals and professionals in the course of their transition to work. Brokerage is defined as a process of "connecting actors in systems of social, economic, or political relations in order to facilitate access to valued resources (Stovel et al., 2011). Brokers: 1) bridge a gap between networks; and 2) cause resources (for example, opportunities, knowledge, actual goods) to flow between parties (Granovetter, 1977; 2018). In the context of employment, brokers are those who connect young people with education,

employment opportunities, work experience, forms of community engagement, welfare, mental health services, homelessness services, and others in their community with the aim of facilitating employment. Brokers are also placed to form bridges between disconnected networks or "social chasms" (Burt, 2009; Stovel & Shaw, 2012). In the context of youth unemployment, this could mean bridging links between marginalised or otherwise disconnected individuals with employment and training institutions, as well as between different services and agencies that support young people.

The concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1990; Morrow, 1999; Putnam, 1995) is linked to brokerage, because creating the network creates and garners social capital, which can be experienced as forms of individual subjective and collective trust, social cohesion or confidence (Hannan, 1999), as well as expectation of benefit or reward. In this respect, the process of brokerage bears directly on the wellbeing of youths within the context of their experiences with un/employment. In addition, the level of power brokers have affects their brokerage opportunities, according to (Landis et al., 2018).

In some settings, cultural competence also plays a key role in brokering. Cultural competence is defined differently across multiple contexts, but generally it refers to the expectation on the part of the patient or client, that service providers demonstrate cultural awareness, and act ethically and equitably while discharging their obligations (Garran & Werkmeister Rozas, 2013; Henderson et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2019). It is important, for example, when brokering employment and training opportunities in Indigenous communities (Maru & Davies, 2011) and also when assisting culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities to navigate the health, education and justice systems (Martinez & Campbell, 2007; Pang et al., 2019; Shepherd & Masuka, 2021). In this context, the style of brokerage is important in terms of the quality of networks involved. For example, strong bonding

networks (such as between individuals and families; Bourdieu, 1990) in Indigenous communities are important in terms of mutual support. Opportunities to engage with mainstream employment may be missed, however, if brokers neglect to develop linking networks that is, between individuals and broader institutions (Maru & Davies, 2011).

Several types of brokering have been identified in research (Stovel & Shaw, 2012). For example, a "gatekeeper" type of broker generally controls access to one party while the other party is isolated and therefore dependent on them. A "representative" broker acts more on behalf of one party and makes representations to another party. A brokerage style of "coordinator" involves both parties and the broker working as a team. The style of the "itinerant" broker is a situation in which both parties have already formed a relationship and the broker is mobile and on hand as needed. The style of brokerage has implications for cohesion and bias among the parties involved. One of the issues identified in the literature are the negative aspects of brokering, such as the potential for gain, corruption or benefiting from conflict between the parties the broker is expected to bridge (Stovel & Shaw, 2012), seen in the context of management (Lee & Lee, 2017). Brokerage also carries the risk of bias, such as when a broker is more strongly aligned with one party than another, when forming a bridge between them. Different brokering styles have different implications for the parties involved. A broker may come under stress if called on to reconcile competing social norms between parties. Alternatively, if brokers adopt a "one size fits all strategy" clients with vastly different needs can be overlooked. For example, in providing educational brokering for youth homeless populations, the differing needs of connected youths, refugee, and long-term homeless youths might be neglected (Broadbent, 2008). This illustrates why brokering is important to the wellbeing of unemployed youths and young adults.

Formal employment service providers are not the only significant relationship involved in the formative experiences of work and unemployment for young people. Also involved are teachers, counsellors and outreach workers. For example, teachers involved in the provision of flexible learning options (FLOs) at the end of secondary school also play a role in managing youths in transition. FLOs are a form of secondary schooling which provides a different learning environment for secondary school students who have been disenfranchised by or have disengaged from mainstream schooling. FLOs are integral to understanding un/employment issues as they tend to focus on qualifications, future work pathways, and individual aspects of wellbeing related to employment such as confidence and resilience (Te Riele et al., 2017). Therefore, in order take account of this variety of influences on unemployed youths' and young adults' wellbeing, the concept of employment brokering is critical, because it can help explain the influence of young people's social support network on their experience of un/employment.

2.4.1 The social context of unemployment: formal employment services in Australia

We should also consider the specific context of employment services that young people may engage with on leaving school and looking for work. In view of the features and evolution of the Australian system, it is worthwhile considering the research literature from an historical perspective. In Australia, like other developed countries, the experience of young people and unemployment is influenced by the availability of welfare for the unemployed. Young people engaged in full-time study may receive a welfare payment (youth allowance), and young people not in training have access to the unemployment benefit (JobSeeker, formerly Newstart). In the late 1980s, the way that unemployed people were supported in Australia changed to a "mutual obligation" framework, in which receipt of social security benefits was made increasingly conditional on a demonstration of commitment to find work, through a

variety of new processes (Eardley & Matheson, 2000). The main changes included individualised job seeker interviews with employment brokers, activity agreements (applying for a certain number of jobs within a defined period), sanctions for noncompliance, and case management for the long-term unemployed. Simultaneously, job support services were contracted to private agencies as well as not-for-profit organisations.

The effects of this change in policy have been evaluated with respect to the impact on clients (the unemployment benefit recipients) and brokers. For example, there has been mixed-methods research into how unemployed people respond to the requirements of the mutual obligation regime, particularly in their dealings with social security services. For example, a report by Considine et al. (2003) found that unemployed people had a range of negative experiences with Centrelink (now Services Australia; the bureau of the welfare system in Australia). These included a lack of understanding on the part of the staff concerning mental health issues or substance use problems, as well as late payments and communication via computer rather than in person. Regarding the use of government contracted agencies, they were perceived as helpful mainly for the material assistance with resume writing, access to computer resources, and basic job skills training. However, the agencies' and agents' understanding of mental health issues was not examined, leaving a further gap in the literature into the precise practices and role of agencies concerning mental health issues faced by the youth unemployed population. In terms of constructions of the mutual obligation regime, the study highlights two key points. First, there was the perception by unemployed people that the requirements of the regime hinder job seeking activities. Second, in terms of barriers to employment a lack of interpersonal and organisational skills was found to be among the greatest barriers. It is also not known how much employment brokers are aware of

this and how they help overcome these barriers and facilitate this sort of development in their young clients.

A follow-up of Considine's (2003) study into the organisational practices of service providers indicated little had changed after nearly two decades of the contracting system of service delivery. Considine et al. (2011) notes that some of the arguments in favour of the new system of contracting were that the result would be greater flexibility of service providers freed from governmental control, more specialised services to cater to those with differing needs, and better service as the providers were not wholly dependent on market trends. However, in their repeat study, the responses of service providers indicated that the pressures on case managers had increased, and specialisation and flexibility were limited by organisations' business needs, increased government regulation, and a fear on the part of staff of "getting it wrong". They also found that staff agreed that the IT systems they used as part of the system (previously called Job Network, then Job Services Australia, currently Job Active) dictated how they performed their job. This research raises important questions about how frontline service providers interact and deliver services to young people, and if they themselves count any constraints in their abilities to carry out their role. Further research is needed to address what the service providers themselves think about these issues, and how it affects their interactions with young people.

Over the course of its institution, there have been several critical evaluations of the contracting system, and its effect on the practices of employment brokers in the literature. One of the features of the new system found that it abandoned the goal of full employment, where everyone has a job, in favour of "full employability", where everyone has the skills needed to gain a job, or is "work ready" (Cowling & Mitchell, 2003, p. 22). To evaluate the extent to which this goal had been realised, Considine (2000) compared public, private and

not-for-profit providers on the same criteria as the older, universal public system; that is, the outcomes of getting their clients into either education or employment. The study found that the new system was better at dealing with the long-term unemployed than the older system, but that different outcomes were achieved for different types of client and across different types of provider, in ways that served to entrench these differences. The practice whereby service providers concentrate their efforts on finding work for those who experience less severe barriers to employment and who have better skills, is known as "creaming", and a similar process, in which those who face greater challenges are deprioritised and left to wait, has been identified as "parking" (Cowling & Mitchell, 2003, p. 99). These practices present challenges for countries who have adopted this system, in terms of the efficiency of funds spent on employment outcomes (Carter & Whitworth, 2015), as well as for jobseekers themselves, who may find themselves without adequate support and "stuck" in unemployment (Laliberte Rudman & Aldrich, 2016).

The use of the contracting or tendering system in Australia, has been compared internationally among countries with similar systems, including the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and the UK (Van Berkel et al., 2007, 2010). International comparisons show overall that benefits to the unemployed have decreased to various degrees, depending on the country. This shows, at a global level, how the type of welfare regime impacts upon the experiences of unemployed (Van Kersbergen & Hemerijck, 2012). According to Van Berkel (2010), the adoption of such a system rests upon a variety of assumptions about practices and different types of governance. These include procedural governance (bureaucratic), corporate governance (contract and target based), market-based governance (competition between service providers), and network governance (cooperation, co-funding and information sharing). The different types of governance, and the associated practices, show the variety of

ways that employment brokers are connected to youths unemployed at the level of social institutions.

These aspects are important, because they are linked to the social capital available to unemployed people. The networks among formal employment service providers are the resources by which outcomes for the unemployed are achieved, further supporting how social support impacts on unemployment distress (Varekamp et al., 2015). Reliance on welfare and dependence on the state is also likely to have implications for the experience of unemployment (Wright, 2016). These include the psychological impacts of welfare conditionality (Wright & Patrick, 2019), as well as the compounding disadvantages of being categorised into client groups which may have a negative outcome in terms of the level of service received (McGann et al., 2020; O'Sullivan et al., 2021; O'Sullivan et al., 2019). Attendance at appointments with employment service providers as a condition of receiving welfare has been reported by jobseekers as being unhelpful as a practice when it comes to securing work and psychologically harmful over time (O'Halloran et al., 2020; 2021; 2022). The implications of less than adequate service delivery on remote and Indigenous jobseekers has also been described, with concerns that the mode of service delivery could also be culturally disempowering (Fowkes, 2018; Staines, 2021). Research on the experiences of jobseekers indicates that work experience activities with employment service providers is often not regarded by jobseekers as helpful in gaining a job (Antoniou, 2020; Casey, 2022; Casey, 2021). In addition, in light of these difficulties it is recognised that additional community services often fill the unmet needs of young jobseekers, in terms of vocational training and planning, in parallel with formal employment services (Moore, 2019). It is clear from the research literature how formal employment services are constituted and deployed at the organisational and structural levels, and that there is variability in the experience that

young jobseekers may have with the system overall. What is less clear is how employment brokers themselves position unemployed youths, what strategies they use to support them, their awareness of mental health issues, and how they construct youth unemployment generally. These questions encompass informal employment brokers as well.

The research literature has touched on the experiences and constructions of mentors and youth workers. Ezaki's (2014) qualitative study of youth workers in the US demonstrates the variety of positions taken by youth workers and mentors in relation to their Youth clients. For example, youth workers report playing a variety of roles, which can include "parent", "teacher", or "boss" (Ezaki, 2014, p. 37). However, more research is needed into these experiences in an unemployment context, and in the setting of Western Sydney.

2.5 Employment brokers and youths: A social-ecological perspective

The narrative review thus far has described how unemployment is associated with health and wellbeing among unemployed youths. It has examined how psychological distress plays a key role in this, and the main theories which account for how distress can impact on unemployed youths. Following on from this, the review has examined the transitional and developmental issues which co-occur with these processes, and how the social environment and those surrounding youths are also involved. In view of this, the influence of formal and informal employment brokers is considered and described, concluding with the need to examine their influence on the experiences of unemployed youths in greater detail and to examine their influence in relation to young people's own experiences. Qualitative methods have also been suggested as appropriate for this aim. In order to account for the various mechanisms that influence unemployed youths and young adults a broader theory is needed which can incorporate both the subjective experiences of the youths and the perspectives and

practices of those who facilitate their entry into the labour market. That is, those who engage in formal and informal employment brokering.

This study frames the experiences of unemployed youths and the experiences of brokers working with unemployed youths in terms of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1986; 1989). The socio-ecological model is a theoretical framework and a metaphor for understanding how social contexts influence an individual's health, worldviews, and development (Stanger, 2011). It conceptualises the individual as part of a series of nested ecosystems (see Figure 1).

CHRONOSYSTEM

MACROSYSTEM

EXOSYSTEM

Economy

Global

MESOSYSTEM

Culture

Religion

Values

MICROSYSTEM

Beliefs

Behaviour

Cognitive system
Emotional System
Body

School

Family

Peers

Society

Institutions

Community

Ideologies

Time
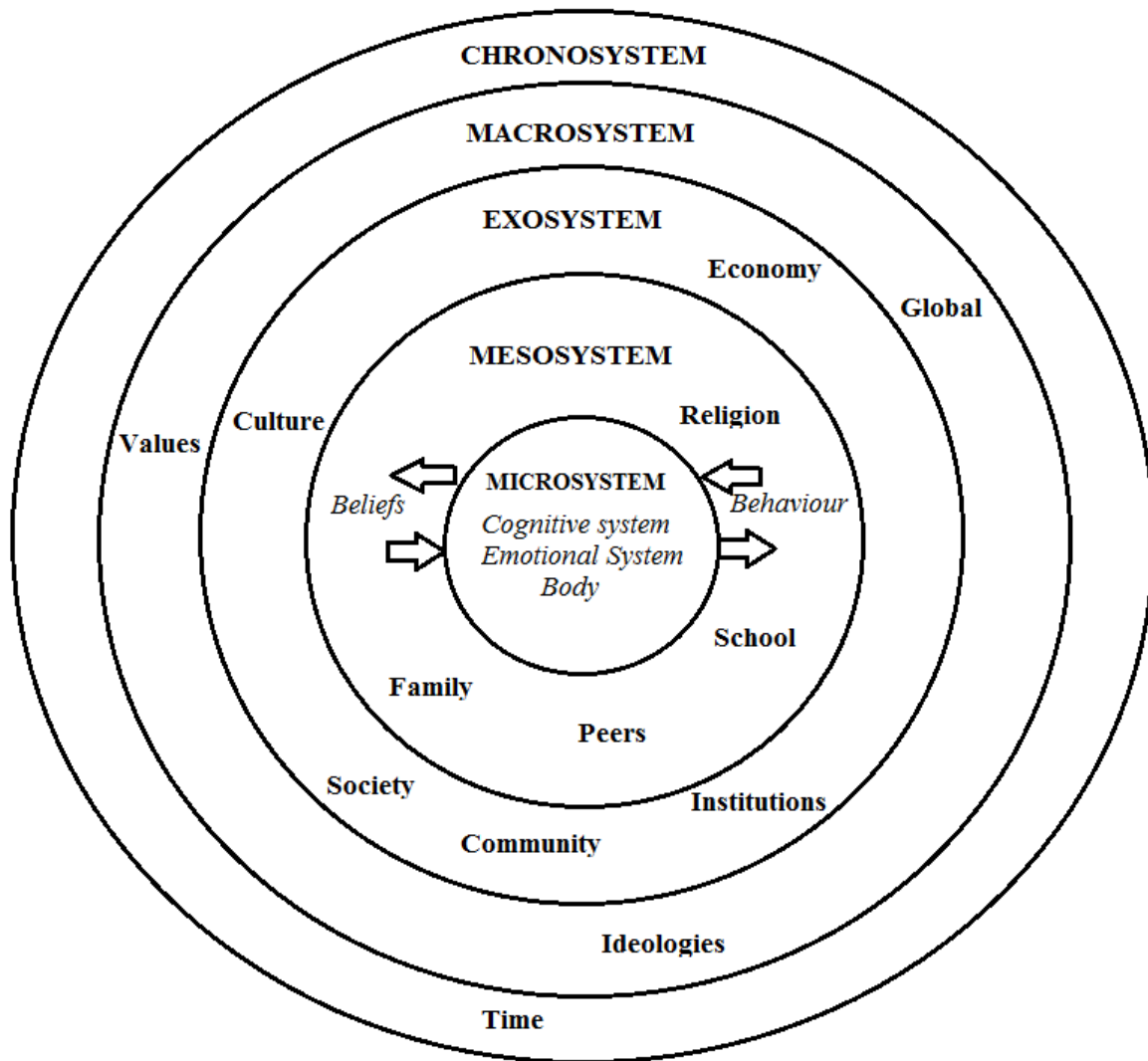
Figure 1. An Illustrated diagram of a socio-ecological model (Adapted from Berger, 2014.)

These ecosystems affect the individual materially, but they also describe the social networks
and structures that are amenable to human behaviour and influence it in turn. Because of this
characteristic, the model has proven useful in describing human development from dyadic
structures in infancy to more complex familial, educational structures and peer group
influences. This is demonstrated by research which has used the model to study topics such as
students' academic achievement, parental pressure on adolescents, bullying at school and
health behaviours across the lifespan (Small & Luster, 1990; Steinberg et al., 1995; Swearer
et al., 2012; Townsend & Foster, 2013).

Individuals are embedded within a nested ecosystem. First, there is the micro-system, which refers to the environments that immediately surrounds the individual and in which they are an active participant. It comprises their immediate physical surroundings, their body, beliefs and behaviour and means for interacting with the social world. In the context of unemployed youths, the micro-system would describe influences such as their vocational behaviour, their beliefs about working, their living situation and mental health.

The second nested ecosystem is known as the meso-system. The meso-system describes the social networks and environments that immediately surround the micro-system. These might include the family network, the education setting, teachers, and counsellors. There is a mutual influence of the micro-system and meso-system because of the close social bonds and interactions which develop at this level, the influences of individual actions on relationships and the impact of relationship quality on individual subjectivity. The meso-system also refers to the links that exist between these domains. In the context of youth unemployment this might include the quality of the links between the education setting and family networks.

The third system, known as the exo-system, refers to influences that exist at the level of institutions, governments, companies, cultures and communities. It refers to the influences that wider and more formal social structures have on individuals. The exo-system is also comprised of several meso-systems; for example, as many schools or colleges may comprise an education system. The exo-system also refers to the networks that exist to link meso- and micro-systems together, such as the transport or health systems.

The macro-system refers to global influences which shape and are shaped by a combination of exo-systems. In the context of youth unemployment this might refer to influences that are

experienced by all, such as global economic influences. It might refer to influences which bind exo-systems together such as shared ideologies or value systems.

Finally, there is the chrono-system, which refers to the influence of time. Time, in the context of the model, specifically refers to the changing nature of each individual and the systems of which they are a part. The chronosystem can change the influence of any one system or level relative to the other.

Given the role in the model accorded to the passage of time, it is important to note the socio-ecological model is also a model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). A key concept within the model is the role of proximal processes. The socio-ecological model holds that close relationships formed between the micro- and meso-systems stimulate and drive development in the individual, in concert with genetic influences. This includes, for example, the dyadic relationship between parent and child. While individual development may be influenced more strongly in initial stages in the micro-system and meso-system, proximal processes enable more complex development and interaction with the exo- and macro-systems. For example, a parent reading to a child is an example of a proximal process that drives development and enables interaction with progressively more complex layers of the social context such as education and employment. The key point is that within the socio-ecological model, development is not just a biological, individual process but a relational one as well. In the context of youth unemployment, this concept is useful as a way of describing the many ways youths may be in transition, as is demonstrated below. The socio ecological model provides a lens through which peer networks, educational systems, social welfare regimes, family circumstances, industrial and economic shifts and other influences relevant to youth unemployment can be understood in terms of how they relate to individual development.

The socio-ecological model is an appropriate lens for examining the issue of youth unemployment. The model has been used to study related concepts and populations. For example, it has been used to re-evaluate educational practices (Stanger, 2011). It has been used to study school and community interventions that promote positive development (Durlak et al., 2007) and to study school and community partnerships (Leonard, 2011). The model has also been used more widely to show links in different ecosystems; for example, to inform mental health policy and practice (Eriksson et al., 2018), to inform counselling training (Lau & Ng, 2014) and promote resilience in disadvantaged communities (Henderson et al., 2016). The socio-ecological model has been used in conjunction with content analysis methods to study unemployment interventions in Egypt, to identify how these interventions operate on each level of the model (Fahmy, 2012). It is relevant to the current study because it has been used to investigate school to work transitions, particularly young peoples' experience of agency during this period, which has clear implications for mental health (Schoon et al., 2017). More recently, the model has been used to identify how different socio-ecological factors influence quality of life in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Aruta et al., 2022).

This thesis argues that a socio-ecological perspective can extend our understanding of the youth–broker dynamic as the model intersects with the concepts of brokering, youth transitions, and youths and the influence of un/employment on health and wellbeing. Therefore, this study focuses on the elements of the SEM, in its qualitative analysis of the experiences of unemployed youths and young adults in the Australian context. The socio-ecological model has also been utilised in a number of studies of issues pertaining to youths, education and mental health. For example, it has been used to study bullying in adolescence (Swearer et al., 2012), healthy eating at school (Townsend & Foster, 2013) and promoting

resilience in economically disadvantaged youths (Henderson et al., 2016). More recently, the socio-ecological model has been utilised in studying the impact of COVID-19 in the Philippines, showing how the impact of socio-ecological factors such as public safety and trust in institutions interact with psychological distress, and how the experience of psychological distress increases the impact of these factors on quality of life (Achdut & Refaeli, 2020). This resonates with the way psychological distress relates to unemployment and highlights the way that young unemployed people must navigate a range of influences beyond the requirements of education, training, and the career objectives. Therefore, in order to achieve the aims of the research, this thesis investigates three questions:

1) How do unemployed youths in Western Sydney experience and construct un/employment and what are the main influences on their wellbeing?

2) How do formal and informal employment brokers across a variety of settings experience and construct working with unemployed youths, and how does it shape their interactions with unemployed youths?

3) How do the accounts of youths and brokers converge and diverge and what are the implications raised?

The following chapter describes the practical context of the current thesis and the methods used to pursue these questions.

Chapter 3 Methodology and procedure

3.1 Preamble

This chapter outlines the analytical and pragmatic context of the thesis, and the methodology used to achieve the research aims. It begins by positioning the current research project within a larger project evaluating the effectiveness of an online vocationally oriented mental health program for young people. Second, it outlines the process by which youths and broker participants were recruited for this adjunct study. Third, it describes the characteristics of the two groups, followed by the procedure used to collect the interview data. Finally, the theoretical position of the research is detailed, and the qualitative analysis conducted on the data is described.

3.2 Positioning the research project

In the face of the changing context of employment, this study seeks to understand how young unemployed people experience and construct employment and unemployment. Further, given the important position of employment brokering in the un/employment experiences of youths established in Chapter 2, this research also seeks to understand how formal and informal employment brokers experience and construct youth employment and unemployment.

The current qualitative study is an adjunct study to a quantitative evaluation of the effectiveness of an online vocationally oriented cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) training program, "Walk the Talk". Walk the Talk consists of a series of online video modules depicting vignettes of unemployment and employment and introduced the CBT concept of self-talk to manage negative impacts of unemployment. The effectiveness of the program was to be assessed by a series of standardised measures on the psychological outcomes self-

esteem, self-efficacy, psychological distress, and work commitment, administered by online survey pre- and post-intervention.[1]

The current qualitative study provided the opportunity to explore the experiences and constructions of youths and young adults of un/employment and to add to the hitherto unheard voices of employment brokers, both formal and informal to the body of research on youth unemployment and employment brokering in the Western Sydney setting. Provision for the current study was made as an amendment to the ethics protocol for the broader Walk the Talk evaluation. See Appendix A for the relevant ethics amendment pertaining to the broader protocol. Appendix B contains the relevant ethics amendment to the study protocol pertaining to the additional sample of brokers.

The conduct of the qualitative study was influenced in two ways by its being embedded in the wider project. First, demographic data on the participants in the current study was collected by means of an online survey (see Appendix C), administered as part of *W*alk the Talk. Second, as the protocol for Walk the Talk provided for a follow-up survey, there was potential for the participants to be interviewed at two time points. Five participants elected to be interviewed twice. Because this affected the ability to make uniform comparisons across the dataset with respect to time, for analysis purposes each of these participants' follow-up interviews were considered an extension of their first interview and analysed as a single interview.

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[1] The Walk the Talk evaluation project was not completed due to a series of logistic and institutional issues. The candidate, Andrew Kellett, was not an investigator on Walk the Talk. The research in this thesis was collected subsequent to the termination of the Walk the Talk project.

3.3 Design

To permit an investigation of different positions on employment, the way these different perspectives influence practice, and the consequences for youths' and young adults' lived experience of un/employment, a qualitative design was adopted, utilising semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. This method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to explore specific areas of interest while simultaneously allowing the interviewee open responses and the opportunity elaborate on issues that were important to them. The study had two participant groups of interest: a group of unemployed young people, and a group of employment brokers who were working with or had worked with, unemployed person/s aged 17–25 in a professional capacity (respectively referred to in this chapter as "youths" and "brokers"). Brokers were interviewed once, while some of the youth participants were interviewed twice.

3.4 Participants

The youth sample consisted of 17 participants (mean age = 18.5 years, SD = 1.51). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the youth sample case by case. The sample was in broad terms, evenly split between male and female, mostly heterosexual, mostly single, half from an Anglo-Australian and half from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, nearly half receiving the youth allowance benefit,[2] and almost half with an educational level higher than Year 10 (leaving age) at high school.

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[2] This is a government payment generally made to young people aged 16–21 who are currently doing an apprenticeship, studying full time or doing other activities to improve their work prospects as they search for work.

Table 1. Youth participant demographics

Variable	M	SD
Age in years	18.5	1.51
	n	%
Gender		
Male	8	47.1
Female	8	47.1
Transgender	1	5.9
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	14	82.4
Non-heterosexual	2	11.8
Other	1	5.9
Relationship status		
Single	11	64.7
Partnered	5	29.4
Other	1	5.9
Ethnic background		
Anglo-Australian	8	50.0
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1	6.3
Other*	7	43.8
Government payments		
Youth Allowance	8	47.0
Not receiving	9	53.0
Level of education completed		
Up to Year 10	10	58.8
Year 12	5	29.4
Diploma or trade qualification	2	11.8

*Other includes: Samoan, Italian-Aust., Lebanese-Aust., S.E. Asian, Turkish, Maori-Aust., Lebanese-Greek.

Table 2 shows the participant demographics case by case. The table is included here to provide context for individual participant accounts presented in the analysis. The data contained in this table serve to augment the participant accounts and give the reader some description of the characteristics of the speaker when their accounts are referred to in the analysis. When participants are referred to in the analysis, only a pseudonym and age is given.

Table 2. Youth participant demographics case by case

Participant pseudonym	Age	Gender	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnic background	Government payment	Time receiving payment	Level of education
Jeffrey	17	Transgender	Transgender	PT-not living	Anglo-Aust.	Youth Allowance	2 months	Year 10
Jessica	22	Female	Heterosexual	Single	Indigenous Aust.	Youth Allowance	5 years	Year 10
Rachel	19	Female	Heterosexual	Single	Samoan	Not receiving	-	Year 12
Sheila	n/s	Female	Heterosexual	PT-not living	Anglo-Aust.	Not receiving	-	Tertiary/trade
Brienne	18	Female	Non-heterosexual	Single	Italian-Aust.	Not receiving	-	Year 10
Norma	20	Female	Heterosexual	Single	Lebanese-Aust.	Youth Allowance	1 year	Tertiary/trade
Arya	18	Female	Heterosexual	PT-not living	Anglo-Aust.	Not receiving	-	Year 12
Shay	18	Female	Heterosexual	Other	Anglo-Aust.	Not receiving	-	Year 10
Keira	17	Female	Heterosexual	Single	Anglo-Aust.	Not receiving	-	Year 12
Harvey	19	Male	Non-heterosexual	PT-not living	Anglo-Aust.	Youth Allowance	3 years	Year 10
Lewis	18	Male	Heterosexual	PT-living	Anglo-Aust.	Youth Allowance	1 to 2 years	Year 10
Tyson	17	Male	Heterosexual	Single	Anglo-Aust.	Not receiving	-	Year 10
Mike	19	Male	Heterosexual	Single	S.E. Asian	Youth Allowance	A week	Year 10
Archie	17	Male	Heterosexual	Single	Anglo-Aust.	Youth Allowance	1 week	Year 10
Maxwell	21	Male	Heterosexual	Single	Turkish	Youth Allowance	Not at present	Year 10
Jamie	17	Male	Heterosexual	Single	Maori-Aust.	Not receiving	-	Year 12
Barnaby	19	Male	Heterosexual	Single	Lebanese-Greek	Not receiving	-	Year 12

Table 3 shows the work activities of the youth sample case by case. The majority of the participants were seeking full-time work. Those who had been employed recently reported casual work of limited hours. Short courses and skills training were common work activities in this sample, and most of the participants had only been looking for work within the last 2 years, with the exception of a few older participants who had been seeking work for longer.

Table 3. Participant work activities case by case

Participant pseudonym	Looked for work (years)	Last worked (years)	Work activities*	Paid work in the last month	Basis of work	Number of hours	Still in position	Looking for work	Kind of work sought
Jeffrey	Less than 2	Never	2,3,4,5	No				Yes	Full time
Jessica	2 to 5	Less than 2	1,3,5	No				Yes	Part time
Rachel	Less than 2	Never	1,2,4	No				Yes	Full time
Sheila	Less than 2	Less than 2	4,5	No				Yes	Full time
Brienne	Less than 2	Less than 2	2,4	Yes		Less than 10	No	Yes	Full time
Norma	Less than 2	Less than 2	1,4,5	Yes	Casual	Less than 10	No	No	Part time
Arya	2 to 5	Less than 2	1	Yes	Casual	10 to 20	Yes	No	
Shay	Did not look	Never	2	No				No	Casual
Keira	2 to 5	2 to 5	2	No				Yes	Casual
Harvey	More than 5	More than 5	2,4,5	Yes	Temporary	Less than 10	No	Yes	Full time
Lewis	2 to 5	Less than 2	2,4,5	No				Yes	Full time
Tyson	Did not look	Less than 2	4	No				Yes	Full time
Mike	Less than 2	Less than 2	-	No				Yes	Part time
Archie	Less than 2	Less than 2	2,4,5	Yes	Casual	30 to 40	No	Yes	Full time
Maxwell	Less than 2	Less than 2	2,5	No				Yes	Full time
Jamie	Less than 2	Never	1,2,3	No				Yes	Full time
Barnaby	Less than 2	Less than 2	2,4	Yes	Casual	20 to 30	Yes	Yes	Full time

*1 = Work experience, 2 = Voluntary (family), 3 = Voluntary (community), 4 = Short course, 5 = Skills training, 6 = Work for the dole.

Table 4. Participant work activities at follow-up case by case

Participant pseudonym	Work activities*	Paid work in last month	Basis of work	Number of hours	Still in position	Looking for work	Kind of work sought
Jessica	1,2,4,5	No				Yes	Casual
Rachel	1,2,3,4,5	Yes	Temporary	Less than 10	Yes	Yes	Full time
Brienne	2	Yes	Other		No	Yes	Full time
Lewis	1,2	Yes	Casual	30–40	Yes	No	
Mike	-	No				No	
Maxwell	5	No			Yes	Yes	Full time

*1 = Work experience, 2 = Voluntary (family), 3 = Voluntary (community), 4 = Short course, 5 = Skills training, 6 = Work for the dole.

Table 4 shows the work activities of the youths who participated in follow-up interviews at the time of those interviews. Most participants reported engaging with some form of voluntary work in the family environment, followed by participation in short courses. Three of the participants had been successful in finding a job at the time of the follow-up interview.

Youths and young adult participants were defined as aged 17–25 years and looking for work. Youths aged 17 years were deemed to have sufficient maturity to provide informed consent because, in view of their seeking employment independently, may not have lived with their family of origin and may have moved intercity or interstate in search of employment. There were no other exclusion criteria. A sample of youths was identified as a function of their having any dealings with an organisation with a presence in Western Sydney, although the organisations may have had branches elsewhere.

The sample of brokers consisted of 14 participants (nine female, five male). The broker sample comprised a range of occupations and job titles. This reflected the range of organisations contacted for participation and the iterative process of networking through several channels before willing participants were identified. Table 5 describes the mix of broker roles by their job titles. This included brokers engaged in work transitions in formal agencies, those who worked at a service for youths in a local community, a psychologist and a social worker. Significantly, the broker sample also included several teachers working in a vocational school, enabling perspectives across the span of youth transitions to work to be canvassed.

Table 5. Broker participants by job title

Pseudonym	Gender	Job title
Bill	M	CEO of organisation
Brighton	M	Work mentor
Cora	F	Community engagement officer
Edith	F	Registered psychologist
Fran	F	Youth mentor
Dana	F	Employment training and education coordinator
Jonah	M	Social worker
Julia	F	Teacher, vocational school
Kirk	M	Teacher, vocational school
Malcolm	M	Community development manager
Marjorie	F	Vocational skills teacher
Mary	F	Teacher, vocational school
Nicky	F	Employment team leader
Olivia	F	School counsellor

3.5 Recruitment

Youth participants were identified and approached indirectly through a process of

organisational brokering. The researcher approached any organisation that was engaged with

providing either employment services, youth services or vocational education and training

and which may have had clients meeting the study criteria. In order to purposively sample

youths with experience of unemployment, organisations having a presence in Western

Sydney were selected. Outer South-Western and South-Western suburbs of Sydney have been

reported as having some of the highest youth unemployment rates in Sydney, at 9.0 per cent

and 8.9 per cent respectively (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2018). Organisations included a

range of not-for-profit, employment service providers, and community outreach

organisations. The liaison person was then identified in these organisations, and usually this

was the person involved with the organisations' existing youth programs. This contact person

was presented with a copy of the youth participant information sheet (PIS; see Appendix D)

and the youth participant consent form (see Appendix E). This person liaised with brokers in

their organisation in identifying youths in the target population, and facilitated a connection between them and the researcher, often in the context of one of the organisation's existing work skills programs or youth meetings. Once the researcher was introduced to potential participants, the research was explained clearly and briefly by the researcher, accompanied by the PIS and consent form. Youths and young adults who were willing to participate in the study left their contact details with the researcher, whether they were approached as part of a group or individually. The researcher then contacted them via phone or email to arrange an interview, to take place either over the phone, or in person at a time and place of their convenience.

Recruitment of formal and informal employment brokers followed an iterative process, overlapping with the recruitment of the youth sample. In the course of recruitment for the youth sample, the researcher built up a network of professionals who had experience with youths and young adults and it was from this network that a sample of brokers was identified, with the criteria that they be working directly with young people, and not just in a purely administrative or managerial capacity. Brokers were contacted directly and provided with a copy of the broker sample PIS (see Appendix F) and participant consent form (see Appendix G). If willing to participate, they then arranged to meet the researcher for an interview.

3.6 Data collection procedure

The majority of the interviews for the youth sample were conducted in a private space in the offices of the organisational brokers such as an anteroom. Some youths elected to be interviewed via other settings such as the university, in a library in a private room, or over the telephone. The brokers were generally interviewed in their own offices, with two brokers opting for a telephone interview. At the interview with the youth group, the researcher began by confirming that the participants had read and understood the information sheet and the

consent form. Once the researcher had received the written consent form, they proceeded with the semi-structured interview using the interview schedule for the youth sample (Appendix H) or the broker sample (Appendix I) as appropriate. The interview schedule for the youths covered topics such as looking for work and any setbacks encountered, time commitments, and the general experience of unemployment. Question 6 ("Have there been any advantages/disadvantages to being a man/woman when seeking a job?") was dropped from the youth interview schedule after the first few interviews because it proved difficult for participants to elaborate on. The broker interview schedule covered topics such as the broker's responsibilities, typical interactions with youth clients, and approaches to the wellbeing of their clients. The interviewer loosely followed the interview schedule, diverting the interview from it as necessary to explore experiences and constructions of interest to the research and prompting in order to elicit responses to the questions in greater detail.

The interviews were digitally recorded. Where a youth participant took part in a second interview, the same interview procedure was followed with informed consent implied as provision for a follow-up was made in the PIS at the first interview. Additional detail was sought on topics raised in earlier interviews. See Appendix J for the follow-up interview schedule. Data collection ceased when the goal of saturation was achieved, and it became clear that the interview data were not yielding anything new in relation to the research questions. In addition, the time that the researcher had allocated for the data collection process had elapsed. The average duration of the youth interviews was 37 minutes. The youth interviews were generally shorter because their responses were brief and often required more prompting and clarification on the part of the researcher. The duration of the broker interviews was generally longer with an average 50 minutes. However, one of the brokers terminated the interview after four minutes due to immediate work matters requiring their

attention, after which they declined to continue the interview. This illustrated the difference in the constraints surrounding each group's engagement with the research. The youths were constrained by the dynamics and language of the interview format; whereas the brokers were constrained by their professional commitments. While most brokers were not under any time pressure during the actual interview, the time it took to arrange an interview was somewhat longer than for the youth sample, which generally took longer to identify. All participants, including brokers, received $30AUD compensation per interview for their time in the form of a gift voucher. In most cases this was delivered in person at the conclusion of the interview but in cases where a telephone interview was conducted this was sent via post.

3.7 Transcription and integrity checking

Once the interviews had been digitally recorded, the interviews were professionally transcribed by a third party and integrity checked by the researcher. During the integrity checking process, the researcher corrected any transcription errors of the transcribers. Integrity checking also revealed many cases where the direct transcription of the interviews hindered a full understanding of the participants meaning because of grammatical errors in speech. Where these data were used as extracts in the reporting the results, the researcher took the liberty of altering these utterances and indicating where such alteration occurred by means of square brackets. Participants were allocated a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality and any identifiable information within the transcripts was de-identified; for example, suburb names occurring in extracts might be designated "[WS suburb]" to indicate where the participant referred to a location in Western Sydney which might be close to their place of residence.

Chapter 4 Data analysis

4.1 Theoretical position

The concern of the research question with both the materiality of being unemployed and the way that the meaning of this is constructed entails a commitment to the theoretical position of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998). This position recognises a reality socially constructed through discourse, but not reducible to it (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). Discourse refers to "the set of meanings, metaphors, representations… that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 2003, p. 64).

In this study, social constructions surrounding unemployment were approached through the lens of positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré et al., 2009; Langenhove & Harré, 1994). Positioning theory argues that the "constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46) . A subject position refers to the way in which people are situated, and situate themselves, within a structure of rights and responsibilities (Harré et al., 2009). This approach recognises the power of discourse to channel human experience while at the same time recognising the power of individuals to draw upon them in social situations (Burr, 2003). Implicit in the concept of a subject position is the idea that individuals can accept, resist, or reject discourses to a greater or lesser extent (Gavey, 1989). This has implications for analysis in that it moves the focus toward a contrast between where subjects are conceptualised as unitary and as having consistent narratives, to where they are conceptualised as fragmentary and where their subjectivity is contested by various discourses. This theoretical approach is compatible with the socio-ecological model, where the self-positioning of subjects may affect relationships between individuals on every level: micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-, and consequently influence health and development.

4.2 Analytic procedure

4.3 Thematic analysis

The analysis of the interview data followed the thematic analysis procedure as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in accommodating a range of theoretical perspectives and was appropriate to the breadth and depth of the qualitative data collected. Thematic analysis proceeds by a close reading of the data, organising the data into chunks of codes and sub-codes. The aim of initial coding is to organise the data, before connections are made and patterns identified to address the research question. The organisation of the data into codes from the raw interview data was facilitated by using qualitative data management software (QSR NVivo).

4.4 Youth sample coding process

Data from the youth group were organised into codes using a coding frame with several codes suggested by the literature (for example, positive experiences and benefits of work) and from the data itself (for example, negative experiences of employment). See Table 6 for the youth coding frame.

Table 6. Youth coding frame

Code	Sub-code
Employment support	Family or partner
	Government
	Social
Experiences with service providers	Negative or ambivalent
	Positive experiences
Gender or age or cultural experiences of work or unemployment	Negative or ambivalent
	Positive
Logistical barriers to employment	Domestic violence
	Drugs
	Education system
	Financial
	Functional aspects or administration
	Chronic health conditions other than mental health
	Housing
	Justice system
	Transport
Meaning of unemployment – open-ended survey question	
Negative experiences of work	Bullying or harassment
	Conflict
	Injury
	Layoff or resignation
Negative or ambivalent experiences of unemployment	Boredom
	Distress and mental health conditions
	Education or training-negative
	Low confidence
	Negative or ambivalent experience of employers
	Rejection
	Time spent looking for work
Positive experiences of unemployment	Education or training-positive
	Finding a job or call back
	Free time
Positive experiences of work	Financial
	Independence
	Personal goals or learning new skills
	Social aspects
The meaning of work (desire, preferences, expectations)	
Walk the Talk program	Information
	Modality or user experience
	Presentation

In the first stage of the coding process, broad categories were used to classify the chunks of

data. To take an example from the youth coding frame, this included such categories as

"Positive experiences of work". Within these broad categories, a more specific layer would

be applied to the coding frame, such as "Positive experiences of work – social aspects" or

"Positive experiences of work – financial benefits", to take an example from the youth coding frame. The data within these codes would then be summarised into experiences or constructions which could be distinguished theoretically. For example, "Positive experiences of work – social aspects" might include experiences of "avoiding isolation" or "building a trusted reputation". See Figure 2 for an example of the youth coding summary.

Code	Sub-codes	Examples
Positive Experiences Of Work	Social aspects	• Meeting new people (Brienne, Harvey, Maxwell, Mike, Norma); • Working as a team (Mike) (Shay) • Avoiding boredom (Harvey, Lewis) • Avoiding isolation (Maxwell) • Helping people (Jeffrey) • Getting along with co-workers (Lewis), • Getting along with customers (Sheila) • Working in a good environment (Lewis) • Building a trusted reputation (Maxwell*) • Building work friendships (Tyson)
Negative Experiences Of Work	Bullying or harassment	• Being bullied or harassed (Arya)(Brienne, Lewis)(Jamie) • Being injured (Harvey)
	Conflict	• Working with family (Barnaby) • Being bossed around (Brienne)
	Injury or Illness	• Being injured by employer (Harvey); • Managing the risk of injury (Jeffrey, Sheila), • Being unemployable due to injury (Lewis)
	Layoff or resignation	• Being bullied (Archie); • Failing to communicate with employer (Maxwell) • Being sacked without reason (Sheila) • Being made redundant (Tyson)

Figure 2. Youth coding summary

In the second stage of analysis, these codes and sub-codes were re-read for both their prevalence across each dataset and the ways in which they could be theoretically connected to form themes. For example, the sub-codes of "growing as a person", "being authentic" and "working independently of family" drew together codes of "the meaning of work" and "positive experiences of work" and these formed a pattern or theme of vocational identity formation.

4.5 Broker sample coding process

A different coding frame for the brokers was developed because of the different themes raised in the literature on youth and employment services brokering, vocational counselling and mentoring. It was also performed to address the second aim of the study which was to examine how brokers positioned youth and youth unemployment. See Table 7 for the coding frame for the brokers.

Table 7. Broker coding frame

Code	Sub-codes
Experiences of youths	Positive experiences
	Negative or ambivalent experiences
	Gender or sexuality related experiences
Experiences of barriers faced by youths	Drugs, nutrition and mental health
	Financial, homelessness, security or spatial barriers
	Justice system, institutions or organisations, social security system barriers
	Training, education, experience
Accounting for youth unemployment	Generational
	Global
	Individual or developmental
	Organisational
Practices used by service providers	Youth mental health, knowledge of SPS, support practices
	Work placement, training and vocational practices

An example from the broker coding frame included the broad category "Experience of barriers to youth employment", the code of "Relationships, cultural and role model barriers" and a sub-code of "negative feedback from parents". See Figure 3 for an example of the broker coding summary.

Code	Sub-codes	Examples
Accounting for youth unemployment & meanings 📋 (Ctrl) ▾	**Global**	• Being in a policy vacuum **(Bill)** • Outsourcing labour **(Bill)** • Being in a 'gig' economy **(Cora)** • Not being affected by global changes **(Dana)** • Being homeless **(Jonah)** • Hearing positive messaging **(Olivia)** • Competing with a skilled workforce **(Edith)**
	Individual or developmental	• Lacking motivation**(Bill)** • Increasing career uncertainty **(Bill)** • A victim mentality **(Jonah)** • A phase of life **(Bill, Dana, Edith)** • Deciding what is a "survival job" vs. "career job" **(Brighton)** • Being afraid to apply**(Julia; Kirk)** • Lacking a sense of maturity**(Julia)** • Getting control of unemployment benefit **(Julia)** • Being a mother**(Julia)** • Lacking long-term planning abilities**(Kirk)** • Having behavioural or learning issues**(Malcolm)** • Lacking Self-confidence **(Marjorie; Mary; Olivia; Jonah);** • Being stigmatised**(Nicky)**
	Organisational	• Disengaging with organisations **(Malcolm)** • Overemphasising grant process **(Bill)** • Lack of involvement by commercial sector **(Bill)** • Lack of tailored programs or early intervention **(Bill)** • Leaving school early**(Marjorie)** • Encountering a gap **(Edith)**

Figure 3. Broker coding summary

The second stage of analysis for the broker data followed the same pattern as that used for the youth data. Taking an example of this process in relation to the broker dataset, the experiences of "being afraid of interviews" and "not checking in" could be combined into a sub-theme of low self-efficacy and avoidance and a theme of "Mental health issues in the Micro-sphere". Other examples included "having role models" and "negative feedback from parents which was combined into a theme of family influences at the meso-sphere.

4.6 Organisation of themes within socio-ecological model

The socio-ecological model (SEM), which can account for these interactions, was selected as the overarching theory to categorise the codes into themes at each level. By linking these experiences together, patterns were identified in how the family setting could interact with the school setting and ultimately employment setting. Because the study did not observe the

youths' and brokers' relationships in a dyadic context or in a forum such as a focus group,

positioning theory was used to interpret talk where one participant group referred to the other.

See Figure 4 and Figure 5 for the youth sample thematic map and the broker sample thematic

map respectively.
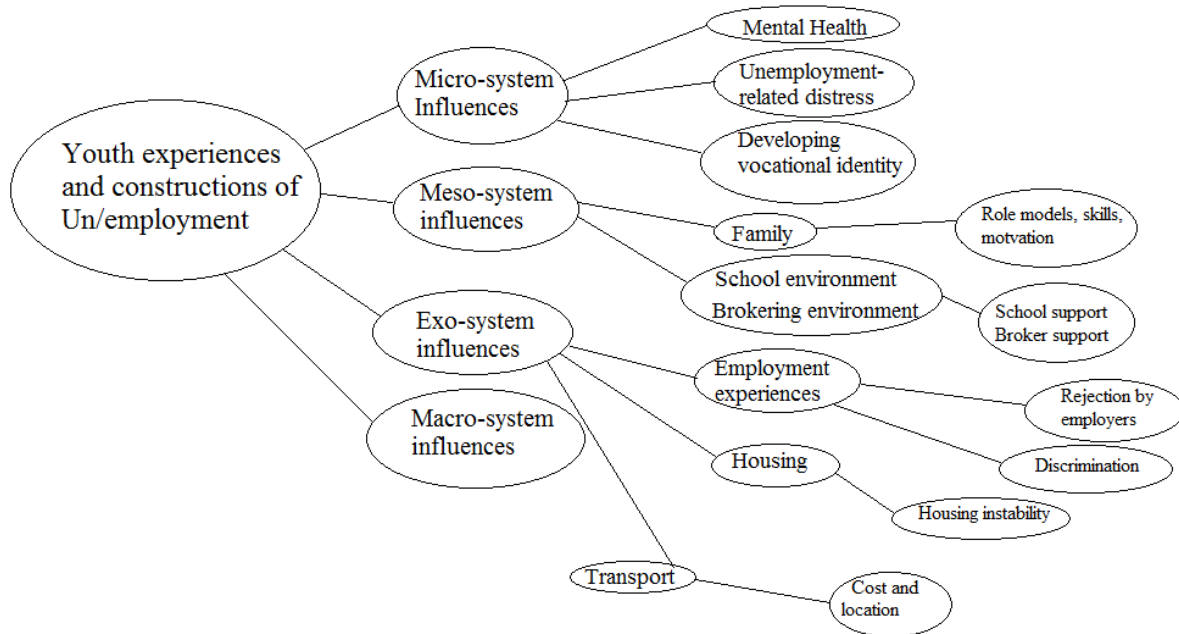
Figure 4. Youth thematic map

Figure 4 shows the thematic map of youths' experiences and constructions of

un/employment. Key themes are shown within their respective level of the SEM, along with

the sub-themes. For example, employment experiences and housing were prevalent themes at

the level of the exo-system, being at the level of broader society and institutions. Within the

theme of employment experiences, the sub-theme of rejection by employers is also shown.
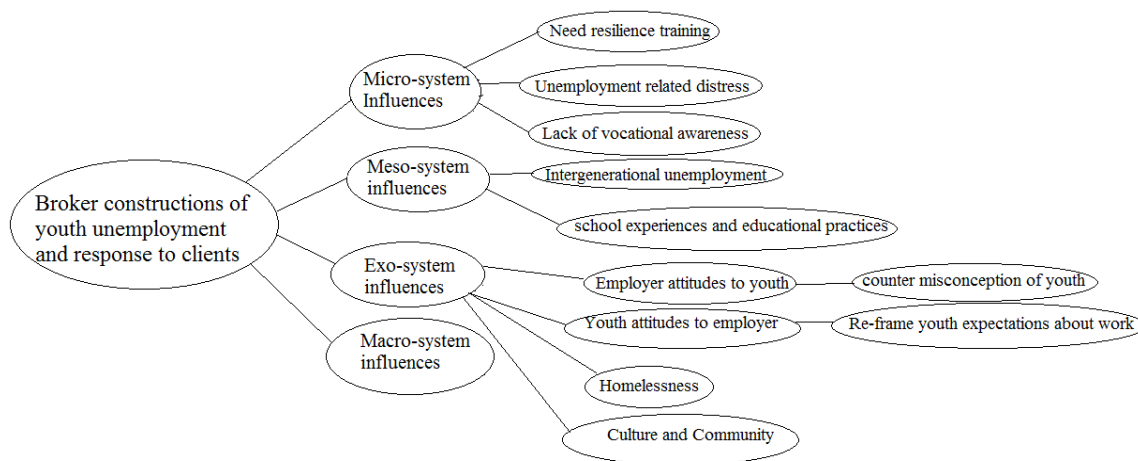
Figure 5. Broker thematic map

Figure 5 shows the thematic map for brokers constructions of youth unemployment and their responses, categorised within the SEM. It shows how themes of their constructions of youth unemployment; for example, employers' attitudes to youths at the level of the exo-system, were associated with certain responses, presented as sub-themes, such as countering misconceptions of youths or re-framing youths' expectations.

Using a socio-ecological framework enabled themes based on the different ecological spheres to be constructed, for several reasons. First, this enabled the experiences at all levels, both of intrapsychic and functional issues, through the relational issues of employers and brokers, through to the macro-level influences such as society and culture to be interpreted. The youths and the brokers invoked a wide range of experiences and influences on their constructions of employment, and the socio-ecological model enabled the data illustrating these experiences to be tied together. Second, it enabled the overlapping theories pertaining to these experiences to be discussed and their connection to youth unemployment to be more clearly illustrated. Third, the youths' accounts were less articulate in terms of constructions and more detailed in terms of experiences than the brokers' accounts. The socio-ecological

model enabled the two datasets to be meaningfully compared. It enabled similarities and differences in the construction of un/employment to emerge between the two groups and permitted a discussion of where brokering support to youths could be strengthened or improved. In the final stage of analysis, the experiences of youths categorised within the overarching framework of the socio-ecological model was compared with the experiences of brokers categorised within the model.

4.7 Summary

This study was designed as a qualitative study with two samples. The semi-structured interview data generated by the interviews was coded and analysed thematically. This design was appropriate considering the literature on youth unemployment regarding the social context of youth unemployment in Australia and for addressing the multifaceted processes of vocational identity development and transition to work. Appropriately, different frames of analysis were used the respective samples to address the issues relevant to them. The final design involved comparing the results of the thematic analysis and examining this thorough the lens of the socio-ecological model. This design addressed the three key research questions. First, how youths and emerging adults experience and construct un/employment; second, how broker constructions of youth unemployment shape their interactions with and responses to unemployed youths; and third, how the accounts of youths and brokers converge or diverge and what the implications are.

The following chapter concerning the youth data deals with the first of these three questions. It examines the experience of youths in-depth with a view to identifying implications for wellbeing. The subsequent chapter addresses the second of these questions. It is concerned with brokers constructions of youth unemployment, expressed through language and the

implications of these constructions, together with any relevant theoretical principles or

methodologies that inform their practices with unemployed youths.

Chapter 5 Socio-ecological system influences in unemployed youths' and young adults' experiences and constructions of un/employment

5.1 Preamble

This chapter addresses the first of the research questions for this study, which is how young unemployed people experience and construct un/employment. The socio-ecological model is used here as a means of framing the impact on health and wellbeing of each of the key themes identified by the analysis. Young people's experiences of work, their interactions with brokers and employers, and the conditions of their past employment, are all placed within the socio-ecological model and the implications for health and wellbeing at every level are discussed. The analysis shows how youths' and young adults' experiences of un/employment were shaped at every level of the socio-ecological model. About one-third of the participants gave accounts of how they had dropped out of school and re-engaged with education, which demonstrates the influence of relationships in the meso-system; that is, the network of people who surround the individual at the level of family and school. A majority of the youths had been employed previously, and so their accounts also dealt extensively and experiences with employers, layoff, resignation and rejection, taking place within their exo-system, or the system which comprises organisations and institutions surrounding the individual. Exo-system influences also reflected their past experience with employers, different industries and transportation. To a lesser extent, youths reflected on micro-system influences (individual and psychological conditions), such as their mental health and vocational identity.

Examples of youths positioning the macro-system as an influence on their experiences of unemployment were rare. Where examples were present in the data, they appeared to reflect a lack of awareness of global issues. For example, as one participant, Archie, described, "I don't know that much about economy, but – yeah, thought it was just like less work, less

manufacturing… It feels like we lost a lot of skills and stuff that the old guys would have had." Therefore, this chapter primarily focuses on the three levels, micro-, meso, and exo-levels within the socio-ecological model. There were also examples in the data of the ways that different social ecosystems interacted and linked to one another. The influence of time was important in this respect; for example, when accounts suggested that time interacted with each level to change the extent of the influences in different systems.

5.2 Micro-system

While influences at the micro-system were not prevalent in the participants' accounts, the micro-system is significant because it encompasses cognitions and beliefs surrounding work, the association between a youth's identity formation and work. As demonstrated, the accounts of influences at other systems were often associated with impacts at the micro-system. There were two themes identified within the micro-system that youths positioned as being important to their employment or that they believed were associated with their unemployment: the impact of unemployment on their mental health, and the formation of their vocational identity.

5.2.1 Impact of unemployment on mental health

First, participants showed their awareness of the way in which unemployment can impact on mental health. Youths' accounts suggested that they believed that time structure, length of time unemployed, social connectedness and work commitment were impacting on their health and experience of distress. For example, Brienne described how: "I was talking to my therapist last week and she was saying she thinks some of the reasons why I get so down is 'cause I don't have the structure of a job any more."

Jessica acknowledged the role of financial concerns on individual functioning: "I'd be a lot less freaking stressful. I'd be more occupied. Financially, I'd be better." Some participants emphasised social connectedness, such as Harvey: "Just teambuilding, stuff like that, meeting new people – mine's more like meeting new people." Tyson spoke in the context of his previous job: "I'd just become so close to all of them."

A few participants emphasised the importance of a job for development and moving forward in life. For example, Rachel said: "Work means not staying home and being depressed. Work means actually being able to do something productive. It also means, to me, actually being able to grow as an individual because I think people really need that having a job."

In contrast to such experiences of connectedness associated with employment were experiences of isolation and depression following layoff. For example, Tyson experienced layoff from his apprenticeship as an electrician and described how "It kind of put me down after losing my job but I just – I thought it could be the same, it could happen again so I just stopped looking for work."

Similarly, Maxwell described the impact on his mental health associated with the isolation he experienced following losing his job:

> when I wasn't working – I didn't work for one year – I stayed at home and I didn't even leave my house an I got to a point where I was a bit secluded from everyone, I wasn't feeling right, and I needed to get out and see the open world.

In a follow-up interview, Maxwell emphasised the importance of positive thinking in overcoming these distressing experiences:

> It makes an impact not only on yourself but the people around you as well. It's important because if you're thinking negatively, then you'll think that you're

worthless or you're useless. You can't do nothing right. If you're thinking positive, you think that you're something to the world and people actually need you.

In spite of such negative experiences of the impact of unemployment the participants' accounts indicated, they could also be resilient. Jessica, who was diagnosed with depression, described her attitude toward working in the context of the impact on mental health:

Life. That's what work is – life. If you haven't got work, then you haven't got a life really, like no offence. Most people that don't work are the mothers, single mothers, drug dealers, junkies, mental health people, people that – and that's one thing I don't believe in even though I have got depression and I don't believe that that stops me from working. I still got an ability to work just that when I'm feeling that I can't work that I needed to talk to someone or something like that.

Overall, the accounts seemed to suggest that being unemployed in itself made it more difficult for the participants to look for work, because of the distress and mental health impact involved. This was the most prevalent barrier to employment presented in the accounts at the level of the micro-system.

5.2.2 Vocational identity

The influence of vocational identity in the micro-system was also prevalent in youths' accounts. In other words, participants spoke about their reasons for unemployment in terms of the stability of their career goals. Some participants, such as Sheila and Mike, considered work from a functional perspective: "a job is a job". Others positioned work as a part of their identity in their talk regarding skills and vocations.

The experience of being employed previously gave youth participants a better idea of what they wanted to do. This experience was generally a positive one. There were examples of positive experiences at work and learning new skills, even though they might subsequently

have become unemployed. Maxwell described his past job fitting sirens to emergency vehicles as "exhilarating". Brienne, who worked as a barista, described how "I really enjoy making coffee, like it's actually fun", and Jessica, whose past experiences on a traineeship in hospitality shaped her goals and willingness to try out different skills, said, "I really wanna go back there [to the company] because they rather you not stay in the one spot they rather you go to different aspects in the company."

Keira reported how she "wanted to work with animals 'cause I love animals", and Shay described how "I've always had a thing about teeth. I don't have the best teeth... as a dental assistant you just go to TAFE and it'd be something easy to do just to start out with." Mike, who was planning a career in entertainment, described how vocational identity could be flexible, saying, "there so much stuff that's out there and there are so many options to explore. You don't have to just find a job, you can study first. You can really spread your wings and just find the stuff you actually like."

Vocational identity shifting might also be a distressing experience, however, associated with uncertainty. For example, Sheila's account showed how she was starting to question the career options laid out for her by her father. Speaking in the context of her current career pathway she said, "Most of it was my dad. He affects me a lot. Originally the plan was to join the army, mostly his idea, mostly mine but I'm looking for work instead... my dad still wanted me to try but it was quite clear it would be a big no after all the tests." Barnaby reported a similar experience of vocational identity shifting. Although he had extensive experience working with his family business, was somewhat put off from this path and this left him unsure in planning his next career move.

> My dad's trying to get me to work for him, that's it, like, "Come on, come, you take over the business," like, "Come on, come on." I'm like, "No, I don't want to work for

you."… I've been working with family for my whole life… I just can't work with them… so they turned me off plumbing, off trade… I'd rather do corporate, something corporate… I've never done it, so I get scared to do it. I think I have too much pride to ask for a job. I've never asked for a job at all. I've always had the job given to me.

This was an ambivalent experience, which highlights how vocational identity can shift in the micro-system and have consequences for future employment and self-mastery. Taking the "corporate" option meant that Barnaby had to complete his HSC and not accept the career already on offer from his family: "Oh, fuck, I got to finish school. If I want to do something corporate later in life." He qualified this, claiming that he would pursue plumbing as a career provided he could have his own jobs; that is, more independence from his father: "I'd take it up, 100 per cent if I could subcontract off my dad." In considering the influence of vocational identity, this illustrates the trade-off between vocational identity stability and other concerns in the micro-system, such as finances and independence of action. Generally, having a sense of vocational identity was positioned as a key influence on the experience of unemployment as this could affect participants later in life, as Mike described:

> Any job can be a good one, just depending what you're using it for. It's just important to have that routine to just get you out of the bed in the morning and being able to work in the most core kind of profession or that kind of thing, and it's really important. It's just working to something you're going to do for the rest of your life. Whether you work on something you enjoy or just work at something that gets you by, it's really up to you but, yeah, definitely important.

5.3 Meso-system influences

Meso-system influences were prevalent in the participants' accounts as being significant for how they regarded employment. Many participants in the sample were still in school environments or lived with parents, and these settings and relationships figured prominently

in their accounts of unemployment. The main themes at this level were family influences on employment and employment brokerage in educational and employment agency contexts.

5.3.1 Family influences

Participants mentioned a range of positive and negative aspects of family relationships on employment. In one sense, family relationships and the family environment were regarded as a positive influence on employment because they might provide motivation, role models, teach useful work skills or provide work opportunities. On the other hand, family influences might pose a barrier to employment, according to participants, because of a disruptive childhood, parental neglect or negative feedback from family members.

One participant reported the positive influence of family on employment was the learning of work skills. Barnaby described how he had gained skills working with his father on plumbing jobs:

> I love the trade and stuff. I know the trade. Probably the good thing about it, I learned a lot of stuff. So I'm good in that path or to be a barista. Like, I've got knowledge and I can write that down on my resume as well. So it's a good experience.

Likewise, Jeffrey also described how his father had taught him trade skills:

> My dad is like – he used to teach me how to do things in the shed and stuff like that…
> Just like helping him out, making a sand blasting booth and stuff

However, for both Jeffrey and Barnaby, family conflict influenced their current employment prospects:

> I've been working with family my whole life, living with family my whole life and I just can't work with them, so they turned me off plumbing, off trade… we're all stubborn…They will just try to boss me around and stuff, and I'm not going to get bossed around.

Family influences could also influence employment positively if they provided role models for participants. For example, speaking in the context of having confidence in job interviews, Mike described how

> the interview process for me, I'd say, is a bit easier… just because my people skills, I know how to gauge the situation, and I think I just kind of picked up on that at a young age… I think from my dad. He's a very open person and he knows how to talk to everyone and anyone. If you put him into a room with five strangers, he would come out knowing everything about them and I really admire that about him.

Participant career expectations also were positively shaped by family influences. For example, Arya spoke about the expectations she had of herself, reflecting on her parents' careers:

> I've always set my heart in going to university more than TAFE and everything. To be honest, to make my family proud. I'm the first person that completes my HSC. My mum did go to uni, but she went through pathways and stuff and it was a lot harder for her. I want to just be able to make myself proud mostly but make my parents proud, to show them that I can go to uni and I can do this thing. And to go to uni, you do need these high marks and qualifications than you do TAFE so it just makes me feel good the fact that I could do that.

Rachel's experience contrasted with Arya's optimism in that Rachel's family had experienced long-term unemployment and this affected the family dynamic. The expectation to go out and find work was balanced by the knowledge they had all experienced rejection, and this affected motivation:

> My family is always telling me to go out there and just train myself because I shouldn't just be staying home being depressed and everything… family wise, I know why they're jobless most of the time… they've done same thing as me where we've handed out multiple resumes but then we've kind of slacked off at the end because we just kind of get sick of consistently being rejected. We'll go through this phase where

we'll be really enthusiastic about going out an entire week handing out resumes and then all of sudden, we'll be like, "No, this is kind of pointless," and then go back to that same rollercoaster of phases over and over again.

Family events could affect the urgency to seek work, through injury to family members. For example, Maxwell said:

> my dad had a back surgery, so he wasn't working… once he got out of that, he didn't work for six months… he tried getting on Centrelink – so basically, me and my brother had to be the support of the family. He was getting Centrelink, but of course, it wasn't enough for the household. So, me and my brother had to get out there and work to support the family… It was a bit tough, but at the end of the day, we had to do what we had to do.

As Maxwell's account indicates, negative family events like this were nuanced. Family relationships could be a source of solidarity and support, demonstrating that expectations of employment might be generalised at the family system or activated specifically in extreme situations. On the other hand, family influences such as negative comments could also test a participant's motivation surrounding getting a job; for example, Jessica received negative comments and put-downs from her family and peers:

> I've been put down too much in my life. I'm like, "I'm not gonna let you bring me down" like "I'll prove you wrong". I'll go do it. Yeah. Just like my Nan and that, when I was younger, all the girls used to be like, "Oh, you'll be the first one to be pregnant," and whatnot. No, I'm the last one to be pregnant, the last one to have kids. I'm quite happy, quite comfortable, but not just that, like people – you get people look at you and they're like, "You're not gonna go nowhere," and then as soon as you get a job, they're like, "Oh, you got a job! Oh, hey girl, we should hang out someday"… Like when I got my licence, I rang my mum. I told my mum. My sister goes, "Oh, yeah, we don't give a fuck." I said, "Yeah: We don't give a fuck when I got my Ps and I'm beep-beep-beeping past you too and you're walking in the rain and stuff." Yeah.

At the most extreme family-system events played a significant role in ability to seek work if they involved long-term disruption, trauma, abuse, neglect and complex health conditions. For example, Keira described how her health conditions were the result of her mother's opioid addiction:

> My mum was on drugs. Even with my brother before me… drugs came first before us… I wasn't able to suck when I was born. I was in intensive care. I have a lot of problems because my mum was on drugs – to do with my brain, with my bones. I'm not – I look fine, but a lot of stuff in me is wrong. So that affected me. And then when I was three, I was taken off my mum and went into foster care, but my Nan took me. So, I grew up with her. That was pretty good, but I was abusive to my Nan, even at a young age, so like six or seven, I broke my Nan's vertebrae. So I was still aggressive and violent as a kid. I couldn't control it. My brain was very wild, which scared my Nan and that for me being older, how I'm gonna be able to work by myself or work.

These influences at the family system were linked somewhat to participants' engagement with education, as with Arya's choice to go to university, or with Keira's experience of repeated suspension from school owing to family instability:

> I was suspended over 32 times… parents neglected me… was never gave food – I was never gave clothes, so I was stealing, basically. And to make money, I was dealing my medication… I got in lots of trouble for that. Luckily, I wasn't charged or anything… They let me go 'cause they understood my situation. So, pretty much my past life and my family caused all this trouble within my schools. I never had the attention at home, so I wanted the attention at school, which caused me a lot of trouble… They were pretty much fed up with me because they gave me so many chances… they knew about how my family treated me, that I was abused, that I was sexually assaulted, so they had sympathy for me… then when I got the warning I've been expelled, I thought they were bullshitting… no mainstream school in Australia, not just Sydney, Australia, would accept me.

As Keira's account shows, the influences at the family domain often overlapped with experiences in the school setting, highlighting a key aspect of the meso-system. The quality

of the communication between the different actors comprising school and home settings has implications within many theoretical and policy perspectives and is an example of meso-system functionality.

5.3.2 Influence of employment brokerage in flexible learning options and employment agency settings

Interactions with employment brokers were a common theme at the level of the meso-system. While the majority of the participants were looking for employment through an employment service provider, several of the participants were seeking employment while engaged with flexible learning options (FLOs), a form of vocational school. For students that may have disengaged with government public schools or other private schools, FLOs provide a way for students to gain their secondary school qualification while in an adult learning environment. In FLO schools, students have more flexible class times and arrangements, and emphasis is placed on preparing students for work. Many of the participants had changed schools to FLOs, which they reported as a positive experience. The FLO setting was important meso-system influence because of the way that youths were supported by a mix of teachers and counsellors, and because of the good links between these staff and support services. For example, Jamie described his experience of various brokers who worked cooperatively with his school:

> They come in and they basically are your caseworker and everything in one. So everything you need, they will bring someone in for you 'cause the teachers are basically here to help with just work, school stuff, while the counsellor is here to do other stuff. And then if you need it more deeper like I did, they will bring someone in to help you, so like legal aid or youth links or something.

The contrast between their previous schools and FLO was prevalent in the youths' accounts and illustrates its impact on participants' employment outlook. Many students emphasised the

patience they received from their teachers in FLOs. For example, Arya described the difference between her past school and current one: "at this school they give us a lot more support, they give us a lot more one-on-one time… we're more like a family than students and teachers." Shay described how "they [her previous teachers] cared about you getting good mark for their record more than your own achievements", and Barnaby made a similar comparison, saying, "In a mainstream school, they tick it off, they've done what they have to do but they won't say, 'Do you understand?' Here, they help you understand."

Barnaby described this approach of the teachers as "nurturing", saying,

> When I first came here, I was getting nurtured. It's like a mum and that was weird because I'm used to the normal school. Like, "Do this, Do that" – That's it. Like, you look at them as a teacher, but here, they try and nurture you and stuff, it's weird.

One reason for this, as Shay put it, was, "I think they understand better that we all have our own personalities, and we all have our own struggles in life." Last, the flexible practices of their new school were also believed to improve relations between peers, which was significant because youths might have experienced social isolation or bullying. Jamie noted how "throughout basically my whole school and before I came here, I was bullied", and speaking of his new school, "We're not really mean to each other, we're really close".

These experience of the contrast between their current and previous schools was significant to youth unemployment – not only because of the academic support, but also because of the vocational support and support for personal and family issues they received. Participants claimed to be better supported in transitioning out of high school. This was not just in terms of their vocations, but in terms of the support they received from the school counsellor, who

positively responded to issues they might be having outside of school. Keira felt well supported; despite her family experiences, crediting her current teachers:

> I never got this at my other school, nothing compared to what this school has provided me. They're the ones that have helped me. I honestly never thought I'll make it to Year 10. Now I'm graduating. And this school has honestly pushed me to where I needed to be.

Arya recalled how she had been supported when she couldn't concentrate owing to her father's illness: "They were very understanding. When I said I needed to go home, they were like 'Okay'. But they gave me work to do at home."

Jamie further summarised the overall experience of the teachers' approach:

> I'm very close with my business teacher. She's very engaging. She asks you stuff like "What do you want to do in the future?", "What's it like happens at home?" They get in depth with what happens at home and see if you're okay. If you're sad or something, they'll come up and actually see if you're all right, they won't just leave you like other schools would. They wouldn't – they have to go with other students "cause there are so many students in class, they're not gonna just focus on you. In this school, you don't have many people in the class so they'll notice and they'll snap on it really quickly and try and sort it out. If they can't help you, they'll get the counsellor to come in and help you, which is really good.

In terms of vocational support, positive experiences were also attributed to the environment of FLO. Jamie described the influence of FLOs as having influenced his confidence in applying for work in the future:

> this school's really trying to get people that have stuffed up in the past. There are people that have dropped out because of, maybe, bullying… and then this school is like, to come back and finish your Year 10 and Year 12, and still have that closeness with people. So you start to trust again and you just feel so much better… Well, now,

> I think that I'm gonna have a very high chance of getting into the stuff I want to do compared to like when I was on it because I was not motivated at all.

The interaction between the school environment and the family environment in terms of vocational support was also described positively, as was the case with Arya:

> The teachers helped me decide that a lot. And then I talked to my parents and they said they could see me doing it. But I was just very confused on what I wanted to do. I was like "I don't see myself doing anything" and then she said to me "What about HR management?" I was like "What's that?' And then we talked about it and I was like "Oh, yeah. I can see myself doing that too". So that's what made me wanna do it.

In addition to the impact the practices of the school had on the confidence of the participants, participants also believed that they assisted in a practical sense with employment, as Barnaby described:

> They do have classes sometimes where you can go in and they assist you with careers advice and stuff like that. They do try and get you out of your comfort zone, like they send you to work experience… It's like, "When you finish, you can come and just apply and I'll sort you out". So they do help you out. They send you to ventures themselves.

In contrast to the setting of the FLO school, participants in the setting of the employment agencies or outreach settings reported more mixed experiences. Positive experiences related to brokers who assisted in a practical sense; for example, with training courses and work equipment or transport. For example, Lewis described in a follow-up interview the support he received from his broker, and how he had built up a relationship with his youth mentor over a period of time. As a result, his mentor assisted him in a practical way as well as acting as a broker:

She found out about it [the job]. She rang around for it, and then she organised the interview date, and then she drove us there, and then she drove us all the way back home. So that was like a real big deal for [his friend] and myself because she stuck her neck out for us and now we've got a job where we can support ourselves and all that.

In contrast, there were several accounts of negative experiences with employment agencies encompassing a range of experiences. This could happen if a participant perceived them to be delaying the process, as Brienne described:

I think overall it was a pretty good experience, but I was with them for quite a while before I got one – even one interview… like having the meetings every week, I pretty much just went there and talked to them for like five minutes and left. I kind of felt like that was a bit useless.

Similarly, Archie described his experience: "They look for work for me. They haven't really offered me any work. They just said, 'Look for places you wanna work and we can call them for you'." This could also happen if brokers "took credit" for the job the youths found. For example, Jessica expressed dissatisfaction with the official recognition of brokers for placing youths in jobs, saying, "We found our own job. We go tell them that we found a job and then they take the credit for it like. That's bullshit." Likewise, this could happen if brokers were seen as uncooperative regarding course funding, if activities were boring, and if they gave the youths ineffective information and unhelpful resources.

Archie spoke about funding:

[they said] "Oh, no, you can't do it. You got to be 18". So, all right, sure. And if you say, "All right, I need funding for this course" and they said, "All right, we can apply for it. There's no guarantee you're gonna get it".

Lewis expressed dissatisfaction with the level of assistance he received with job websites:

[the sites are] Terrible. It's good… but [only] when you got the people with you and explaining it to you, it's a lot easier than doing it yourself. If I got the support and I know what I'm doing with the website and stuff like that… Because some words that I put on there it doesn't make sense.

5.4 Exo-system influences

Beyond the influences of their families, schools, and mentors, participants also described influences that formed part of their exo-system. This included the domains of companies, employers and the wider community. The most prevalent themes highlighted by participants at the level of the exo-system were negative past experiences with employers and, to a lesser extent, housing and transport barriers to employment.

5.4.1 Negative past employer experiences

Participants' past negative experiences of employers were a prevalent exo-system influence. Many participants who had worked previously described some form of negative experience working previously, and how their work attitudes and decisions were shaped by these experiences, at the time of the interviews. Negative experiences included mistreatment by employers on the job, rejection of their job applications and being laid off from work.

First, reported mistreatment in past employment was a key experience that shaped participants' preferences for different working arrangements, or a decision to resign from their jobs. For example, Norma described being underpaid: "once I went to get my pay from the boss and then I counted it and it was supposed to be $300 and he only gave me $200", after which she resigned from the job. She went on to say how this impacted her preferences for jobs which were not paid by cash-in-hand, saying, "I'd rather it by tax… going through the government is better, I think… because at least the government will know you're working and [the employer is] paying."

Lewis described being yelled at on his birthday by his supervisor, leading him to quit, reporting that "he just abused the absolute shit out of me". This experience coloured his current experiences of looking for work:

> I didn't want to end up with the same type of boss. So I'm a bit wary of what I do now. If I don't like someone now, I would tell them. So it just put that bit of a piece in the back of my mind every time I go for a job, "Are you going to be the exact same?" They could be nice now and a prick later.

Harvey spoke about how one of his managers threw a set of keys at his hands, reporting that, "the boss just threw the keys at my hand, it cut all my fingers open. So I quit then, that day." Brienne described feeling physically intimidated at her previous job as a barista, saying, "It was one of the managers. I just felt like he was very aggressive and telling me to go faster. Instead of just [saying], 'Hey, speed it up', he would just go like <claps hands> in my face… I left that job because I felt that I was being targeted." Another example of mistreatment was reported discrimination. Jessica described how she had "taken discrimination at work". She also described how this experience shaped her approach to seeking work, saying, "when I'm looking for jobs now, I go for Indigenous traineeship. I go for an Indigenous identified job, so when people go you know like 'Oh' – out in the city people know that I'm Aboriginal. They're like, 'Oh, you're Indigenous. How are you? Are you here for the Indigenous thing?'"

However, not all accounts of mistreatment ended with the participant resigning their job. For example, in the case of Tyson, his experience of mistreatment at work led him to stand up to a co-worker, which in his case increased his commitment to the job:

> When I first got there, it was one of the second or third year, he was kind of like trying to control me and I just – I was doing it for a bit, I was just like, "Yeah right, whatever". I was just doing it and I just got sick of it. And he just kept coming up to me when I was doing a different job and said, "Go get this for me. Go get that". And I

just really told him to go fuck himself. And then after that we become really close. He just stopped trying to – and he'd want the boss to put me working with him all the time. I'd just become so close to all of them, that's good.

A related issue was the youth's or young person's expectations of their work duties compared with the employer's expectations. The mismatch between the actual duties given by the employer and the expectations of the participants constituted a negative experience that could also lead to resignation. In these cases, participants emphasised that the work was not of the quality they expected. Archie gave an account of the safety practices of his previous supervisor and his futile attempts to raise the issue:

There's a sheet of asbestos on a fence. I said, "Oh, I think it's asbestos" and they'd be like, "Yeah, it could be"… I'd be like, "Oh, yeah. Well, shouldn't we get someone to investigate it, possibly remove it?" And like, "Oh, yeah, you can do that, or you can go home and have a cry about it".

Norma gave an account of how she too expected different duties as a hospitality employee: "I was doing customer service… they would make me clean the whole shop and there's like a cleaner for that." In these accounts the mismatch between expectations is often positioned as mistreatment by the youth or young adult. This is another area where brokers play a dual role in managing the relationship and the expectations of youths, but also use their position to advocate for them, which is discussed below.

Second, there were experiences of participants having their job applications rejected (either online applications or in person) across the sample. Participants reported rejection affecting their wellbeing and confidence. For example, Mike described how his roommate had mentioned "job search depression" to him:

I was like, "What the hell is that?" I'm like, "I don't get depression and all that stuff". But soon after getting the first two rejections, I think the depression started sounding. I was like, "Oh, I think I know what you're talking about now".

Anticipated rejection was also associated with these concerns, such as not having enough qualifications, as Shay described: "I'm just stressed because I'm like, what about if I get the qualification and then they want experience? Or what if I try and get the qualification, but then I don't do as well as I'm supposed to do?"

Rejection was also associated with distress at unreasonable qualification requirements, as Rachel experienced when she was rejected for jobs that had simple duties:

the moment I would bring in my resume, they [the jobs] were already filled… Sometimes, it was an age requirement thing or you need ten years of experience for a simple job like moving boxes or just working a cashier thing. That was the thing that was really "meh" for me.

Third, there were experiences of layoff raised by the participants. If the job they lost had been viewed positively by the participant, deep misgivings about the likelihood of securing a similar job could result, as Tyson described:

My boss loved me, man, him… and he'd send me mainly by myself to do some jobs that fully qualified people wouldn't do… I thought if I was doing well there and they let me go, what would the others going to do? If I was the exact same, man? And I just – I thought what was the point really?… I thought it could be the same, it could happen again, so I just stopped looking for work.

5.4.2 Housing and homelessness

Another exo-system influence on unemployment identified by youths at the involved their experiences with housing and homelessness. Participants' accounts of unemployment intersected with their experiences of housing. The influence of housing was significant not

only for the impact of homelessness on employment, but because such impact serves to highlight the advantage to employment of having a stable home. For most participants, homelessness was not described in their accounts because they were living with family. Having a stable home meant that participant had a secure base from which to seek out employment. For example, Sheila described how "my dad doesn't want me looking for work anywhere too far away… I think it's because I still live at home and stuff." Similarly, Rachel, who lived with family described how "I've had family members that have been able to support me so far… My family is always telling me to go out there and just train myself because I shouldn't just be staying home being depressed and everything." This formed a contrast with the employment experiences of youths who faced homelessness. Jeffrey described how he became homeless after "my dad kicked me out… I just wasn't following his rules", and described how things "Would be a lot easier – [to] have my own place… Have a stable home." As Jessica described, "That's why it's hard to find a job because when young kids leave home, whether you leave home on your own terms or bad terms, it's hard to find a job 'cause how are you meant to find a job if you don't have a stable home?"

Even after the youths gained employment, housing status, such as living in public housing, could impact on their work commitment. One example of this was Lewis, who experienced belittling at work because of his housing status, which had already influenced his decision to resign from a previous job. He reported how

> one of them [a co-worker] just used to insult me constantly every day, say shit, pointless crap… Like… "go back to [your own neighbourhood], you're a houso scum", and all of that, you know what I mean? So it's like I'm not gonna sit around and put up with that shit for the pay rate I'm on.

Jessica also encountered discrimination based on her suburb of residence: "it's very frustrating. Not just my nationality, but part of the area that I was living in at that time in [suburb] which is discrimination." Jessica spent substantial time arranging housing, which affected her job seeking commitments: "when I go to housing commission, on Tuesdays, my days are full. Full. And then my week's probably full with all my other services and it's quite tiring." In Jessica's case, the situation was made even more complex because of the possibility of discharging cultural obligations concerning housing. According to her, this meant that she found it even more difficult to plan her job-seeking activities, for example,

> I don't know whenever I'm gonna move or my people could come and say, "Oh, there's a family, an Aboriginal family that really needs this home. We need to put you back in the motels", and I go to motels every two days a week.

5.4.3 Transport

Third, transport was a significant influence at the exo-system, shaping daily experiences of being unemployed. One experience of this influence related to the cost or availability of public transport. For example, Rachel described missing job-seeking commitments because she couldn't afford the train, reporting that

> you still need to top up cards and everything… if you don't have money on your card constantly, that's when I'm in a bit of a fix. Either I pretend that I'm sick on that day or I just completely ignore the problem until it goes away.

Another example was Jessica's experience of living in an outer suburb of Sydney and having limited transport options. She said, "The public transport ain't so good, and mostly around the [Western Sydney suburb] area, it takes you the long way around. It's not on time. It's not reliable half the time. It's expensive."

Another experience of the influence of transport was car ownership and being able and licensed to drive. For example, although she was seeking work in her local area, Norma's concerns were about security and probably having walking home at night, based on the hours of work on offer. Not having a car meant there was a level of risk in accepting certain hours. Having or getting one's licence was also an experience that showed the impact of transport. Losing one's licence could mean losing one's job, and have to pay fines, putting further pressure on time spent seeking work. This was the case with Maxwell: "I was speeding… And I lost my licence on the spot… It was pretty shocking. I stayed at home. I was clueless. I was pissed off 'cause… I just got the job about two months ago."

Even when youths opted for getting their licence, this could lead to conflict with others in the meso-system:

> I was just speaking to my ex-partner. He goes "where were you yesterday" I said "oh I went up to the RTA". He goes, "Are you fucking shit? You went for your licence, but you're a dumb cunt". I said, "Thanks for the fucking negativity", hung up on him.

While it was an experience that might be associated with stress, it was also undoubtedly important to the young people in the study to be able to drive. It is not just about being able to get to work, but also about confidence and independence. The literature suggests that gaining one's licence is an important experience to identity development (Kroger, 2004). It is significant that in recent decades, young peoples' licensing has been in decline, with increased housing costs and increasing part-time work as possible factors (Delbosc & Currie, 2013). This illustrates how the exo-system influences can intersect to determine employment and health outcomes.

5.5 Discussion: Results in the context of the literature and interplay between social-ecological systems influences

The analysis and examples above illustrate the main influences in participants' experiences of un/employment. The influences described by participants were generally reflected the in literature of that influence, with regard to un/employment. It was also possible to identify the way in which reported influences in different systems interacted to shape participants' meaning and construction of un/employment experiences. The results indicate that there were two main interactions between different socio-ecological systems within the model. The first relates to the interaction between the meso-system and micro-system in influencing self-positioning with regard to un/employment. This interaction was mainly the reported impact of a change in the school context on the self-efficacy and mental resilience to work. The second key interplay between systems relates to the interaction of the exo-system and the micro-system. The influence of negative employment experiences affected participants in the micro-system, because their beliefs about work and workplaces were changed. The research context of each influence and the associated interplays are discussed below.

In terms of the micro-system influences of the mental health impact of unemployment, the accounts of participants are well supported by the literature. The accounts highlight how participants felt deprived of some of the main benefits of work according to the LAMB theory of unemployment distress (Jahoda, 1981; 1982; Selenko et al., 2011). The experiences of social isolation referred to also illustrate how the loss of agency due to unemployment could also be associated with distress (Fryer, 1986). The loss of time structure in particular has implications for unemployed youths. Past research suggests that youths who engage in "work-like" activities such as education, voluntary work or care activities, even though they may be unemployed, spend less time on activities such as "surfing the net" or "doing

nothing", which predict poorer health (Scanlan et al., 2011). A key factor in the benefits of time use management, however, is the meaningfulness of the activity (Vondracek & Skorikov, 1997), which also supports the experiences of participants regarding the importance of vocational identity in the micro-system. The experiences of youths in working out what forms of employment work well for them is also supported by the literature. Research suggests that vocational identity is one of the principal factors of overall identity, and has been shown to be related to experiences of self-efficacy, and this is reflected in the accounts of the participants (Gupta et al., 2015; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007; 2011).

Given the prevalence of the impact of unemployment on mental health as a theme by the participants, interventions that aim to increase the use of youth mental health services would be warranted. In this regard, interventions that aim to increase use by reducing stigma (Booth et al., 2018) or by increasing ease of access (Le et al., 2019) have proven effective. The way participants described their distress as getting worse over time would also suggest that counteracting the perception that mental health issues would decrease over time is another barrier to be overcome (Sareen et al., 2007). Research indicates that if young people believe mental health problems will go away over time, they are less likely to seek help (Rickwood et al., 2007).

Regarding the meso-system influences of education, the participants' experiences of school were well supported. The relationship of bullying to psycho-social health has long been recognised in students, and early recognition of it as an issue by therapists is crucial (Forero et al., 1999). In terms of rates of bullying, research indicates that it varies according to the type of bullying experienced. Relational aggression (that is, socially excluding peers) is the most common form of bullying in the context of the secondary school level of the participants, followed by traditional bullying (physical aggression), with cyberbullying on the

rise (Hemphill et al., 2012; Jadambaa et al., 2019). The impact of bullying is likely to result in worse employment outcomes through disengagement with secondary school, and these results support such findings (Moore et al., 2015). The positive experiences that participants reported from their brokers in meso-system in the context of education and employment supports the literature on the importance of these interactions. As the accounts of participants show, these relationships are associated with formation of vocational identity and the maintenance of mental health. Parents, teachers and counsellors are possible sources of mental health support (Ungar, 2004; Van Harmelen et al., 2016), but are also sources of information regarding work (Levine & Hoffner, 2006). Parental involvement in young people's employment transition has been shown to increase exploratory behaviour (Kracke, 1997), which helps young people form a stable and satisfactory vocational identity – findings which lend support to Marcia's theory of identity status (Mancini et al., 2015). The results suggest that paying attention to the developing work identity of their clients may result in better employment outcomes for brokers.

There was a clear interplay of meso-system influences of school and family with micro-system in the context of changing schools evident in the interviewees' responses. This was through changes at the meso-system in terms of the participants' relationships with teachers, and the accounts illustrate how there were associated changes at the micro-system (a sense of job-search self-efficacy). A change in the school environment, from one in which participants had experiences of bullying and isolation, to one in which they were supported by teachers and peers indicated a supportive meso-system. Creating this sense of community at the meso-system may encourage positive relationships at the exo-system with the broader community, as eventual higher school certificate (HSC) graduates, and with employers. Arya described this in relation to the school environment:

as I've said before we're more like a family than students and teachers. They can be on an emotional level with us; whereas, in mainstream school it's just like teacher–student. So, here, we're on the same level. But of course they've got more authority over us and everything but they don't treat us as such. They treat us as equals, as people, as humans, just like work colleagues pretty much.

Arya's experience shows the role of meso-system relationships transitioning to more exo-system relationships where the school environment was also modelling workplace-type relationships and behaviours. Perhaps because of this changed relationship, participants may have felt more comfortable seeking out support from teachers. For example, as Jamie described:

There are people that have dropped out because of, maybe, bullying and they're getting abused by something else, and then this school is like, to come back and finish your Year 10 and Year 12, and still have that closeness with people. So you start to trust again and you just feel so much better.

Shay also reported this change of environment interacting with her experience of distress:

The teachers are very supportive of helping out if you struggle and they don't mind your asking questions. They're happy to help. They have the counsellor which always comes and checks on you. And then if you're stressed about something, they'll talk to you about it and try to figure out a way, so you can do it without being so stressed.

Family influences in the meso-system affected other systems in a broader sense. For example, childcare duties could affect time spent looking for work or interacting with employers in the exo-system. Not having this time could also affect the micro-system in terms of losing control and feeling conflicted, such as in the case of Jessica, who described how

I've got two siblings that stay at home with me, I said, "Yous are too much responsibility!" They're not too much responsibility, but it's just too much in some ways because… I got these two kids getting up, waking me up.

Maxwell, Lewis, and Tyson also mentioned caring responsibilities for younger siblings.

The interaction of the meso-system with the micro-system was also evident in the context of brokerage in agencies. Maxwell described how his network had broadened after his employment broker offered him a new course:

> there was a course that came up and they were asking me if I was interested. I didn't know if I wanted to go at the beginning but then I said, "Yeah, I'll do it," and then I started going, and now I really enjoy it and met some new friends in there and they're from around here also. So, yes, it's been pretty good.

Maxwell's account identifies how the building of these relationships can address the need for social connectedness fulfilled by work operating at the micro-system. Further, building a stronger community network at the exo-system had the capacity to strengthen relationships at the meso-system, as Maxwell described:

> the youth community centre could be different because it brings all the kids together instead of those people just from Centrelink or coming from there, it's actually for everyone. So it gives everyone an opportunity, not just the pensioners or people on the dole

Regarding participants' negative experiences of work at the exo-level, these results point to a range of different issues. One issue was rejection and discrimination. The research suggests that employers potentially discriminate when hiring on a range of different categories, including ethnicity, religion, wealth and others (Baert, 2018), and these factors may intersect with age in ways that disadvantage youths in employment (Imdorf, 2017). In terms of mistreatment at work, the participants' experiences support the research on the impact of workplace bullying on mental health (Butterworth et al., 2016; Leach et al., 2020). Likewise, the stigma associated with welfare receipt (Schofield & Butterworth, 2015; 2018; Schofield

et al., 2019) and the discrimination faced by the Indigenous population in the labour market is also supported by these results (Biddle et al., 2013; Cunningham & Paradies, 2013; Hunter, 2005). Specific issues raised by participants, such as when Archie's safety concerns at work were ridiculed, highlight the importance training programs to help youths advocate for work safety (Chin et al., 2010). This is not only to increase the confidence of youths in their transition to work, but to prevent serious injury. Overall, the exo-system experiences signify how participants did not believe they were included in some way at the exo-level, and this was associated with their distress.

Participants' experiences of housing instability and homelessness also supported previous literature in terms of the relationship. While most of the participants had stable housing, the types of barriers faced by the few who did not were well supported. Unemployed and homeless youths are more likely to be receiving support from a variety of services, and this can reduce the time available to look for work (Mavromaras et al., 2011). Being homeless can also create distance between family members which reduces support available while unemployed (Flatau et al., 2015). Homelessness also interacts with other socio-ecological influences such as transport. Homeless participants reported transport or travel time as one of the key barriers faced when looking for work (Grace et al., 2006).

The issue of transport was important for all participants, and it interacted with the micro-system as well. The importance of addressing social exclusion associated with transport is acknowledged by the literature (Lucas, 2012). However, in some respects, the results from this survey were at odds with the literature, with respect to driving as a mode of transport. The research indicates that gaining one's drivers licence, in addition to expanding employment options, is an important adult life stage marker (Delbosc, 2017). However, young peoples' licensing is in decline, possibly because millennials are delaying or foregoing

using a car (Delbosc & Currie, 2013). This might be different for unemployed youths facing disadvantage, because every year that getting licence was delayed was another year restricting work options, an urgency which was highlighted in Jessica's account of getting her licence:

> If you stop now, then you're never ever gonna get them [licence plates]. What are you gonna do? Wait till you're 25? Deadset? You're only 22 . You would have to wait another 3 years, I can have my blacks in fucking 4.

In conclusion, the results from the youth sample highlighted several aspects of the experience and construction of un/employment among unemployed youths. First, the participants experienced the deprivation of benefits and restrictions in agency described in the literature. Second, certain factors in the exo-system, such as transport and housing, were experienced as prerequisites to employment. While the literature has focused on these aspects as benefits that flow from the financial rewards of work, the participants' accounts focused on these factors as issues of equity and access. Past experiences with employers were another exo-level influence which contributed to the way that youths experienced unemployment. The results show how layoff and resignation did not only affect the participants wellbeing in the short term. They affected their approach to work, future employers, applications and training decisions. The results show how these experiences have implications for their future job search self-efficacy. Third, there was the interplay between the meso-system and the micro-system in educational contexts. The experiences of youths at FLO schools and being supported by brokers shows how a negative educational experience could sets up youths for lower self-efficacy in employment and how the positive experience of a changed school environment might have the opposite effect on wellbeing. The comparative lack of macro-system influences in the youths' accounts may speak to the consciousness of youths of these

issues, or alternatively, the communication to youths of policy initiatives and global factors throughout the meso-system and the exo-system; that is to say, by teachers, parents and others in the youths' support network. These findings have implications for how youths are supported throughout the transition to work and for how brokers respond to the impact of unemployment on wellbeing.

Chapter 6 System-level influences in broker experiences of youth un/employment

6.1 Preamble

This chapter addresses the second of the two research questions, which is how formal and informal employment brokers construct youth unemployment, and how this shapes their interactions with youths. Specifically, the chapter examines the accounts brokers gave concerning the main influences on youth unemployment. These themes are placed within the levels of the socio-ecological model at which the influence is positioned as operating in the accounts. The chapter describes how brokers experiences of youths at these different levels positioned youths in various ways. These accounts of youth unemployment were the reports of others, although some brokers referred to their own youth experience as informing their practices. While the brokers reported a wide variety of influences, it was clear that meso-level and exo-level influences were the most prevalent in the broker accounts. Brokers' accounts suggest that macro-level influences were not prevalent, and these types of influences did not constitute a theme within the data. There were isolated examples of brokers mentioning global influences, and trends in the structure of work such as the "gig-economy", but where they did, they expressed either uncertainty, or the view that global influences did not impact on their work with youths in any significant way. This chapter focuses on the influences brokers identified at the micro-level, meso-level and exo-levels within the socio-ecological model.

While every broker had their own individual position, there was also some consistency between accounts as to what the most important issues were. This tended to cluster around the type of broker and the context of their work with youths. Teacher-brokers reported on the impact of education on unemployed youths would impact on unemployed youths; whereas

community brokers described more detailed account of the exo-level influences, such as community and cultural issues. Brokers elaborated on how they responded to the influences at these various levels, and in doing so, gave an indication as to how they were positioning unemployed youths and the issue of youth unemployment. Youths were positioned variously as being unemployed for multiple reasons beyond their control, or at times bearing responsibility for the fact they were unemployed.

6.2 Micro-level influences

The main themes described by the brokers at the micro level as bearing on youth unemployment was the influence of self-efficacy, self-confidence and vocational awareness, and a variety of mental health barriers, such as anxiety and depression.

6.2.1 Self-confidence, vocational awareness and mental health

The main theme here was the barrier that a lack of self-confidence and awareness, combined with anxiety and depression, could present to employment for youths. Mental health was identified by brokers as major influence at the micro-level on the capacity of young people to seek employment. Although the majority of brokers interviewed were not clinical professionals, they did come into contact with a variety of mental health conditions and barriers. Brokers said that they could see how mental health issues were impacting on their clients' ability to address employment concerns and carry out career activities. Brokers described a range of mental health conditions among their clients, and common behaviours that could act as barriers, for example, Olivia, a school counsellor said,

> you're getting avoidance, you're getting aggression, you're getting anxieties, depression, social anxieties, just different things like that that show up as a result of that. I think ultimately it comes down to building up their resilience and their self-worth.

Brokers also mentioned mood disorders, such as by Jonah, a social worker, which was associated with the impact of unemployment and the likelihood of drug use to cope, and Asperger's syndrome, mentioned by Malcolm, a community development manager, which was associated more with unemployment in the context of social skills and learning difficulties. Among these, anxiety was associated with employment activities. For example, Dana, an employment training and education coordinator, described the mental health impact on her clients:

> We've got people who can pull a whole car engine apart and put it back together, but to send them for a job interview for a mechanic job or something, these people would flip out and not even be able to sit in front of someone and have an interview.

This was echoed by Cora, a community engagement officer:

> It invokes a level in their anxiety in some of these young people that I've never experienced, most of the [employment] team would never experience, and we struggle to understand. Sort of things like calling an employer, going to an interview, it's normal for us but for them, it makes them so anxious in getting on a bus, travelling maybe ten minutes down the road.

Cora also described how distress could grow at the micro-level due to relationships at the meso-level, creating a trajectory whereby youths who gained jobs could lose them again if their anxiety was not addressed in the early stages, whereby

> you could see a spike, where they're loving it [a new job], they're doing amazing and they're seeing the benefits, but then things happened: they're not hanging out with their friends, they stop getting their payments, that fear and anxiety 'Well, what happens if this doesn't work out?'.

Julia, a teacher at a vocational school, described the same thing in a school context, illustrating how anxiety was perceived to pervade both continuing in employment and in the

initial decision to seek it, describing how "You can see these kids have anxiety or things like that and they're just too scared".

According to brokers, this sort of situation could then lead to behaviour which further impacted on youths' and young adults' chances for employment over time. For example, as Edith, a psychologist for an employment organisation, described, they might stop attending therapy sessions, an issue that was common across settings of school, employment agencies, and therapy: "one of the biggest barriers I encounter is attendance… that's a pretty standard issue with employment services generally". The young people might also begin to isolate themselves generally, leading to further issues, as Jonah mentioned: "I think the longer the young people are not engaged with education and employment, the easier it is for them to fall into other things like drugs and alcohol and homelessness".

According to Olivia, the anxiety they experienced was also a barrier to youths seeking help for mental health in the first place. Even when she tried to facilitate a young person's attendance at therapy, anxiety might still prevent them:

> Great, you've got a meeting at Headspace at three o'clock. We'll let you leave a bit early to get there… No, they "saw a butterfly" on the way… and that comes down to the avoidance and the… "What questions are they going to ask me and am I going to have to confront about myself, about my own emotions?" and I think with complex trauma, a lot of these kids are doing everything they can to just exist.

Although the mental health challenges were prevalent, brokers also suggested that mental health and employment goals could be aligned. Edith, a psychologist for an employment organisation, made her position clear. She suggested that vocational activities and resiliency training could be concurrent and mutually supporting. For example, "My personal belief is that it would be good if the two could kind of come together because I do think that

employment can be a really great intervention for mental health." She acknowledged, however, that for some clients, "we're not really at the stage where we're discussing employment at that point in time. We're just trying to get them linked in and get some treatment happening and stabilise their situation." Similarly, Jonah acknowledged the difficulty of trying to implement both employment goals and mental health goals simultaneously, "Because of their presenting medical conditions, we know that it's unrealistic to expect them to be able to focus on employment goals because of the conditions that they've got." Brokers recognised that while therapy and employment goals could theoretically work well together, judgment was needed about how this could be applied.

The other barrier to employment in the micro-system that brokers reported was a lack of self-confidence in their youth clients. This could lead to ambivalence in how they positioned youth unemployment generally. For example, Mary, a teacher for an employment training organisation, expressed her ambivalence concerning the motivation of youths: "I don't know actually if I would blame them on not trying or if they've given up before they even started." She elaborated on this further, saying, "they don't have the skills that it takes to believe in themselves enough to apply, self-discipline to get to work and do what's necessary throughout that shift, yeah." Other brokers expressed similar impressions of the youths they worked with, for example, Olivia, who suggested there was a "culture of their self-esteem being quite low". Kirk, a teacher at a vocational school, spoke about how low self-esteem could impact on the cognitions of young people in the context of seeking employment, for example, "they might talk themselves out of applying for a job or they think that they're not worth it". Marjorie, a vocational skills teacher at a employment agency, reported a "lack of self-confidence, lack of self-awareness" on the part of her clients.

In response to this belief, brokers engaged in a range of different practices with their young adult clients, from formal group sessions designed to increase resiliency, to personalised individual approaches designed to build rapport and change thinking styles. For example, Brighton, a work mentor, spoke about his resiliency group sessions, where he would "get people talking and do those ice-breaker stuffs, building social intelligence really, social skills, the soft skills, life skills" and then he would "try to get them to realise now how what we talked about then, how can we translate that into our everyday life, in a situation outside, whether it's dealing with someone… with the clerk at headspace or whatever". In this way, Brighton would attempt to reduce the impact anxiety was having on clients in the employment context. Olivia, a school counsellor, ran similar resiliency programs in her school, but with a focus on functional skills: "In my life skills class, we've taken classes to go over things like how to write your resume, a good interview, a bad interview, tax file numbers, what tax brackets are, what they look like." Cora reported a similar response, aiming to improve young clients' resilience, adding that for more serious mental health issues she would refer to a professional:

> We are looking into other programs, probably just day-type workshops about challenging behaviours, managing personalities and the workplace… That would all be about not giving up. So if you meet someone and you don't like them, but they're your boss or they're your co-worker, how do you manage that relationship without resorting to violence… but in terms of mental health, if someone was to present to us with a mental health-related condition we would, of course, have to refer out to someone more appropriate.

In addition to developing workshops at an organisational level, Cora also described her individual response, which was aimed at changing the routine of her young clients to prepare them for the routine of work:

Sometimes these young people they have – I use the example again anxiety or depression… they don't have many friends, and then you're asking them to go out to the workplace and that's extremely daunting. But the first natural step would be, okay, well what's something they're interested in?… do they want to take kickboxing?… going with them the first few times however how many times it takes to have them feel comfortable… getting them immersed within their local communities so they feel a sense of achievement… if they can withstand that, then you know when you're asking them to go into TAFE five days a week or to work five days a week, you're not setting them up to fail because they used to it, the routine.

Nicky, an employment team leader for an outreach organisation, adopted an approach, intended to challenge the thinking style of youths. For example, she spoke of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP; Dilts et al., 1980) as one of her preferred approaches when working with young adults. One of the practices of NLP involves re-framing events in one's life as being useful information, rather than positive and negative events which define the person. This reframing process came in useful when Nicky spoke to her clients' drug use in the context of seeking work. She attempted to re-frame their behaviour as something that might not be compatible with their employment goals, rather than stigmatising it. Nicky used the analogy of a "watermelon" in a "paddock full of strawberries", describing her clients' drug use as the watermelon, and telling them "a watermelon is not a weed, it's just not in the right space or the right place to be doing a good job for the other things around it"; that is, their drug use was inhibiting the achievement of their employment goals or their performance in job interviews. In this way, Nicky found this re-framing process as a way to overcome barriers to employment in her clients.

While brokers attempted to mentor youths toward education and employment by attempting to increase self-confidence, they also were aware of the limitations of this response. Dana, an

employment training and education coordinator, cautioned against "forcing it" with her youth clients:

> I've realised that too, like the more you try and force it, you end up being more disappointed because you think, Oh, I've put all this time and effort in and he still doesn't want it… Some people just won't ever want it, unfortunately. We're at the kind of mentoring education employment type way and if they're nowhere near even ready to enter that kind of level, we can mentor and help them through a referral process somewhere else.

In this way, brokers could address vocational anxiety by practising activities which, in their experience, unemployed young adults found daunting. By promoting resilience in their youth clients, brokers attempted to address the perceived lack of self-confidence and the youths giving up before they had started.

A related theme was the issue of vocational awareness, which was perceived to have an influence on the self-confidence of young clients. Marjorie's experience as a vocational skills teacher, was that self-confidence in employment for youths came from being self-aware and having some idea of what they wanted to do. Marjorie described how "They probably don't know really what they want to do, so don't know really where to start". Her response was to conduct workshops which emphasised the vocational identity of the youth clients. Instead of focusing on the outward skills of youths, she responded by emphasising the inward self-awareness:

> So I think the youths really need to understand that you don't have to be the superstar, the outward superstar. It's good to know who you are a little bit about who you are and what your skills are, so personality. That Myer-Briggs stuff, character strengths are really important. I believe you should always start with that… I just think we need to focus more on the potential realising that to fulfil your potential is to be happy and to find purpose.

Bill, the CEO of an employment organisation, also linked the lack of confidence to a lack of career awareness in high school: "[quoting youth] 'I dunno what I want to be' at Year 12, so [they] don't know early enough… And even as they go on, the less sure they are." Even Kirk, a teacher at a vocational school, who described youth unemployment as "a mix between not knowing what to do and being lazy", acknowledged the influence of vocational awareness:

> I guess you gotta take them back to what they want. So, what's the purpose of what they want and you have to tie it back to their personal interest… so relate it back to… why they want this and you just keep them on track… it's just about making sure that they find the relevance in what they're doing. So I just remind them – keep reminding them, sending them a little tasks, little goals

These experiences highlighted a pattern in brokers' accounts, in which youth identity was linked to self-confidence which was a key issue in youth unemployment. According to brokers, young people's self-awareness and thinking about their identity and interests were important components in building the confidence needed to apply for work and managing youths' experiences of anxiety and depression at the same time. Youths were mainly positioned as vulnerable in these accounts, and it was acknowledged that this was somewhat outside their control, and they needed support for it.

6.3 Meso-level influences

Influences at the meso-level on youths' and young adults' unemployment were prevalent across the brokers' accounts. Brokers consistently referred to the role of family and education in their experiences with unemployed youths. The brokers referred to the influence that relationships in the school setting could have on later employment. They also believed that the family setting and intergenerational unemployment was a key influence on youth unemployment. These two processes were generally described in terms of the way youths and young adults faced many barriers beyond their control. The accounts tended towards

positioning young people as genuinely in need of "nurturing", in order to compensate for the lack of support in these settings which consequently influenced their employment.

6.3.1 Educational influences and response: Dropping out of school and nurturing while at school

The school setting was perceived as an important influence on youth employment in the meso-system. The key influences of education on employment highlighted by the brokers were the following. First, engagement with the educational system generally was an influence because of the impact on employment of not gaining skills or formal qualifications at school. Second, engagement of youths *within* the school setting was important in terms of how school practices could alienate or exclude some students leading them to disengage with education and from society generally, including from seeking employment. There was a belief among brokers that youths lacked the support necessary to stay engaged with education and transition effectively to employment at the time when they were to leave school. This was attributed to the lack of support young people experienced in the family setting to promote confidence, guide their job seeking activities, as discussed in the previous section on family influences. Brokers positioned this lack of a support person as not being adequately compensated for in the school environment, as far as most schools were concerned. As a consequence of this belief, brokers believed they had to compensate for this perceived lack of attention by nurturing them in educational settings for example on the interpersonal level, and also by implementing educational practices consistent with flexible learning options (FLOs), at the school level. This took the form of less classwork, more emotional support, more job seeking support, especially among the vocational schoolteachers. For example, Julia, a teacher at a vocational school, described how she nurtured her students, providing them with "minimal work" during class times

it's kid gloves, conversations, praise, minimal work… even if it's crap, you need to say, "Okay, you're doing really, really well"… I'm too nurturing. So when they're hurting or something like that, I'll just give in, "It's okay. Come here. I'll give you a hug," and it would just ruin everything. I don't have a backbone where the kids are concerned. I just give in.

Olivia described the assistance she gave to students looking for work:

So it's, "Miss, I want to get a job. Can you help me write a resume?" Miss, I want to get a job but I don't have any ID card or anything… So sometimes it is a little bit of, I'll call it, hurdle help. It's a little more handholding but it's to show them that someone's there. They're kind of not in this alone and they've got that support.

This was done to ensure that students felt their concerns were heard, and to maintain their concentration and engagement with school, to ultimately help them progress and transition to employment. Speaking in the context of graduation from school, Julia commented that, "we are their lifeline, they're here with us all the time, we can nurture them and get them to that [graduation]."

Brokers referred to a lack of support for unemployed youths outside of the FLO setting, which led to their clients becoming disengaged. Brokers understood one of the reasons their students had chosen vocational school was because of negative experiences their students reported being bullied at other schools. Youths became isolated in other settings the "one-on-one" approached she witnessed at her school: and were not supported adequately. One of the ways that teacher-brokers responded was by trying to build more effective peer relationships at the school by different approaches to conflict between students. In contrast to the indifference of teachers she had encountered in previous school settings, Olivia described the response of teachers at vocational school:

I've heard from our students about why they avoided school and the link that that has had to their self-esteem… they felt that teachers didn't care, didn't give a crap… I can overhear them [teachers] and here it sounds different… Here, it sounds like, "What's going on with you [student] today because this isn't you? You're usually very kind and you're in there telling me off. What's going on?" So it's, "Okay well do you need to talk to [name]? Do you need to go to the counsellor? Or do you need five minutes to cool off?" There's more of a one-on-one thing here I think that changes the dynamic big time.

This was important for youth employment, because it meant youths disengaged with education, and was something the vocational school was attempting to address. The position of nurturing the youths was at times held ambivalently. Julia noted that if she became too nurturing, she might promote dependency.

I spoke to the psychologist – because what I do is I seriously baby them, and it's not good, the psychologist tells me… we've got a whole bunch of kids without jobs because we became their comfort zone. We became their safe place. So without this environment, they have no safe place, and they don't feel they can go to another place.

The position of nurturing youths in the FLO setting was also accompanied by measures designed to encourage youths to take responsibility. Olivia noted that although the school had no uniform, there were still expectations – and her position was that this was important in the workplace setting too. Her approach was about setting expectations:

We don't have a uniform but we have, again, expectations to youth, like a code of dressing, so no spaghetti straps, no cleavage, no miniskirts, so things like these. So we don't have a uniform but we have expectations around presentation.

Kirk attempted to prepare students for work by introducing a token economy at school, to teach students management of finances.

we've made a [college] economy. So they get money for the positive things they do or whatever a teacher sees that they're doing right, or they're helping someone out, or they're just doing good work in a class, or whatever. So we give them money. So we're trying to teach them about handling money as well. Or if they come in on time, they get money for that, and it's all fake money obviously.

In all these examples, the educational setting was positioned as a key influence in the meso-system, with links to both the family setting and workplace setting. According to the brokers, school was important to employment – not just for the result of formal qualifications, but for the support networks developed through the sense of inclusion at school, which was perceived to extend to inclusion in society and into the exo-system. This was described by Brighton, who described patterns in his clients in his youth clients in the context of an employment agency:

> I find that when they leave school early, they don't gain the social skills that they need, and I think going from that Year 10 to Year 12 can go from one extreme to the next… I've been told that they didn't receive the support from the teachers when that kind of stuff happened but on the other hand, the ones that do leave… probably would've gained a lot more social skills and social intelligence if they had stayed in school, but they just weren't made aware of what they would have to prepare for if they did leave school, they just leave school and there's no support or a person who can persuade them within the educational system… The school should have something set in place… before they make that decision of leaving high school.

In general, many of the brokers constructive responses to negative educational experiences followed this pattern. Brokers would attempt measures to improve the social skills and educational engagement of their youth clients. Kirk described how his FLO school partnered with external companies to provide activity days for the students, and how this fostered positive thinking: "So they're doing bushwalking, or rock climbing, swimming, canoeing, all that type of stuff… So a lot of the students kind of have to get out of their comfort zone and

try and be a bit more positive." Mary attempted, albeit with limited success, to disabuse

youths of the perception they would always be bullied: "[they]were bullied at high school so

they believed that in the workplace, it's just gotta continue, so it will not stop and I used to

say to them, "But look, it's not happening here." And they said, "Yes, because in your class,

there's only ten students and you take care of us." Brighton described how his resilience

sessions attempted to redress a lack of social skills associated with negative educational

experiences:

> we're wanting to prevent youth homelessness and youth unemployment. We want to
> build their character, strengthen their character, help them build on their social skills,
> job search skills, all that jazz. The only reason why they're coming here is because
> they don't get that at school… How can they have an early intervention to prevent
> them from having to go to a job service provider?

Finally, Dana's approach was to encourage re-engagement with education at a community

level, by contacting clients as they attended "pay off your fines" programs:

> a lot of the young ones come down just to pay their fines off through volunteering
> and then we can kind of say to them, "Where are you at? What would you like to be?"
> and start there, and then it's just talking what their step one is. So some of them might
> say, "Well, I don't even know how to read." So we'll say, "Would you be interested
> in just doing a general literacy course at TAFE?"

6.3.2 Intergenerational unemployment

Brokers identified intergenerational unemployment as a key influence affecting unemployed

youths. In their accounts, they described intergenerational unemployment in terms of the

influence of the family environment. There were three ways in which intergenerational

unemployment was positioned as an influence. Brokers made references to a lack of role

models in the family environment, who could inspire young people to achieve and instil them

with confidence to find work. This was highlighted in several accounts. For example, Brighton referred to "neglection from parents or guardians, or lack of role models". Dana elaborated on this issue:

> No one is speaking life into the people at home for various reasons. You could have first the people who they've got at home have never had anyone speak positively to them, so they don't even how to encourage that person. They don't know how to say, "That's awesome. You're doing really well." No one's ever spoken to them like that.

Not only did brokers claim young clients lacked role models, but they also experienced negative feedback. Dana described how this linked to intergenerational unemployment, reporting that "you've sadly got people at home saying, 'No, do you think you can go get a job, do you? Oh well, I don't have a job. I haven't worked. What, you think you're better than us?'" Speaking in the context of her school students, Olivia, a school counsellor, reflected on the influences of her own family in this respect, "I grew up with parents that told me I could achieve, and I was smart, and those messages but we have many students here that were never told that they are smart at home."

To respond to this perceived lack of support at home, brokers engaged in much the same strategies as they did for educational influences, for example, by nurturing their youth clients, as Julia described:

> they come in and they're really, really struggling at home or they've got no place to go, they don't feel worthy, you build that self-confidence in them, okay, to the point where, "You can do this, you are great, you are…" we get their resumes are ready for them, we – you know, all of that sort of thing. So, by the end of their schooling here, they should be able to communicate with their peers, they should be in a happier place hopefully than when they started.

The presence of people in the family environment who could act as role models for gaining employment was regarded by the brokers as a key "pull" factor in getting young people into work which they described as lacking and tried to fill.

Brokers also referred to the lack of discipline they had experienced in their youth clients and placed this responsibility on family influences. This was the "push" factor, and the accounts of brokers referred to the need for unemployed youths to have someone to push them at critical times. Julia described how

> I don't see a good cycle here at all. There's nothing that will push these kids because they're – so lenient. Who's going to yell at them to get a job? They'll just go on benefits. It's just easier for them and they can stay home, they can be with their friends, they can – it's just a ridiculous cycle. If you got laziness within – and inbred in the child, you're stuffed – absolutely stuffed.

Bill suggested that the absence of a father figure in the family environment was also a key family influence on this lack of discipline:

> I think that's the main issue for everything – having that – the patriarchal sort of role, if that's absent, it can almost guarantee it's not gonna end well for this kid in a number of ways, and that's something I've always – to me, I've always pushed on in terms of the role of the father in the family unit or at least the lead alpha male, but 100 percent, I'd go back to daddy issues being the biggest thing there, so then the kids are not engaged. If you're gonna have disengagement from school, it's more likely to have a lack of respect for authority, have their interactions with police and other things there.

In this respect, parental pressure was also identified as a key family influence. Julia suggested parental pressure played a role in the different employment outcomes of her students. She contrasted this with her experience teaching at a "cultural religious school" and how parental pressure on the youths meant that they often achieved high marks, "I worked at a cultural

religious school before this one… I can honesty tell you the work ethic that those cultural parents forced on the child – their children, they were all aiming for 90 and above… But it's – their parents are the ones that are forcing them." Nicky also noted that "when you're at school, if you've got mum, dad, or nobody that's really been academic or see school as important, then they're not going to be able to link into a school."

Julia described how the school had responded by telling students, "Whoever doesn't attend school will have their payments cancelled." However, while this may have been effective in improving attendance rates in the short term on an organisational level, Julia qualified this by highlighting the need to keep the youths on side through her individual approach. This approach involved not forcing the issue and encouraging the youths to reflect:

> once they sort of – you can see that it's sort of getting too much, then you say to them, "Well, you should be an astronaut. If you really think about that, you're a space cadet anyway." You muck around with them and eventually they – so they take the criticism, but you've also gotta say, "Okay, well, have fun," because you'll lose them and they won't come back.

The third way that brokers positioned intergenerational unemployment, was simply as a result of immediate financial necessity whereby the financial benefits of having another child and claiming government support seemed to outweigh the incentive to seek further education and employment. Julia described the situation at her school: "parents[were] on the dole, [and] had kids so they could get the baby bonus and that mentality gets imprinted on the child. So, we've got about five kids that are having kids or have left [school] to have kids." In a community setting, Dana described how:

> Once the kid is eight, they get chopped [from a parenting payment] completely and go back to Newstart [the basic unemployment benefit]. So that's between the age of

five and eight, that's when them young mums will go, "Oh, I should have another baby because I'm going to be chopped at eight.

In a similar way to Julia, who aimed to convince students to plan for their careers at the critical time when they were finishing school, Dana responded to the issue of intergenerational unemployment by using the critical time her clients had to gain work skills before they elected to have another child or before their payments were reduced:

> whereas at [age] five, it's just a little bit of reduction [in welfare payment] but "I can do a course and then that's fine. So we know mentally we've got between, for the next two years, to convince them not to have another bub but, "Hey let's do this course in childcare, so when bub does turn eight and you go back to Newstart, you're qualified and you're ready to go to work. You're ready to actually start your childcare job, or your aged care job," because they're our entry-level kind of stuff.

6.4 Exo-level influences

There were three barriers in the exo-system reported as significant by brokers for youth unemployment. The first was the interactions that youths had with companies and employers and these were for the most part negative, involving experiences of perceived discrimination, exclusion or stigma. The second was the way culture and community intersected with employment opportunities and the third was the impact of homelessness.

6.4.1 Employer attitudes and responses of brokers

The theme of unemployed youths reporting mistreatment at work was prevalent in the experience of brokers. Brokers reported several experiences of employers' rejection of their youth clients and the employers' attitudes of mistrust toward their youth unemployed clients. Brighton described the issue in general terms associating youth unemployment with "discrimination by the employer" and narrated how "They [employers] see mental health issues as a liability". He described the response of one employer to one of his clients not

turning up for mental health reasons, "he [the employer] said, "I'm not going to put up with this much longer. Honestly, I don't think [young person] is that sick anyway… So if he was aware that she had possible mental health issues, would he have treated her differently?"

According to Mary, employers' mistrust of youths was associated with school engagement:

> Employers put them into the same bucket. They run away from the youth. As I said, we've worked with so many businesses close by and as soon as you tell them, "He left Year nine and he was with us…" the subject changes. There was no belief that that person actually could do something.

Even when the youth or young adult was successfully placed with a business, the brokers had difficulty establishing work duties with the employer that were likely to help them to remain in employment. For example, Mary described one example of a typical exchange: "I think he was very worried that this person would steal the money… [He asked] 'Can they wash dishes at the back?' Washing dishes, they're not gonna like it… they wanted him far away from the counter". Julia described one incident where a youth was summarily laid off after an altercation, without any discussion of the events: "another guy hit him, like he got into a fight, and they got rid of him, and then a couple of days later, he calls me and he goes, 'Oh, they took me back because everyone else started telling the real story'". Regarding the employers' mistrust of youths, Julia qualified her position. While she described how "some of the [employers] are very, very biased when it comes to teens… and I get that because if you look at our kids specifically, their attendance is crap". She could see how the issue of discrimination impacted on youths in the long term: "I'll say some of them are lazy – yes, 100 per cent, but some of them have legit problems. How are they gonna find work if someone doesn't give them a go?" Edith remarked that in her experience with youths, "supportive employers" were "few and far between".

Accordingly, regarding their belief that the attitudes of employers and the youths' negative experience with them was a key barrier to employment, brokers responded in several ways. First, they responded attempting to disabuse the employer of their negative perception of unemployed youths. Mary described how she tried to counter the prevailing stigma with an employer: "I said to him [employer], 'Look, I'm a teacher. I have a piercing. No one ever judged me about the piercing.' He said, 'Yeah. But: Different'." Her response to disabuse the employer also guided her placement practices: "I didn't wanna push my students into getting any jobs just for the money. I wanted them to see how good it is to work in a place where they loved it and I said to them [employer], 'Washing dishes, they're not gonna like it'."

The second response was to re-frame the expectations of youths , and to encourage them to be more presentable in job interviews. This was the more prevalent response, and this could take place on either an individual level or an organisational level. For example, on an organisational level, Mary described a variety of programs she organised to re-frame her youth clients' attitudes.

> I worked very closely with RUOK. So what we did, we did like a… Christmas hamper and then it was distributed at Tuesdays at the big park in Liverpool to the homeless people… So we try to show them that we could do something, for them to kind of see that it's not the worst what they have, that they're not the worst off… We've involved the police… keep it simple when you talk to the police officers and what gets you in trouble is actually your mouth that because you talk back to the police officer. And as I said, through the garden, we had a student get apprenticeship from the garden that was sponsoring us and helping us a lot. So it was programs like that that would link them and get them jobs.

Mary encouraged her youth clients to re-frame their experiences during job interviews: "You don't go to an interview and say, 'I was kicked out of school because I bashed the teacher. I was kicked out of school'." I said to them, "You need to start the conversation differently.

You need to tell them, 'I had a rough time but I have changed'." Marjorie explained to her youth clients that "You can't just go from gaming in your lounge room to be working for Xbox or whatever they are. You got to start somewhere." Similarly, Nicky made sure that her clients were getting the most out of every work opportunity, re-framing work experience as "skills building" and making sure that her clients were proactive and did not just "sort out the storage unit". Personal appearance was another way that brokers prompted youths to change their expectations, as Olivia described: "First impressions are large in getting, in securing the job and then for the kinds of jobs most of our young people go into… they have to look the part." Likewise, Julia conceded that most of her students "don't how to dress, they don't know how to talk, and they're very disrespectful to adults".

In a similar way to Mary, Brighton also attempted to disabuse the employer, while at the same time, encourage the young person to re-frame their perceptions. Regarding the case of mistreatment reported by his client, Brighton responded:

> Every manager, any employer should be fully aware of who they are hiring, but that the problem there is there's a fine line to discrimination… he's not aware of the story of this young person and the road that they've been battling, and yet we're doing everything we can to help empower these young people and just one stupid thing or said from a manager of an establishment to say that can completely ruin and that could obviously lead to further unemployment because that person will no longer have the drive to go forward and get jobs. So there is a fine line between letting an employer know you've got a mental health issue. So my approach is I case-noted it.

Brighton's response was balanced in terms of acting as a broker for both parties. He emphasised the importance of encouraging confidence in his client, but also warned about "getting someone's hopes up":

With her, also, I just had to keep reassuring her that she's doing everything right and I had to remind her I'm very proud of her and just remember of her rights and obligations and that's she's not breaking or breaching anything, she's done nothing wrong… I'm pretty sure that our relationship with this CEO is very strong… but don't take my word for it. The most important thing is you don't make promises or words. There's a fine line of getting someone's hopes up, making promises, breaking them, bringing them down. So my words were a little different, a little bit more specific, a little bit more careful of not saying too much where if it fails, it would damage her development.

The third response to the negative experiences of youths with employers was to refer to the gaps in contracting system itself which, according to brokers could be prone to inefficiencies and less than adequate support for young unemployed people. Brokers referred to issues within the broker sector. One of the issues was a concern that the funding model was not suited to meeting the needs of the youth unemployed clients adequately. For example, in contrast to Dana's view, Bill suggested that: "Being bottle-fed by the government… it's flimsy because government change and then it's gone… Budgets can change it any time and the goal posts are always shifting." In response to this, Bill suggested that a model which is jointly funded between government and the corporate sector with good post placement support was what was needed. For example:

You're not creating a company overnight because – oh, the government is gonna throw three million dollars at it… the result of that is poor service… Who's looking after that journey for that client? We have to go back to client-centric. We can't go back to client-centric, without a strong social work model. Other [models] aren't good at it… it should be more about government supplementing an income as opposed to providing the entire income and it's more ownership for corporate, more ownership for me and everyone sort of – 'cause you are – you're paying for a service. I mean what's the difference? The guy is cleaning – the chair gets cleaned… I put in my youth caseworker… whoever it is, and they check in on this guy, see how he's travelling.

Similarly, Dana expressed concerns about inefficiencies in the system, and how unemployed youths could get trapped in an unproductive cycle of unemployment:

> They walk in, and [the job agency is] like, "Who are you? How much are you worth to me? Can I quickly get you in? Are you a cream of the crop one that I can flick out quick and get a pay [out] for or you're one of the ones I'm just going to sit in the corner every week?"… if four months later they come back to them, well then that's a new person all over again. They get the $1,000 again and then if they get them a job, they get the big payment again. So they're kind of a revolving door. But I still believe that if they got that come alongside support, they'd do much better and you've got those good relationships with employers.

Dana's response to this was on the organisational and community level. She facilitated the come-alongside support by means of organisational flexibility in securing training qualifications for youths at the community level:

> Because I'm not bound by any of the Jobactive boundaries or limitations, I partner with every single training organisation, so I have access to every RTO out there. and my class doesn't have to only be filled up with people from one particular Jobactive. I can go out every single unemployed person. I'm not limited to who I can see, whereas Jobactive might want to fill class to do some training but they can only pull from their own clients… I've got at least right now 54 people who want to do traffic control, 54 of them… So I've got to advertise it out to communities. I'm going to take in the 54 people's names who now think, "Yes, we're going to get a free traffic control course."

6.4.2 Culture and community: broker awareness

Brokers' accounts highlighted how the influence of cultures and communities impacted youth unemployment at the exo-level, particularly in the culturally diverse region of Western Sydney. For example, Mary described literacy issues as a barrier to employment in the refugee community: "it was the literacy that would stop them because of spelling. They came

to Australia when they were 16, came from a war-torn country where school was never happening kind of a thing."

Different cultural communities had different values and expectations of employment and this exo-level influence had implications for meso-level and micro-level influences. Cultural expectations might set parameters around the type of job sought or where the job was located. For example, speaking in the context of her female clients in the Middle Eastern community, Marjorie noted that "they're expected really to put their efforts in at home more so than anywhere else". Similarly, Cora described how "you might meet a young woman and she's very keen to work, has a certain idea in mind but it's the brother, it's the father, it might be the husband… and they're not letting her work sort of thing… Culturally, it's not appropriate for them to work." This might pose a challenge for brokers, as they then have to put more emphasis on engagement with the networks surrounding unemployed at the meso-level, opening communication with family members and getting them involved in the process of looking for work. Cora described how she had attempted to gain the support of family to enable a young woman to enter employment:

> There was this young woman in particular and we would reverse-market her and we find her this great position, exactly what she wanted… all of a sudden she wouldn't attend… it was a case of the husband didn't think that position was appropriate, or the area was appropriate. So then, we bring the husband into the office and let him get to know [name], the recruitment manager, and myself, so we could understand they might feel a little bit anxious about these two people he's never met sending his wife to interviews… but it didn't even work as well, just nothing was going to work. He wasn't happy. As long – if only the position was in [Western Sydney suburb] itself, then that would be okay.

Malcolm also described the influence of culture and community as a major one, with reference to how well that community was supported by brokers. Having positioned culture

as an influence for which youths were not responsible and which could affect many communities, his response was threefold. First, he emphasised that culturally appropriate employment support needed to be attached to those communities. In this respect, the prior experience of brokers was important:

> So, I grew up in the local social housing estate as well, and I grew up with Indigenous young people, I grew up with the Middle Eastern community, Southeast Asian, Anglo community – everyone is going through the same hardship as well. And I think my personal experience differentiates me – between me and someone else who's coming into the sector… If you don't take the time to understand those communities, they're very hard to engage and very hard to support.

Second, he emphasised that in dealing with young people from various communities, it was important that the broker not attempt to put on a façade, to build trust with the youths in those communities and cultures:

> that's the reason why they engage with me 'cause they feel that I've been through what they're going through right now. When I do engage young people… I'm always myself. I'm not trying to put on a certain façade or a front. So, they respect that and I think it's funny, this – they feel to a certain extent I'm one of them as well.

The third response that Malcolm took was to suggest developing tailored training packages and context in the vocational services space. In his view, these needed to be pitched at an appropriate language and low level of complexity:

> You also need to develop training packages or content which would [be] at the same levels as those young people for example, at a more basic level, and then you attach support services or addressing along these pathways, drug and alcohol issues, mental health issues, family breakdown, all those issues which you can address during this pathway. And for the different communities, these models are adaptive to different communities. So you just put the right case workers to understand those client groups with that model, and that's pretty much it.

6.4.3 Housing and homelessness: broker experiences of youth homelessness

Homelessness identified as a way in which youths were vulnerable in the exo-system. Homelessness meant that youths could not spend time looking for work and brokers suggested that it took away from broker's ability to respond to other aspects of employment. Nicky, an employment team leader, referred to Maslow's (1943) theory of the hierarchy of needs in her construction of youth unemployment: "Maslow's has really resonated with me because it's an understanding if you're needing a home, if you're needing food, or if those things are worries for you, then you don't care whether you've got a good resume." Olivia described how homelessness was an issue for many of her students. Providing support around homelessness interacted and potentially obstructed her other practices and supporting employment: "So kids coming in 'I'm homeless now, mum kicked me out,' and then I've got a kid saying, 'Can you help me with the resume?' Which one am I taking first? I'm taking the kid that's homeless". Homelessness could also impact on the career paths available to youths at the present time. For example, Cora stated: "Some have more barriers than others… So I might meet someone and they want to find an employment in the music sort of sector, but they're also experiencing homelessness and things like that." Most brokers positioned youths as victims of homelessness. This was qualified somewhat by Jonah, who described how sometimes the solutions he offered were refused by homeless unemployed youths:

> They don't like the rules that come with living in a like a group home environment which is often what youth refuges are… certainly if they were accepting of it, then it's going to be better for their mental health… sometimes it's because of what they've heard from peers… they've heard about for example what it's like to live in a youth refuge and they think, "Well, I don't want to be in that environment".

Most brokers responded to youth homelessness by referring youths to other services. For example, Cora noted how "Sometimes they don't realise that they're homeless, either they're

couch-surfing or you're going from friend to friend to friend… So it's helping people get to that realisation and then connecting with them to the appropriate services as well." It was suggested that even anticipated homelessness and housing stress might present a barrier to employment. Unemployed youths who were motivated and successful in gaining work, might paradoxically find themselves facing the loss of their public housing owing to the fact their circumstances had changed, meaning there was a disincentive to enter employment because of the disruption this would cause. As Dana described in the context of young parents aged 24–25:

> Housing [commission] will [be] going to kind of put the pressure on them like, "You should move out of housing now because you're working," so they're like, "Oh God, I can't give up my housing commission home, it's been in the family for 38 years." So when you think about it, it's very tempting for them, very beneficial for them to stay where they are.

6.5 Discussion: Interactions between socio-ecological systems and key influences in broker accounts

In the micro-system, brokers tended to position youths as vulnerable and in need of support for a range of issues surrounding mental health and self-confidence. This echoes a common theme in the literature (Schaufeli, 1997; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). Their main response to this was to encourage resilience in their clients through a combination of in-house programs, external programs or referral to other services. This supports research which highlights the need for supportive environments at the micro-level, not only for seeking employment, but for promoting a supportive environment for seeing mental health advice (Rickwood, 2011). This aspect of the micro-system interacts with the exo-system, whereby the availability and appropriateness of mental health services can interact with brokers ability to respond. Edith's

account demonstrates how even referring youths to other services can be problematic in terms of the timeframe or accessing the right service:

> So there definitely needs to be more services assisting people that are experiencing homelessness for one. I think headspace is a really great mental health resource for young people. However, depending on which headspace you're dealing with, your client may not always fit into their kind of model of care. So sometimes I've been told that my clients are too complex that I've tried to refer and that they should be better serviced by someone like in mental health, but that's very hard to get linked into that unless you're sort of at acute risk of harm, so – yeah. So probably more – just more – maybe more tailored mental health services for young people or perhaps a few more – a bit more flexibility in accessing those services. There's also long waitlists as well.

This argues for more tailored mental health services for unemployed youths, and the need for brokers to familiarise themselves with them. Linking youths in with mental health services as they seek work is important interplay linking the exo- and microsystems. The results argue for better coordination between employment brokering and mental health (Blustein et al., 2012; Blustein et al., 2016).

In the meso-system, the brokers identified educational disengagement and intergenerational unemployment as important. Their experiences compare well with the literature, with attendance rates a common concern in secondary school system at large (Watterston & O'Connell, 2019). While the broader effectiveness of FLO needs further research (Te Riele et al., 2017), the responses of the brokers FLO's here suggest that can be a positive outcome for some unemployed youths who are at the younger end of the cohort. Many of the brokers here took a nurturing approach to their FLO students; however, the results show that at end of school this positioning might become more ambivalent. The perspectives and responses of the brokers on intergenerational unemployment were associated somewhat with the

importance of having a close mentor and this perspective was supported (Ungar, 2004). This was a response that positioned unemployed youths more as adolescents and emerging adults. The other response to intergenerational unemployment by the brokers was concerned with coordinating parenthood and study. This latter response demonstrated how in certain circumstances unemployed youths might be positioned more as becoming responsible parents, to encourage educational engagement.

In the exo-system, brokers responded to the influences of homelessness, employer attitudes to youths, and cultural issues in a variety of ways. Regarding employer attitudes to youths, brokers attempted to take a balanced approach, disabusing the employer of their misconceptions while at the same time trying to preserve the young person's work commitment through resilience. Brighton's account illustrates how the broker's role was at the nexus of an interplay between the micro-, meso- and exo-systems, and had to navigate individual and structural aspects:

> The first thing we'd like to do is put them in resilience training program… and I think that is a very key part. So it's now becoming, for the lack of better words, I don't want to say "compulsory", but it is becoming compulsory that they'll be attending these resilience programs, and there are exclusions if they don't follow up… we need to teach them that they need to take responsibility and ownership of their actions… And if they can't comply with that… Maybe we need to take a step back and then they need to be referred to the appropriate service… sometimes they're ready for it. They're ready to be employed straight away. So we go down the track about talking about what kind of thing that they want to do, do they want a survival job, do they want a career job, stuff like that… But if they're not job-ready coming out of [training], that's when we move into the education, are they ready to study?

This positioned work readiness as a key influence at the exo-level, but it also incorporated the meso-level (education) and the micro-level of work commitment and motivation. Brokers had

to balance the structural demands with the individual's needs. The brokers' placing responsibility on the structural factors of the brokering system and their calls for a more client-centric model had some support in research (Gilchrist, 2020), as did their descriptions of the potential dangers of "creaming" and "parking" (Cowling & Mitchell, 2003). The experiences reported by brokers highlight the need for the availability of post-placement support of youths in employment, which has proven useful (Drake & Bond, 2008). Their accounts of culture and homelessness also intersected with this approach. Research suggests that policy approaches need to incorporate the experiences of low SES and different communities (Grant-Smith et al., 2019). This also applies to mental health services, as the brokers' accounts highlighted (Minas et al., 2013). In terms of homelessness, brokers highlighted its impact on seeking employment, and generally responded by referring to the appropriate service or information. Research suggests that resources developed by young homeless people themselves would be beneficial in this respect (Muir-Cochrane et al., 2010). One aspect of homelessness that did not come through as strongly from the broker accounts was the interplay between family conflict and homelessness. Research suggest that the meso-level and homelessness are interrelated through inter-parental conflict (Flatau et al., 2013).

The global influences on youth unemployment were remote from the brokers accounts, who focused more on the other levels. One possible reason could be that the brokers' official roles were necessarily more involved with the meso-system and exo-system. Nevertheless, brokers made occasional reference to the gig economy, which implied the influence of global factors, in line with research. For example, the gig economy has a health impact, as the infrastructure of health typically associated with regular workplaces is absent (Bajwa et al., 2018). Also, perceptions of employability from those who hire in the gig economy might change, with the

increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in selection processes, and the self-marketing required by workers who participate in it (Carr et al., 2017).

In conclusion, the analysis of the brokers accounts shows how brokers were constructing the issue of youth unemployment, the issues they deemed most important, and how this determined their responses across individual, community, and organisational levels. The balance of brokers accounts positioned unemployed youths as vulnerable actors in terms of unemployment, as in their experience, youths faced multiple barriers across the social ecosystem. Generally, unemployed youths were positioned as vulnerable, and a brokers used a wide variety of strategies to compensate for this vulnerability as they saw it. Even so, there were a few examples of brokers placing responsibility on youths, and these were aimed at the period after they left school, identified as critical. The impact of this positioning on the brokers practices can be seen across the levels. At the micro level, it was focused on the individual and referring to the appropriate service, if there were mental health issues. The theme of instilling confidence in youths shows how this can come from the individual brokers and from organisations. It speaks to the training and skills brokers have and what is possible in terms of programs in organisational settings. At the meso-level, the results highlight the importance of social skills learned in the school environment and the role of the FLO setting in encouraging this. Brokers claimed that this was a key part of breaking the intergenerational cycle of unemployment and disengagement from education. At the exo-level, the results show that brokers are aware of the negative experiences that youths encounter at work and how this affects their confidence. They aimed to mobilise their position as brokers to ensure that they brokered to supportive companies and had the necessary cultural training for their clientele. As was the case in the youth sample, brokers gave a minimal account of macro level issues. The reasons for this may be due to the brokers concern for community and organisational

concerns. As countries across the world move to put in place training and employment programs to deal with global influences on unemployment, such as conflict, economic crisis, and pandemics, the emphasis brokers give to this may change. Seen through the lens of the socio-ecological model, the results show how the interaction of employment brokers with youths transcends both one-on-one mentoring relationships and the impact of welfare regimes on a social level. It highlights the role of what happens prior to seeking work in terms of mental health and wellbeing, and it offers possibilities for the improvement of work and training opportunities in terms of the actual conditions of transition to work, and the support systems available for this age group.

Chapter 7 Convergence and divergence in youths' and brokers' accounts of youth un/employment

7.1 Preamble

This chapter addresses the third and final research question, which is how the youths' and brokers' accounts demonstrate points of divergence and synergy in their positioning of youth unemployment, and the implications of this. The various influences referred to by both brokers and youths indicated different areas of priority for each group, different ways that unemployed youths might be positioned, and how these positions could be validated and supported. This chapter shows how youth experience shaped their constructions of un/employment, and how the constructions of youth unemployment adopted by brokers shaped their responses to their youth clients.

On balance, youth experiences shaped their engagement with education, their vocational identity and their career decisions, emphasising the micro-and meso-levels. Broker experiences shaped their responses to their clients primarily at the meso- and exo-levels of the model, focusing on education and organisational programs. The implications of these perspectives and approaches are discussed along with the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for young people in terms of employment, education and broker support.

7.2 Key influences at each level of the model

Figure 6 illustrates the influences identified as important by youths and brokers at every level of the socio-ecological model, with interactions between different levels in youth or broker participant accounts. Each level contains the influences and responses to youth unemployment that were identified by participants as significant. The connecting lines indicate the way that certain influences interacted or were interrelated at different levels of the model. It shows the way that the meso-system influence of vocational school and flexible

learning options related to experiences of self-mastery and employment self-efficacy. It shows how employer attitudes related to changes in youth work commitment, either toward motivation or resignation. It also highlights how work commitment is also implicated in the quality of broker support given to youths. Last, it highlights the link between the quality of mental health resources and programs offered by brokers and the resilience of their youth clients.
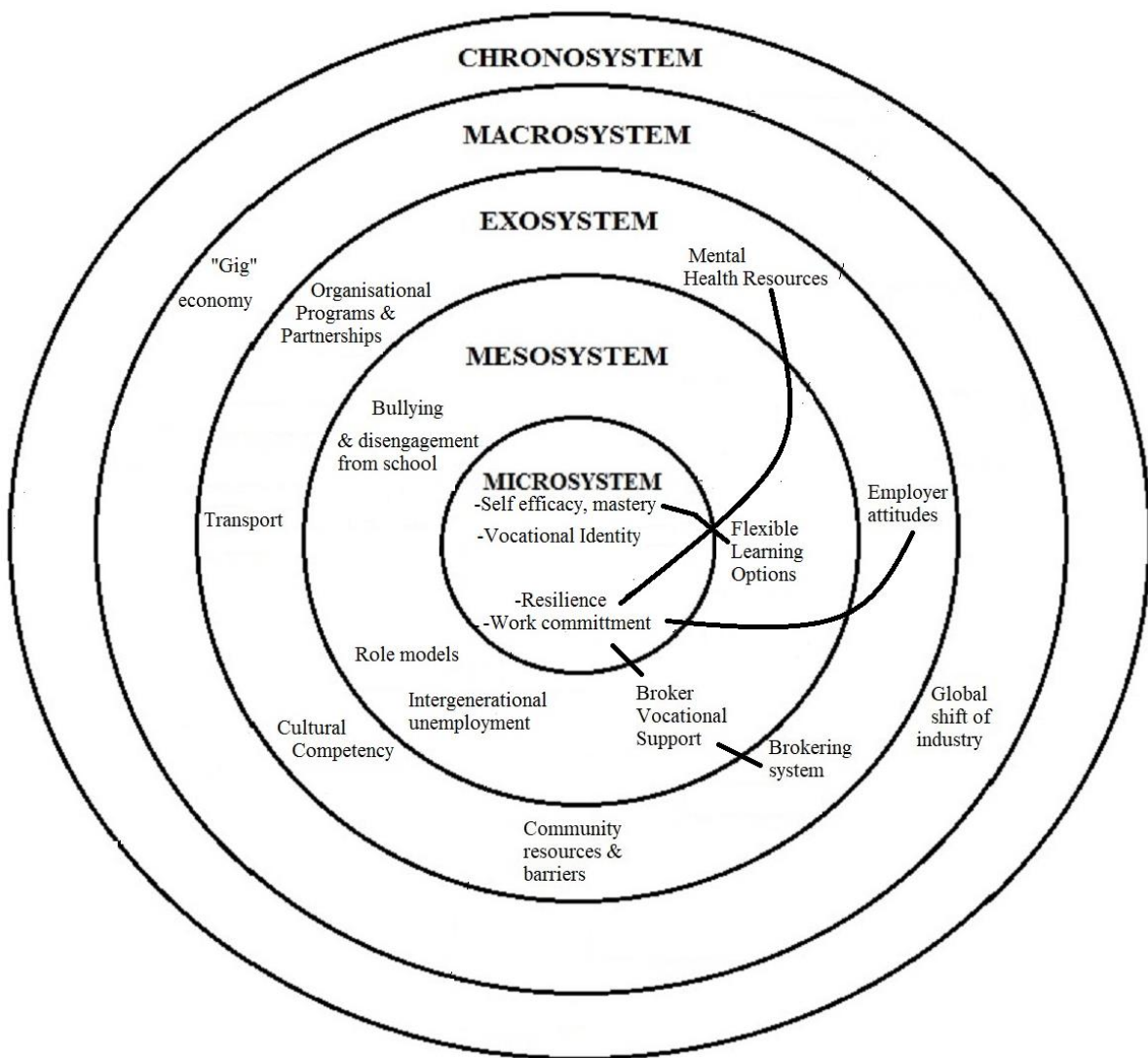
Figure 6. Key themes placed within the socio-ecological model, and associations between levels

7.3 Micro-system

The perspectives of youths and young people and brokers given in the interviews in this study aligned in several ways concerning the impact of unemployment. Both groups of participants acknowledged the associations between unemployment, distress and risks to mental health. Youths spoke of isolation, boredom, low motivation, anxiety and depression. Brokers spoke of youth clients who were withdrawn, anxious before interviews, or who withdrew from attending school, interviews or appointments. In this respect, the accounts of youths tended toward the "exposure" effect of unemployment on health (Graetz, 1993) and lent support to the common themes of the LAMB model of unemployment distress (Jahoda, 1982; Selenko et al., 2011). Figure 7 shows the synergy between the perspectives of youths and brokers at the level of the micro-system. Both groups converged on the issue of the mental health impact of unemployment and differed in that youths emphasised work in terms of vocational identity, and brokers emphasised work readiness or barriers to vocational awareness.

Figure 7. Synergy and divergence between brokers and youths' accounts in the micro-system

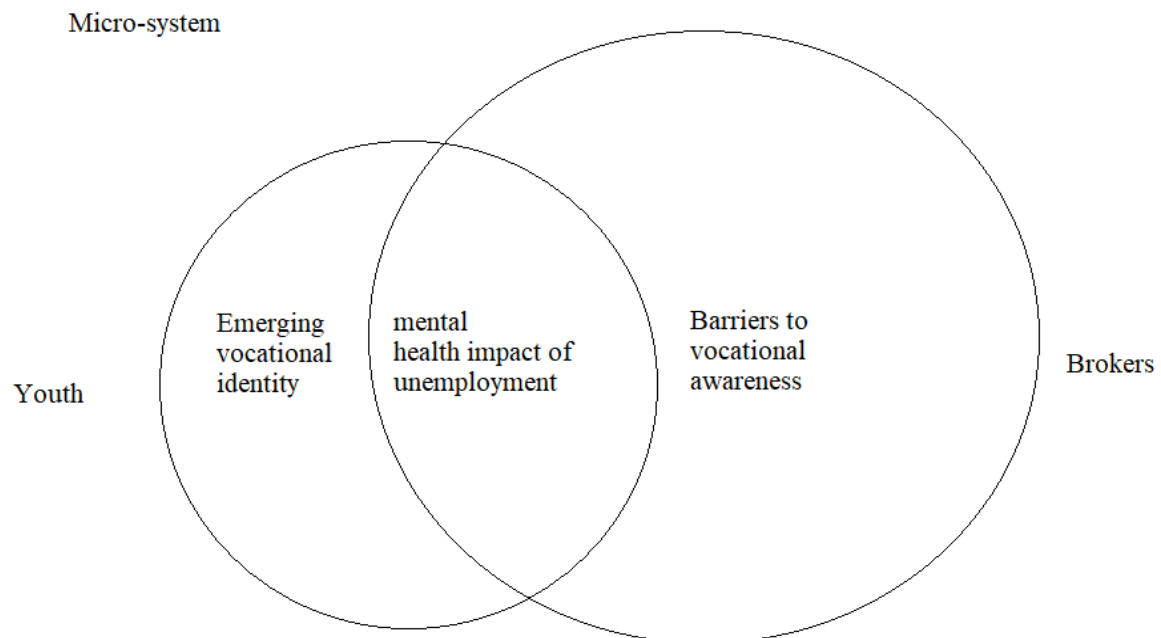With one exception, the youths interviewed for this study self-positioned as vulnerable to mental health issues, and this inhibited their ability to find work. The brokers questioned generally positioned the unemployed youths the same way, and their response was to frame the issue in terms of work readiness. Unemployed youths who were not ready to work because of mental health concerns were referred onto the appropriate service. However, there was some recognition on the part of the brokers that mental health and employment goals could be better aligned. The results suggest that even youths who are facing mental health problems might wish to continue to seek work, and this is where brokers could validate their self-determination. Where youths do self-position as vulnerable, however, brokers also had a role in de-stigmatising mental health help-seeking, which is in line with research (Patel et al., 2007).

The results illustrate how the youths positioned the benefits of work as a way to find meaning and to develop as a person. This was highlighted by the way in which youths reported experiences in which they might have been individuating themselves from parents. The experiences of the youths developing their vocational identity as distinct from their parents can be read through the lens of the identity theories of Erikson (1959; 1968) and Marcia (1966; 1967). Within Erikson's broader identity stage of *identity versus role confusion*, Marcia identifies four identity statuses which the young person may have. Each of these four identity statuses reflect different dynamics in the individuation process. First, there is the identity status of *foreclosure*. This refers to a dynamic whereby a young person has a stable identity and may even appear self-confident. However, their identity is one which has been largely modelled on parents, and has not been subjected to serious questioning or alternatives, leaving it vulnerable to events which challenge their values. This formation could accurately

describe some youths in the study who had made up their mind to follow a career pathway suggested or endorsed by their parents and teachers.

Second, there is a *moratorium* identity formation. This refers to a situation where the young person's identity may be in a state of change as they question their congruence with their parents' values and experiment with different identities as circumstances allow. Moratoriums are open and reflexive about their identity challenges and shifts. This was highlighted by accounts of youths in this study who appeared to be actively questioning the common pathways suggested to them by their parents, teachers or their past education experiences.

Third, there is a *diffusion* identity formation. This refers to a state in which model identities may be lacking or unviable, and as a result, a young person may be unable to make identity commitments easily and may become withdrawn and vague in their self-expression. This might refer to the accounts of brokers in this study, who described how some youths possessed skills, but that they might not be able to commit to formulating them into an integrated career pathway or communicate them in interviews.

Finally, there is an *identity achieved* formation. This refers to an identity status in which a young person has passed through a preliminary moratorium state of questioning, arrived at an identity which is stronger for it, and recognisably distinct from their parents' identity. The person who has an achieved identity is generally satisfied and comfortable with the differences between themselves and parents. This compares with the participants who had chosen different career pathways from their parents', and were confident in their ability to pursue those pathways. These results highlighted the way that unemployment can be experienced differently according to their developmental stage and brokers can play a role in validating these concerns. This might mean that brokers consider vocational identity as a

factor when making assessments of the work readiness of young people and use appropriate interviewing or questions to conceptualise the vocational development of their clients. It could also mean that they encourage youths to reflect on their vocational stage and consider the relative advantages of each formation and utilise them in their job search strategy. For example, a moratorium stage client might be best suited to applying for varied roles. In contrast, a diffuse formation might be more suited to one role where they are supported by a mentor to model or assist them in a specific role.

Generally, brokers validated this aspect of identity development through the programs they offered and the approach they took. Even though youths' identity may be shifting, the results indicate that a constructive response could be made. First, they encouraged youths to explore different experiences and courses. Second, through their resilience programs, they validated vocational identity through vocational awareness. Unemployed youths were positioned as having low vocational awareness, and the resilience programs were designed to help unemployed youths reflect on what it was they wanted to do. Research suggests the constructs of exploration and career decision self-efficacy are important factors associated with vocational identity (Gupta et al., 2015), supporting the brokers' response.

7.4 Meso-system

At the meso-level, there was divergence between the accounts of brokers and youths in terms of family influences. Youths identified both positive and negative aspects of their family environment. Brokers tended to emphasise the negative aspects associated with intergenerational unemployment. Both groups highlighted negative influences related to the family setting, demonstrating the impact that the family setting could have on employment. There was nuance at this level too, however. Youths tended to emphasise the interaction of family influences with their individual functioning and motivation; whereas brokers

emphasised the impact of role models in developing work commitment and attitudes. Both these positions have support in the literature. Research illustrates that youths' perceptions of the family dynamics can be at odds with their parents' perceptions, and this difference in experience can contribute to maladjustment with implications for education and employment (Human et al., 2016). Youths' and brokers' accounts converged on the way that early childhood trauma and disrupted relationships with parents could lead to impacts on functioning in adolescence which they experienced when youths came to look for work, supporting research indicating low employment outcomes (Sansone et al., 2012). The effect of parental interaction also converged with brokers' accounts of the role of diet in their experience of youths (Krug et al., 2016). Figure 8 shows the synergy between the perspectives of youths and brokers at the level of the meso-system, in relation to family influences. It illustrates how youths' accounts emphasised family support and pressure; whereas brokers emphasised the lack of role models and intergenerational unemployment. Both groups acknowledged the influence of family on motivation to seek employment.
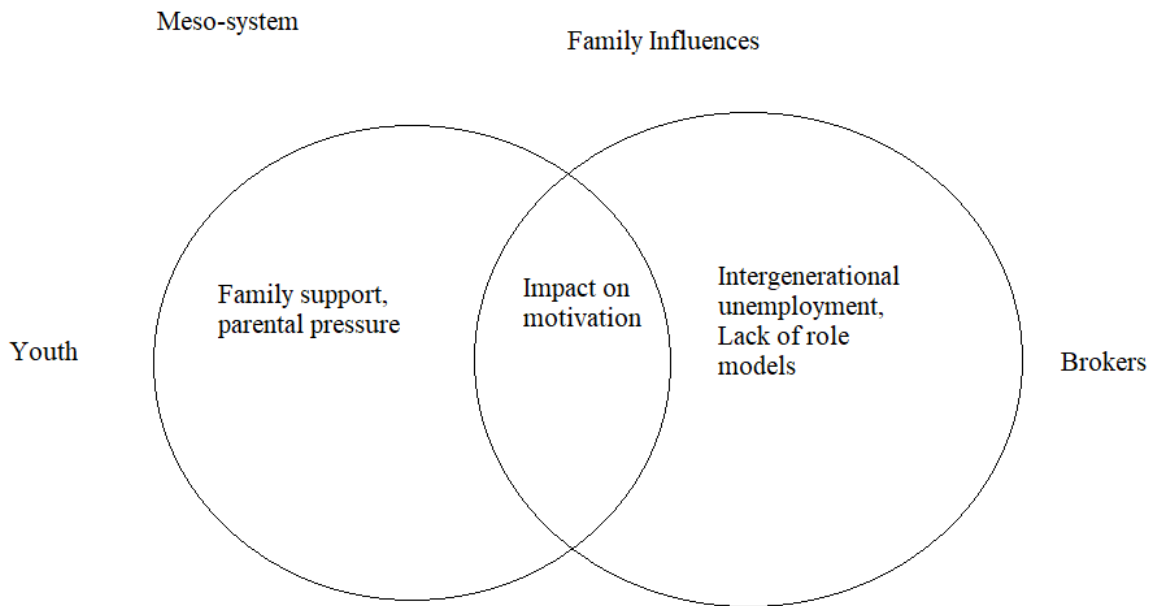
Figure 8. Synergy and divergence between brokers and youths' accounts of family influences in the meso-system

Brokers emphasising the role-model influences of family on youth unemployment reflected their experience of intergenerational unemployment in their clients. This position has some support from the general findings that parental SES predicts the employment opportunities and ambitions of youths (Blustein et al., 2002). However, in terms of parental education level, the influence of SES may be changing, with declines in the correlation between family education level and student educational attainment (Marks, 2019, 2020; Marks & Mooi-Reci, 2016).

Generally, brokers positioned youths as vulnerable because of the impact of intergenerational unemployment. Youths were not held responsible for their unemployment in this respect, but the results indicate that some responsibility was placed on the parents of young clients, on the basis that adolescents gain much information about work from parents (Levine & Hoffner, 2006). The results indicate two things: first, that the positive experiences available to youths in the home environment should not be discounted. Some brokers did mention using work

experience with parents on their resume, and this could be beneficial. Second, in view of the

negative experiences, there is scope for more involvement of family-based programs in the

employment transitions of youths. For example, programs that aim to lessen family conflict

might improve employment outcomes and have been shown to improve transitions among

youths in foster care (Van Ryzin & Dishion, 2012). In addition, programs that aim to reduce

stress, or encouragement of "soft" skills, such as concentration, perseverance and locus of

control at an early age could also be considered, because these have been identified as factors

in intergenerational disadvantage (Vera-Toscano, 2020).

The other response to intergenerational unemployment from some brokers at the meso-level

was to attempt to influence young mothers to engage with education while they were

financially supported. The example of young mothers' distress around termination of

parenting payments supports research on the psychological effects at the time the relevant

policy underwent changes (Kiely & Butterworth, 2014). This interaction illustrates the way

that brokering goes beyond a transaction between youths and employers, and instead involves

strategic planning about an employment and training trajectory which accommodates

individual concerns such as financial stability and parenting responsibilities. Young single

mothers are a subset of youth unemployed that has received specific attention in past research

because they face additional challenges to employment (Butterworth, 2003). In particular,

they may experience additional distress and reliance on extra support from their social

networks in the wake of welfare-to-work policy changes (Cook & Noblet, 2012; Cook, 2012).

A principal way in which the results from youths and brokers overlap was in the way they

spoke about the influence of the type of schooling. As the results show, the type of schooling

had a profound effect on the outlook of students who had experience of education in an

inclusive school environment such as flexible learning options (FLOs), and the results

seemed to reflect the common aims of this form of schooling. These include, among other things, personal wellbeing and confidence, developing aspirations and skills, good relations with adults and service providers, and broader engagement with education and society (Te Riele et al., 2017). The results show that broadly, the students' positive experiences of this type of schooling suggest there were influences on several of these domains, and therefore FLOs were working well for them. While education is conceptualised here as a meso-level influence on youth experiences of un/employment, the positive experience of social inclusion was present in the accounts, and suggests that meso-level education experiences interact with exo-level social structures. The results demonstrate the level of stigma that dropping out of high school can engender and shows how having a strong positive influence such as FLOs at meso-level may also work through reducing marginalisation (Te Riele, 2006), which may then have an impact on self-efficacy in employment. The accounts brokers gave of their practices in FLO compare well with the positive experiences of youths. There was convergence in the types of help that the youths received and the brokers gave in terms of employment. The types of support that the brokers gave to youths in the context of FLOs was positioned as important to achieving the confidence, optimism and resilience needed to engage with employment, and thus validated the experiences of unemployed youths.

The brokers' positioning of youths as responsible rather than vulnerable came at the critical time of leaving school. Around this time, the brokers in the school setting were concerned that their efforts at "pushing" the youths would be derailed. Some youths reported this "pushing" positively, in terms of gaining their qualification. Figure 9 shows the synergy between the perspectives of youths and brokers at the level of the meso-system, in relation to educational influences. It shows how there was convergence on the positive role of support for youths in vocational schools. However, only brokers spoke of the risk that youths might

become dependent on the school environment. Youths also emphasised the role of bullying and being neglected by brokers.

Meso-system   Educational Influences

Youth

bullied or excluded
from other schools

Neglected by
brokers

Vocational school
environment
positive

Positive of broker
vocational support

Risk of
dependence on
vocational school,
need pushing in
Year 12
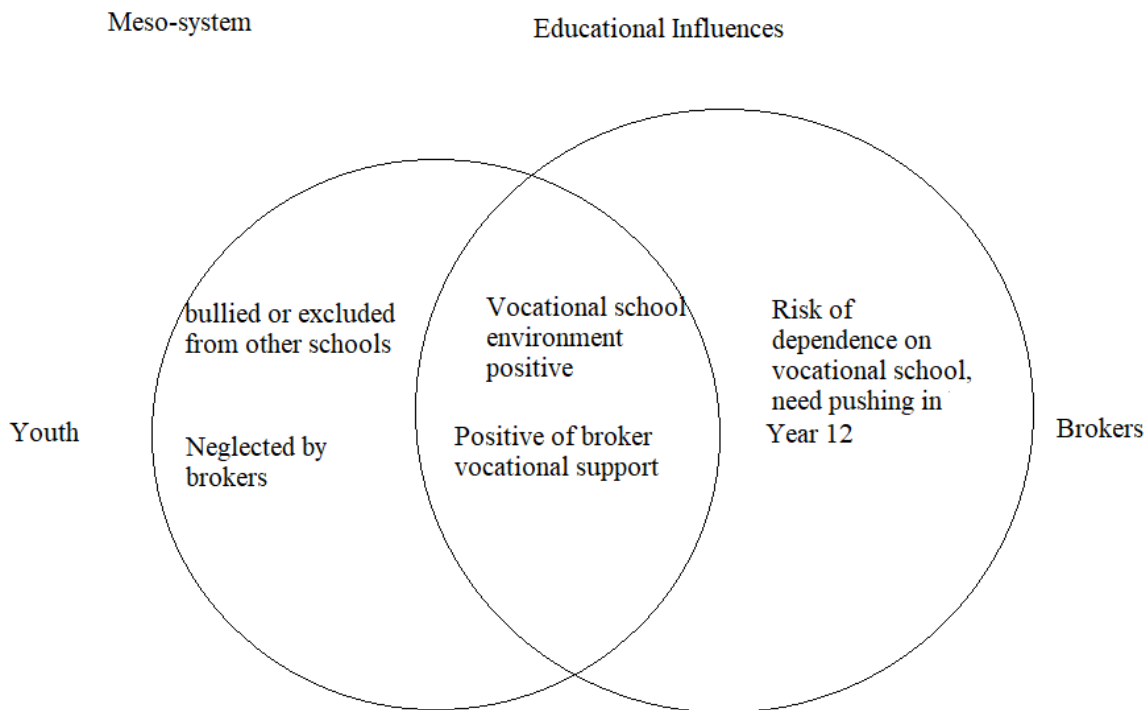
Brokers

Figure 9. Synergy and divergence between brokers and youths' accounts of educational influences in the meso-system

The results show that this contrast was paralleled in employment agency settings and among formal employment brokers. Experiences of being left alone with job search websites can be contrasted with brokers who ensured that their clients arrived at job interviews. Brokers who saw the barriers their clients faced and adapted acted to validate the experiences of youths with employment agencies. Brokers can be effective in this way because of "weak ties" and informal networks. The value of such ties is supported by recent research which found that weak, formal ties (such as brokers or professional contacts) are an important complement to strong and informal ties (such as family and friends) when looking for work (Patulny et al., 2019; Ramia et al., 2020). The teachers, while not officially employment service providers, did fill this brokerage role in their activities in FLO, and illustrate how the "weak tie broker"

(Patulny et al., 2019) at the meso-level is an important factor in the wellbeing of unemployed youths and young adults.

Besides the implications for work opportunities, the brokering activities, such as teaching style, encouraging teambuilding and assisting youths with job search activities, validated the youths' experiences of being isolated or excluded. As the results show, youths' experiences of mastery and efficacy in terms of their aspirations and career plans were associated with the trust that was built up by these activities. This is supported by the finding that having increased support from peers made it less likely that the youths would become discouraged job seekers (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Patulny et al., 2019), and research on the role of social support more broadly (Milner et al., 2016). There is also research that suggests that the building up of these relationships and strengths have positive implications for adolescents' regulatory processes and behaviour, and may contribute to collective efficacy; that is, the broader efficacy in the context of the school community (Masten, 2004; 2006; Masten et al., 2004).

7.5 Exo-system

There was some divergence in the results regarding homelessness. Youths' accounts of homelessness were not as prevalent as brokers' accounts of the scale of the problem of unemployment associated with homelessness. While there were a few examples of youths noting the impact housing could have, most youths were living at home, and spoke in terms of past homelessness or housing instability. This could be attributed to the methodology of the study and the way the youths were recruited. Homelessness services were not approached in this study in the recruitment of youths, and so the divergence between the results may reflect the extent of brokers' experience of homelessness in their clients and dealing with the relevant services. The youths' and the brokers' accounts both show that housing for youth

unemployed can be complex and changing, so positioning youths as homeless might be problematic if they resist this categorisation, as some brokers claimed they did. There might be many reasons for this. The youths' accounts showed how housing and homelessness might fluctuate with relationships with parents, being in motels because of cultural obligations, or because their home was not a welcoming place. These factors are supported by research that shows that the needs of youths who engaged in couch surfing (that is, where young people without parental support move from one temporary living situation to another) have different support needs and demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of homelessness (Curry et al., 2017). The way that brokers offer support to homeless unemployed youths is therefore important. Research suggests that referring to resources that have been developed with the input of youths (Muir-Cochrane et al., 2010), and ensuring that multiple services are coordinated in their delivery to youth clients (Grace et al., 2006) might be a constructive way to validate youth experiences of intersecting homelessness and unemployment.

There was some convergence in the accounts of youths and brokers in relation to relationships in the exo-system with employers. The youths' accounts of negative experiences at work synergise with broker accounts of helping youths reframe their perceptions of work. Whereas youths spoke about their reactions at work in the context of their decisions to resign and or subsequent anxiety about looking for work, some brokers positioned the youths' behaviour as resistance to the work duties they were offered and having unrealistic expectations. However, the results also were aware of the stigma that youths faced from employers and made attempts to advocate for them by disabusing the employer of their negative preconceptions. Therefore, brokers generally pursued a dual strategy, disabusing the employer to ensure work opportunities for their clients remained open, and re-framing their youth clients' expectations. In this respect, the accounts of youths were somewhat validated.

Figure 10 shows the synergy between the perspectives of youths and brokers at the level of the exo-system, for the influence of employment experiences. It shows how youths and brokers converged on the positive influence of being advocated for and being supported to re-frame their responses to setbacks. Youths emphasised the experiences of discrimination and responses of resignation. Brokers spoke about the unrealistic expectations of youths, but also of the need to reform the operation of placements at the organisational and policy levels.

Exo-system Employment Experiences

Youth

Rejection
Resignation
Discrimination

broker support,
re-frame
expectations,
dispel misconceptions
of youth

unrealistic youth
job expectations

Reform structures
of employee
retention

Post-placement
support
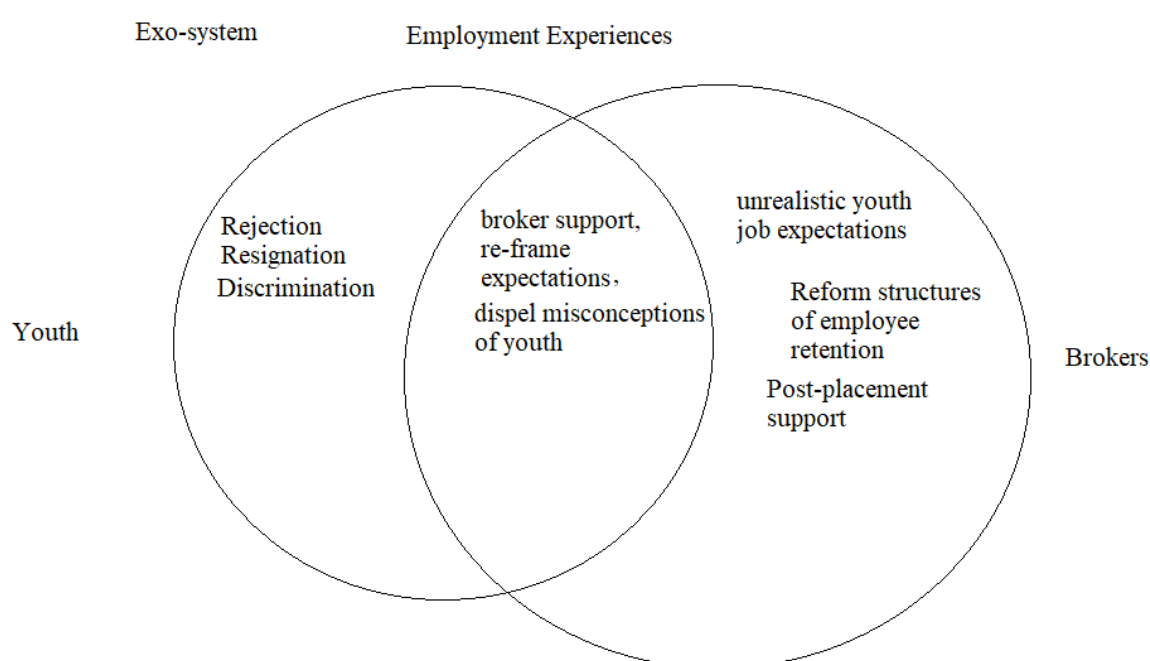
Brokers

Figure 10. Synergy and divergence between brokers' and youths' accounts of the influence of employment experiences in the exo-system

Both the negative experiences of youths and the influence of stigma are well supported in research. Bullying and mistreatment at work is a significant issue for youths because of the impact that it can have on mental health (Butterworth et al., 2016) and future engagement with work (Leach et al., 2020). Even perceived discrimination may have an effect on health (Caputo, 2003). These experiences impact on mental health by reducing the psychosocial quality of work and therefore negating the benefits working is supposed to bring (Butterworth

et al., 2011; Law et al., 2020). These findings also question the assumption that accepting any job will automatically bring benefits to youths and young people (Butterworth et al., 2013). The brokers' accounts of stigma illustrate why these negative experiences might lead to poorer health outcomes for youths. Research shows how, in addition to the loss of work quality from bullying, unemployed people can internalise unemployment stigma from social attitudes and discourses of personal failure (Peterie et al., 2019a). Not only does this support the accounts of shame and anger reported by the youths in this study at their previous employment experiences (Peterie et al., 2019a), it also demonstrates how this can lead to isolation and withdrawal from networking, as a way to manage the effects of the stigma (Peterie et al., 2019b). This synergy in the results illustrates how the psychological impact of unemployment can be associated with the way that youths interact with brokers, create networks and navigate community attitudes. As important as getting youths to experience a sense of efficacy and identity in their initial employment experiences is the need to retain a sense of self-mastery – if and when they resign in the wake of negative experiences at work and experiences of stigma from employers (Crowe et al., 2016).

Given these influences, the response of the brokers in terms of promoting resilience in their re-framing of youths' expectations seems appropriate. However, in terms of resilience the responsibility to respond to these setbacks does not rest with the youths alone. Resilience has many aspects, some individual (such as self-mastery, vocational awareness, identity stability), such as the resilience programs addressed, and some at other levels. Resilience can apply to family cohesion in the meso-system, school environment, and community safety and inclusion, and the ability of all these networks and systems to respond to unemployment is also part of resilience. Therefore, to validate the formative experiences of unemployed youths, brokers could more explicitly define their response as addressing multiple levels in

socio-ecological systems. These aspects should be incorporated into any resilience training so as to encourage youths to mobilise their own networks, as well as individual capabilities.

The other response from some brokers was to position the experiences of unemployed youths as symptomatic of the broader influence of the exo-system, specifically the complexity of employment and youth services offered. The views of these brokers are supported in research. Some brokers described the sector as having too many organisations trying to provide all services to all clients, instead of specialising. While it was not directly expressed this way, in addressing the macro-level brokers were invoking a concept of "public value" (Moore, 1995). Applied to the context of employment service providers, this means a focus less on competition between brokers in the employment service provider role and more on cooperation with not-for-profit, corporations and government (Ramia & Carney, 2010). In a sense, the emphasis placed on the exo-system by the brokers (as compared to the youths, who did not mention this aspect) in the accounts highlight the gaps between conceptualising a client-centric model and putting into practice where it can be experienced by youths as better support, and more equitable health and employment outcomes. Brokers formed a link here, between the various gaps in the system, and the fostering of resilience in their youth clients, as the results show.

On other issues in the exo-system, youths and brokers accounts diverged. Transport was identified as a key issue by youths as a barrier to employment; whereas brokers focused on the influence of culture and community. Transport disadvantage has been associated with social exclusion (Currie et al., 2010). One of the ways that brokers could validate this experience is through selecting appropriately located positions or by discussing transport options with youths, who may live outside the area. This might help to mitigate some of the attendance issues that both youths and brokers reported.

The brokers also emphasised culture more than the youth participants. While the youth

participants in the study came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, the only references to

culture in the youth participants were in the context of discrimination and housing barriers

which continue to face the Indigenous population, which is well supported by research

(Menzies, 2019). It is not clear the extent to which the other youths regard their various

cultures as impacting on their unemployment. This study did not address these concerns

explicitly and further research is needed to examine the experiences of migrant youths. Figure

11 shows the synergy between the perspectives of youths and brokers at the level of the exo-

system in relation to community level influences. Homelessness was the common issue

identified by both groups, whereas youths emphasised transport and brokers focused on the
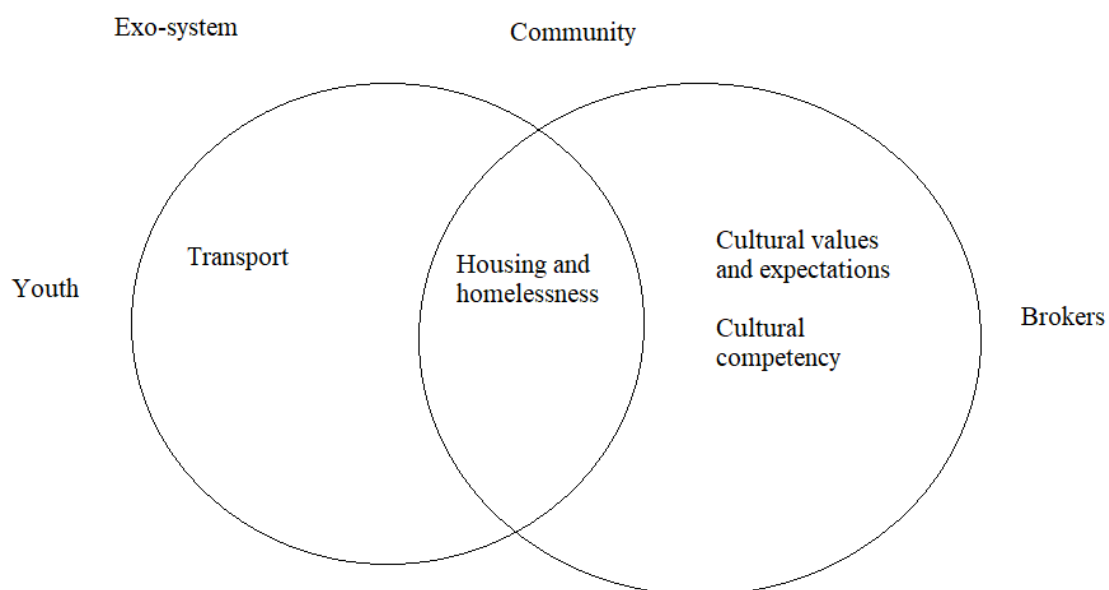
influence of culture.

Figure 11. Synergy and divergence between brokers and youths' accounts of community influences in the exo-system

7.6 Socio-ecological level relationships and implications for autonomy in the model

The results of the study support the consistent finding that unemployment is associated with experiences of uncertainty and distress. The experiences of youths in this study echo the research within the latent and manifest benefits of work model and the agency restriction models. The experience of autonomy as it relates to the manifest benefits of work (that is, finances) was clearly associated with the barriers to employment that youths and brokers reported. However, the study went further than this, illustrating how autonomy also applied in the developmental as well as functional sense. The way that experiences of employment were associated with developing a vocational identity and independence from parents illustrates how the socio-ecological model can expand on the key theories of unemployment distress. A compatible link between these theories can also be made in terms of self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2004). Noting the way in which self-mastery applied to experiences of job loss, job application rejection and family crises, SDT provides a way of interpreting the impact of unemployment at the micro-level of intrapsychic experience. It also helps to conceptualise the effects of brokering at the meso-level that were intended to give youths a sense of responsibility for their own actions and build the resilience and capacity to plan their future. The experiences of youths while they were working are also supported by research. The distress which some youths reported while working their first jobs may be attributable to a low sense of control over their jobs (Too et al., 2019). This needs further investigation in this context, because it is likely that most entry level jobs youths will be engaged in will have low responsibility and scope for action by the character of their duties and position, meaning there is potentially a baseline loss of control in most circumstances. Another way that SDT helps interpret the results is in terms of the relationships youths had at different socio-ecological levels and how these affected their own actions. According to SDT,

individuals have a sense of whether their actions are self-directed or are a result of external pressure (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Ryan et al., 1995). Being able to sense this difference is key to mental health, and when this ability is impaired, there are negative consequences. As the results show, the youths and young people were subjected to a variety of pressures and barriers. Feeling as if one is pressured at different levels (for example, school, family, work) can affect the relationships with those at those levels, and this was demonstrated by the results. The brokers' responses were substantially related to repairing the youths' and young adults' ability to retain this sense of autonomy, facilitate some repair of the relationships at different levels, or create the broader conditions in which both were possible.

In terms of the experience of distress the results support research, which shows this is a common experience in unemployment. While this study did not systematically gather data on formal diagnoses, some of the youths did mention they had a mental health condition in their accounts. As the results demonstrate, there were many factors that could have contributed to these conditions besides unemployment; likewise, there were many different factors that could have posed a barrier to employment besides the micro-level of a mental health condition.

The concepts of equifinality and multifinality (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002) could therefore prove useful when interpreting the results and identifying how youths could be best supported. Multifinality refers to the phenomenon of diverse outcomes arising from the same starting point. For example, youths may develop in a cycle of intergenerational unemployment and yet some may remain unemployed, but some may not. Multifinality points to the need to consider individual differences and take action to identify who is at risk. Equifinality refers to the opposite concept – that the same outcome can be reached from diverse and varied starting points. For example, youths may end up homeless, but the

circumstances that led to this may vary such as being kicked out of the family home, or by choosing to leave an unsafe home. Equifinality points to the need to consider diverse processes, and to ensure services are appropriate for diverse pathways. This is an alternative to positioning youths in a dichotomous way according to their diagnostic status, employment status or educational status (Cicchetti & Toth, 2009). This study also supports the research on these concepts, in the sense of highlighting how the different starting points, such as poor concentration, bullying or expulsion can lead to the same outcome, such as dropping out of school. It also shows how youths who may start from the same position; for example, higher SES, proximity to transport, and access to education, can have diverse outcomes because of health concerns, or social isolation (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Cicchetti & Toth, 2009; Schulenberg et al., 2004).

This study also shows how the individual experience of autonomy in the youth un/employment context includes interactions of intrapsychic factors, family factors and community factors. Experiences of agency restriction can begin at the macro- or policy level and filter down to the individual level owing to misconceptions about the way that youths transition and experiment with different careers, courses and adult identities in their developmental journey. If youths' experience is not reflected by the policies, then it can lead to experiences of stigma, non-conformity and isolation, thereby creating a further problem. In this respect, the study supports research that finds that youths have increasingly non-linear transitions to adulthood not necessarily characterised by further education after secondary school (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011). Furthermore, research suggests the transition to adulthood in current labour market conditions is either prolonged or alternatively, a new adulthood is being constructed altogether (Wyn et al., 2017). This points to the need to investigate both the features of new generational constructs of adulthood, and the need to ensure that any

interventions can extend throughout the prolonged transition and are not only short-term measures.

The broker results have several implications for youth unemployed interventions and brokering. First, there were the prevalent influences of brokering at the meso-level in FLOs, and these could potentially be broadened at other schools and with employment agencies. The brokers' accounts of youths not being ready for work emphasise the importance of having the time to work out what career they wish to pursue and use the school network and setting at the meso-level as a basis to gain the confidence and skills to operate at the exo-level. In this respect, the study supports previous findings regarding young people returning to education. Many of the youths who returned to school did so because to attain qualifications needed for employment in their chosen field, but may also have done so because of the signal that this sent to employers and the way completing school is often taken as a marker of commitment (Machin & Vignoles, 2005). Gaining qualifications is also one of the arguments put forward in research into the value of raising the school leaving age (Dickson & Smith, 2011). More importantly, research suggests that an extra year spent in vocational school may benefit future youth wages, with benefits equivalent to one year of experience in the workforce (Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2007). However, this study also suggests that the key factor is the type of vocational support offered in the extra year. Time spent on skills alone needs to be complemented by time to build networks, become self-aware of aptitudes, build confidence, learn presentation skills and explore different options through work experience. Further research into the effectiveness of more vocational courses and itinerant career programs in schools should also be investigated.

Overall, the study supports the literature which finds that first, youths face a range of challenges to self-determination, personal control and agency at multiple levels. This includes

the literature on unemployment and theories of agency restriction. Second, it links self-determination theory, resilience, identity theory and the constructs associated with unemployment distress, such as self-mastery. Third it refers to the sense of control in relation to work arrangements, duration and the relative insecurity of the labour market (Chesters et al., 2019).

This study reinforces the approach to prevention based on the socio-ecological model. This approach suggests that strengths from all levels of the model need to be combined and work together to improve health outcomes for youths. The utility of this approach is increasingly recognised among economically disadvantaged and ethnic minority youths (Henderson et al., 2016). The research extends these approaches by illustrating how they apply to the issue of employment, within the structural influences of the employment service provider system in Australia and appropriately in the specific social and cultural context of Western Sydney.

7.7 Macro level influences and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic

In this study, neither the brokers nor the youths emphasised the role of global influences in their positioning of youth unemployment. The isolated examples referred to the "gig" economy and global shifts in industry leading to skill shortages. In terms of the gig economy, its relationship to health is becoming clearer in research, with a lack of work safety, lack of job quality and security being key factors (Bajwa et al., 2018; Friedman, 2014). Future research could compare these risks to the impact of being unemployed to better understand the experience of youths more broadly, in line with the current literature (Freni-Sterrantino & Salerno, 2021). Global events can have an impact on youth unemployment in ways we are yet to understand. For instance, the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment, and if it will change the nature of unemployment compared to previous periods (Blustein et al., 2020) is yet to be understood fully. The pandemic has led to calls for a "youth jobs

guarantee" (Arakkal, 2020). A youth jobs guarantee refers to policy measures which target

youth unemployment through four mechanisms: publicly funded post-secondary education,

study allowances commensurate with a living wage, creation of entry-level positions, and

directing youth workers to industries with skills shortages. These measures target the

potential for "scarring" which refers to the impact of youth unemployment on the average

adult wage across the lifespan. It is therefore useful to discuss how the pandemic may have

impacted on young people and their experience of unemployment. The data for this study

were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted issues

relevant to the participants in this study and raises questions concerning the results which

further research could address. Several changes have occurred during the pandemic that

influence unemployed youths at every level of the socio-ecological model.

First, youths have been impacted at the micro-level in terms of mental health. At the outset of

the pandemic, the youth unemployment rate was 11.6 per cent at December 2019. In July

2020, at the height of COVID-19 lockdowns, the youth unemployment rate had peaked at

16.4 per cent. It had fallen to 9.3 per cent by 2022 (ABS, 2022). Such changes to employment

overall have been associated with increases in suicide (Stuckler et al., 2009). The experience

of lockdowns is widely understood to have impacted mental health. Research suggests that

lockdowns are associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety (Hammarberg et al.,

2020). Additionally, the services in place for identifying and responding to psychotic

disorders (which peak in late adolescence and early adulthood) have been placed under

pressure (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). Experiences of isolation that occur in a lockdown have

also been associated with other health concerns, such as more sedentary behaviour, increased

screen time and decreased happiness among Australian adolescents (Munasinghe et al.,

2020). The isolation associated with the lockdowns is concerning because loneliness has in

turn been associated with greater mental health problems, and this is more likely to be the case in young adults who have experienced bullying across the lifespan (Matthews et al., 2019). Those who were in precarious employment showed decreases in wellbeing, symptoms of mental illness or a disruption in core beliefs in a study by Oswald et al. (2021). The impact of isolation may also be reduced by use of approach coping or actively focusing on the challenges at hand, especially for young men with low wellbeing (Cheng et al., 2021). This is similar to findings regarding problem focused coping in the previous literature, and highlights the utility of employment brokers encouraging this in their clients. Research also indicates that young women may be particularly affected by the lockdowns for two reasons. First, the economic impact on young women was significant, because they were the most likely to employed in the industries most affected (for example, hospitality and retail) (Churchill, 2021; Cook et al., 2021), and compounding this, these industries were largely casualised. and as such. not eligible for the social security benefit set up to ameliorate the economic impact (known as JobKeeper; (Cassells & Duncan, 2020). Second, COVID-19 saw a greater impact on girls and young women in terms of mental health whose wellbeing was already compromised (Hawke et al., 2021). However, the lockdowns did have the effect of decreasing harmful alcohol consumption among younger women (Callinan et al., 2021).

The substantial impacts of the lockdown raise questions about how unemployed youths can best be supported. So far, the indication is that brokers ought to pay particular attention to their young female clients and the differential effects this may have on their engagement with employment and education. Brokers could also consider other strategies to promote mental health in the wake of the pandemic; for example, encouraging their clients to increase their time in nature and near green space may be useful (Oswald et al., 2021).

Another key question is how unemployed youths will seek help for their mental health concerns following the impact of the pandemic. The use of Kids Helpline (an online and telephone counselling service in Australia) increased during the pandemic, with self-harm and relationships reported as key concerns (Batchelor et al., 2021). While the helpline is useful, more extensive supports may be needed for the young unemployed population which included face-to-face counselling. The other question is whether online mental health apps will be more extensively used following the pandemic, because youths have had the experience of having to rely on online methods. On the other hand, there may be a resurgence in face-to-face methods, because young unemployed people, already experiencing a level of exclusion, seek to repair the isolating effects of the lockdown. The research already indicates that internet based self-help programs for young people are well received (Deady et al., 2014), particularly when they are guided by a therapist who is motivated to use this modality (Thew, 2020). One issue, however, with internet-based mental health apps is adherence to the program among certain groups (Deady et al., 2020). For example, in male-dominated industries, there was a preference for the term "mood fix" rather than a "mental health" app, which had potential stigma associated with it (Peters et al., 2018). This is where formal and informal employment brokers might play a role, and it could be further investigated whether they include this further in their responses to youth experiences of un/employment.

In the meso-sphere, the pandemic and the associated lockdowns have implications for unemployed youths in terms of their family and education. During the lockdowns, many people were forced to stay at home in close contact with family members, which may place relationships that are already strained under further pressure. Given the negative family experiences and trauma reported by participants in this study, this raises the question of what the medium- and long-term effects will be. In Australia, the pandemic has been associated

with increases in domestic and family violence (Mittal & Singh, 2020), placing pressure on support systems (Usher et al., 2020). Frasquilho et al. (2016) suggest that parental unemployment and youth distress are connected in times of economic crisis, and we have yet to see the consequences for young unemployed people facing these pressures.

The other meso-level concern is how the disruptions to education will affect youth unemployed following the pandemic. The results highlight how positive experiences of employment brokering are facilitated by an educational context. This is supported by Waugh and Circelli (2021), who describe how vocational education and training can provide a method of addressing the scarring effects of unemployment into the long term. At the meso-level, young people have been isolated from their school colleagues, and while research suggests that a period of home schooling was distressing for parents (Calear et al., 2022), the effects on young people are less clear.

Being isolated from the experiences of bullying reported by youths might have a short-term positive impact. However, being removed from other peer-supports might have more negative consequences in the long term, which needs further investigation, and how this impacts on job-search self-efficacy. Osborn et al. (2022) give clear examples of how career counsellors may have to shift their approach in response to the pandemic, adopting more concern for basic needs and experiences of distress and less on vocational identity concerns and self-actualisation.

The pandemic has also highlighted some of the issues that youths reported at the exo-level. An obvious example related to the lockdowns is the restrictions and regulations around transport, and the anxiety that may accompany getting on the train. Delbosc and McCarthy (2021) have shown how all youths have had their transport affected in some way in the short

term, while others have been severely than others in the long term, with life plans having to be changed and becoming increasingly reliant on a car. This seems to suggest that the transport experiences reported by the unemployed youths in our study will continue to be a concern into the future. Many employed people were able to avoid travel and work from home during the pandemic, and likewise, students were "learning from home". However, the pandemic also showed how a digital divide opened up during this process, and students with less digital access were at greater risk of disengagement (Drane et al., 2020).

The influence of community was also a prevalent theme among the participants. Some described positive experiences of community; however, the pandemic has highlighted some new concerns. The experience of lockdowns amid suggestions of discriminatory policing of the public health orders (Pano, 2021) may have left certain communities with more mistrust, and consequently, more socially excluded and less engaged with health and education. In the US, Lee et al. (2021) describe how distress during the pandemic has varied along ethnic lines with Hispanics, who have the most employment insecurity, reporting disproportionate levels of distress. Vaccine hesitancy is a global concern in migrant communities (Tankwanchi et al., 2021), and the impact on employment, given mandatory vaccinations for some industries, needs to be researched further.

There is also the impact of policies and practices at the exo-level on youth unemployment, notably the creation of the JobKeeper payment, which were emblematic of the pandemic. It has been suggested that this may have influenced unemployed youths in terms of exclusion by creating a "deserving" class of unemployed and an "undeserving" class who continued on the unemployment benefit (JobSeeker; Fronek & Briggs, 2021). In addition, the fluctuating payment of JobSeeker may induce youth unemployed to get back into work (Waugh &

Circelli, 2021), and further research is needed into how these changes shape work commitment.

Overall, the youths and brokers in the results did not report global, macro-level events as having much influence on the way they shaped their careers and their experiences of un/employment. That will almost certainly change post-pandemic. There is growing recognition in the face of the crisis that a wider, international approach is needed to be put in place to address the issue of youth unemployment (Lambovska et al., 2021). In Finland, a youth jobs guarantee program has been introduced in which all youths under 25 have a guaranteed place at work in various forms of on-the-job traineeship, with career support available to them. Many youths in this study reported negative events at work or with employers leading them to resign. There is increasing recognition that these negative events can lead to occupational scarring which has serious long-term effects on employment across the lifespan (De Fraja et al., 2021; Strandh et al., 2015). The research also suggests that active labour market programs and cadet programs have the potential to counter this process (Dawkins et al., 2020). As various countries adopt such programs, the effects on the experiences of young unemployed people will have to be re-evaluated.

7.8 Methodological considerations of research with youths and brokers

There were several methodological considerations pertaining to this study. First, the variety of professions and organisations involved meant that there was some inconsistency in the way that both youths and brokers engaged with the research. Concerning the youth participants, there may have been variation in the types of concerns across different contexts. For example, youth participants in a school setting might be concerned more with qualifications and school environment and dwelt more on this influence on the experience of unemployment. Likewise, participants in an outreach setting might have emphasised the exo-

level or community-based concerns. Concerning the brokers, the differences in expertise were a positive feature of the study, in that many perspectives and theoretical approaches could be covered. The varied professional jargon needed attention to ensure consistency of analysis of what the brokers viewed as important.

In this study, a high level of resistance was encountered in the recruitment and the data collection phase. This pertained to the brokers and the youths, but for different reasons. Concerning the youth participants, the resistance occurred in relation to participation in interviews. Youths might agree to participate on one day, but then decline the next, often owing to legitimate and pressing concerns such as carer responsibilities, childcare or having to move back home interstate due to homelessness. This highlights some of the further issues faced by this population and how these pressing concerns, while they were of interest to the research itself, can paradoxically impact on their engagement with it. Another concern was with asking youth participants to attend a follow-up interview. Youth participants might have become employed in the time between the first and second interview, and thus the data that they generate, while interesting, loses some consistency with the accounts of other, as yet unemployed youths, and may have reflected the concerns of the recently employed. This highlights the importance of longitudinal study designs that can properly account for the changes in key concerns. The socio-ecological model emphasises that the chronosphere is another important domain in development, which this study did not address in detail (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Future studies could examine not only the proximal processes between youths and brokers, and the contexts of organisations and settings, but also the influence of the passage of time for a fuller picture of development and transition to emerge.

At the time of the interviews, youth participants often required more time to read the information sheet and understand the subject matter of the study than did the brokers, and required more elaboration from the interviewer. Resistance might have occurred even in consenting participants, despite all measures put in place to prevent feelings of coercion (that is, compensation, explaining voluntary nature of the interviews). This issue is raised here because in the context of welfare, participants are often asked many questions by agencies and asked to provide much information, but they might not be necessarily asked to generate the sort of narratives required by the semi-structured interview. It is therefore important to acknowledge the effects of broad surveillance and the way this can affect engagement with research of this kind. The ethical measures might need to be emphasised more with this population, given the way in which surveillance, even in search of positive outcomes, can have stigmatising effects and consequences for wellbeing (Dee, 2013). This could be overcome in future studies which address these research questions through the involvement of interviewers or facilitators who are known to the local community or who are culturally competent to work in specific settings, who could be tasked with collecting the data in a culturally sensitive manner.

The task of elaborating and articulating issues of unemployment might be difficult for younger participants who have had limited experience. Participants might have the lived experience but being able to communicate that experience could be a difficult task. This could account for the many grammatical errors and missing words in the transcription of the interview data. Substitution and clarification, clearly indicated, becomes necessary in these circumstances to broadly communicate the meaning as it was positioned in the interview. This also might account for the way in which the data for the youth participants was more heavily weighted with *lived experience* for the youth participants and less so to *constructions*

of un/employment. The reverse was true for the brokers. While it is simplistic to say that this was because the subject focus for each group was different, the differences in the potential language and expression ability between the groups may be a key issue with these types of data. This needs consideration in the interpretation of this and future studies. Future research could overcome these limitations of the use of interviews by considering the use of graphical or arts-based data collection methods (Bagnoli, 2009). These could include the use of drawing, painting, group projects involving video, expressive dance and mask-making (Green & Denov, 2019). These methods enable the participants to transcend the use of words to express their experiences (Simons & McCormack, 2007). Arts-based methods have been used in youth research previously, in the context of sexual health interventions (Lys et al., 2018), and in the context of youths with anxiety, where video methods have proven useful (Woodgate et al., 2017).

Concerning the brokers, time constraints, and organisational barriers should be considered in future studies. In the course of the study, every effort was made to make the interviews as nonintrusive as possible. However, one broker could not participate for the full interview, and others postponed their interview several times. There was variation in how the brokers engaged in the study. Some brokers were more engaged in the sense that youths were recruited from their organisations, and they assisted with this process as well as participating themselves. Other brokers participated solely in an individual capacity, and their engagement was more reflective of their own professional expertise and practice.

7.9 Conclusion and recommendations

This study began with a particular focus on the psychological literature and the impact of unemployment on mental health and development. In relation to the first research question, the study emphasises that unemployment imposes a restriction on individual agency for

unemployed people, and that this, combined with the deprivation of the benefits of work, is one of the possible ways that unemployment can have a detrimental impact on subjective experience. The research also indicates that the experience of unemployment holds specific issues for young people, with the issues of education and vocational identity expected to be significant in this population. In relation to the second research question, the study explores the experience of working with youths for mentors, including teachers, employment agents and other youth workers, here defined as brokers. With this context in mind, particular attention is given to the influences of social support and the development of self-mastery and self-efficacy, and what settings and practices were reported as conducive to the development of these important factors, themselves associated with less distress in the literature. The study investigates these experiences qualitatively and through the lens of the socio-ecological model, so that the area is widely explored to identify which practices and experiences could be significant in working with this population in future. The qualitative method was useful in exploring the everyday, working knowledge that brokers used in their interactions with youths.

The study used a semi-structured interview format as the basis for engaging with youth clients across Western Sydney. The study took the opportunity to involve the brokers to highlight an aspect of youth unemployment that is less often looked at when considering the needs of unemployed youths. Considering these issues, the study investigated how unemployed youths in Western Sydney experience and construct un/employment and what the main influences were. In doing so, it adds to the literature on young people's experiences of unemployment into the context of Australia, and in particular, Western Sydney. Overall, the study succeeds in engaging with the target groups of interest and achieves several insights into some of the main concerns that each group held.

Finally, and in relation to the third research question, the study addresses how the accounts of formal and informal employment brokers across a variety of settings converged or diverged with the accounts of unemployed youths. It identifies key areas where youths and brokers position themselves differently and identifies which strategies on the part of brokers were well received by youths. The study also identifies potential areas for future research in the context of global influences.

In terms of the first research question, the study highlights several findings. As expected, the multiple influences at the level of the micro-system supported the previous research. Key among these findings are that young people are affected on the functional level by unemployment, particularly the lack of time structure. Youths reported a sense of deprivation of the benefits of work, which supports the previous research on the relationship between deprivation and experiences of psychological distress. The experiences that youths reported in this study in relation to psychological distress may be generalises to youths on a generational level. Research suggests that Generation Z may be showing increased risk of psychological distress, as indicated by college students use of college counselling services (Gallagher, 2015). It may be that the experiences of youths in this study reported regarding the distress they experience in relation to attending job interviews, getting to work on time, and socialising at work may have a generational aspect and be indicative of a generational phenotype. The reasons for this are unclear, although there is some indication that economic stressors may play a role (Brown et al., 2017), particularly given the shifts in education and work over the past few years (Means, 2017). This warrants further investigation, particularly regarding what we know about epigenetic inheritance and the transfer of experiences from one generation to the next at key points in development (Harper, 2005).

To a lesser extent, youths reported the importance of developing a vocational identity. Vocational identity was linked to having had prior employment, and with the meso-system and the expectations of parents. In this respect, determining the range of jobs young people can realistically apply and be considered for is crucial. Identifying experiences that build on what they have enjoyed previously and gives them scope beyond what they may feel pressured to do is likely to make for greater autonomy and less distress. Vocational identity is fundamental to future experiences of self-efficacy, and hence ought to be associated with less distress.

Confirming the role of social support in countering unemployment distress, youths reported positive experiences they had with teachers, peers and youth workers at the meso-level. The contrast between their positive and negative experiences was most illustrative. A change in school setting, a different teaching method, a different school dynamic between students or additional support from an employment broker were the key influences at the meso-system according to unemployed youths, and served to distinguish their negative experiences of brokers from the positive ones. The flexible learning options setting emerged as a key theme in this regard, and the study shows the interaction between the exo-level (the organisation of this style of learning) and the meso-level (the relationships between student and teachers). The youths' reports of their FLO school being "like a family" is positive, but the brokers in the study were limited in what even they could provide and had ambivalent responses. More support for teachers, and more integration of FLOs with formal employment agencies should be encouraged. The study found that FLOs were a positive experience broadly, echoing previous accounts in this area. More evaluation of FLOs is needed to build the evidence base around these initial positive reports.

As youths moved from a negative school environment to a positive one, the results suggest their job search self-efficacy should also improve. Future research should identify attributes within schools that careers and employment brokers in the wider school system should foster in their interactions with students before they leave school. In addition, more information about the myths about help seeking ought to be promoted, and bullying should be examined more extensively in its relationship to employment. As the results show, this is a particularly unseen form of distress that happens before looking for a job may have started; and yet if a young person's vocational identity has been affected by this, it may be more difficult for them to develop a sound career plan as they leave school. A key theme identified in this study was the way that past negative experiences with employers shaped youths' experience. These experiences were associated with rejection and resignation from work. These included experiences of underpayment, discrimination or bullying and poor safety practices, which affected their motivation. The theme of their experiences with brokers outside of school settings centred on the material assistance they were given or denied, such as course funding or funding for equipment or tools. Hosing and transport were the other key themes at the exo-level. The accounts illustrated the importance of these factors for autonomy and independence of the participants, as well as the access to jobs.

Formal and informal employment brokers spoke about barriers to employment in self-confidence, self-mastery and the psychological constructs important for job seeking, supporting the literature. They spoke of how these were both predisposing factors, and impacts, echoing the selection and exposure hypotheses. These included impacts on applying for work, impacts on keeping work, and impacts on youths seeking help. The responses of brokers included a variety at the group and individual levels. These included resilience programs and approaches to changing thinking style; and while these measures could not be

called therapy, the results demonstrated how brokers were using practical psychological tools and resources. This was clearly useful from the youths' reports of vocational support and highlighted the importance of more tailored interventions.

Brokers positioned youths broadly as being in a vulnerable position in their home/family life, with major concerns of intergenerational unemployment, and negative educational experiences. One response, exemplified by an FLO setting, was that brokers took a nurturing approach to young unemployed people. On the other hand, brokers positioned youths' need to take more responsibility at the precise point of leaving school. They qualified their position, emphasising that this takes the form of supported autonomy, neither dependence nor lack of direction.

The results show that brokers were aware of the negative treatment some youths had experienced in past jobs. The results highlight the mutual distrust that exists between parties and the challenge they have to negotiate it. Their key responses were to disabuse employer of their preconceptions of youths, combined with a re-framing of youths' expectations. If the mentoring relationship is good, and the brokering one also – then results might be better accordingly. More research is needed to follow these interactions over a sustained time period. Likewise, housing also was a theme overlapping both youths' and brokers' accounts. This is important, because brokers need to be aware of it as a potential issue going into a youth's consultation, otherwise the realities of the lived experience of the young person will be sidelined to the detriment of the employment strategy. In terms of the sector, brokers suggested a more client centric model and emphasised the value of brokers who understand how individual issues link together with community and other organisations.

Finally, the results showed the influence of macro-economic forces was viewed as marginal by both samples and was not a prevalent theme. The experience of COVID-19 adds a new layer to the results and more research is needed to determine whether this will continue to be so. We must consider the impacts of isolation, of global factors such as pandemics, of the society wide initiatives and responses, and how this might shape the constructions of youths and brokers of un/employment and employment.

This study emphasises complexity and interrelatedness of the influences involved in the experiences of youths and brokers. The overarching themes emphasise that a key synergy and dynamic exists between the sense of autonomy of the youths, and the linkages between brokers, youths and other people or services in the networks of youths. They highlight how positive experiences are associated with brokers who can engage with parents, communities and other services in a way that gives youths a deciding role and positions them as emerging adults on a journey. The first question for future research is how effective interventions are at the meso-level; that is, can brokers find a way to involve the support networks around youths in such a way as the autonomy of the young person is respected at each stage of the job seeking process. Future research could examine how brokers consult with parents of unemployed youths, or the key services that they interact with, given that unemployed youths come from a multiplicity of backgrounds and circumstances. It could use observational methods and conversation analysis of discussions with key individuals or services, with attention to the vocational development aspects of youths. A setting for this research could be the FLO vocational school and could measure the outcomes of this process with reference to career decision self-efficacy, which in addition to general self-efficacy and job-search self-efficacy, this study indicated was a variable of interest.

A second question relates to the subjective experience of unemployed youths with brokers. This study has shown that youths have a variety of experiences with brokers – some positive, some negative, and across different contexts. Future research could examine the question of what youths' expectations were of their employment brokers and vocational counsellors, to get a better understanding of what the needs were of specific communities. This study has shown that different communities have different expectations and needs in terms of youth unemployment. This could compare different local areas with different employment outcomes. Given that this study demonstrated limitations with the use of semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection and as a way of engaging youth participants, any future study could consider the use of graphical and arts-based measures mentioned above.

A third question for future research relates to the findings of the study at the exo-level in terms of social attitudes and the attitudes of employers regarding unemployed youths. A next step could include a study to explore how attitudes to unemployed youths might have changes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent research has highlighted how the pandemic and associated lockdowns have had implications for employment and a narrative analysis of young people who were going through transition to work at the time of the pandemic would expand our knowledge of the specific subset of the unemployed youth population and highlight potential challenges for future generations.

In closing, the macro-level changes that are occurring at present mean that the issues highlighted in this study will likely increase in complexity, ensuring that young people's experiences of un/employment as an area of inquiry will continue to be important. This study has highlighted the need for greater attention in research to the dynamic between different socio-ecological levels when considering youth unemployment, and how changes in one level are associated with changes in another. Global interconnectedness has implications for how

communities cohere socially, how young people seek support and communicate, and how interventions for unemployed youths can be delivered, and this will likely shape the lens through which this area will be investigated in future.

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Appendices

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751 Australia
Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI)

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

REDI Reference: H10672
Expiry Date: 31 December 2017

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

9 December 2016

Adjunct Doctor Vanessa Rose
School of Medicine

Dear Vanessa,

RE: Amendment Request to H10672

Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) has received a request to amend your approved research protocol H10672 "Walk the Talk: Study of an Online Population-Based Intervention for Young People who are Unemployed".

The amendment has been reviewed and I am pleased to advise that it has been approved, as follows:

Add Andrew Kellett to the research team

Augment the existing measures of mental health and employment and training with additional scales as outlined in section 8.1.1.1 of the NEAF

The addition of a qualitative component to the research design.
The addition of this qualitative component entails the addition of a new group of participants, with an appropriate recruitment procedure, recruitment materials, information sheet, consent form and new reimbursement, and the addition of a second research site, not in an online environment, to facilitate interviews

Please do not hesitate to contact the Human Ethics Officer at humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au, if you require any further information.

Regards

████████████████████

Professor Elizabeth Deane

Presiding Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee
Western Sydney University

APPENDIX B: Ethics amendment to include sample of employment brokers

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751 Australia
Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI)

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

REDI Reference: H10672
Expiry Date: 31 December 2017

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

26 June 2017

Adjunct Doctor Vanessa Rose
School of Medicine

Dear Vanessa,

RE: Amendment Request to H10672

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your request to amend your approved research protocol H10672 "Walk the Talk: Study of an Online Population-Based Intervention for Young People who are Unemployed".

The approved amendments are:

Inclusion of an additional sample of participants to the research design, comprised of youth and employment service providers, who will participate in qualitative interviews, focusing on their experiences with jobseekers aged 17-25, and how they facilitate support to unemployed youth.

Project specific approval conditions:
There are no specific conditions applicable.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to the e-mail address humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au as this e-mail address is closely monitored.

Regards

Professor Elizabeth Deane

Presiding Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee
Western Sydney University

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

Walk the Talk Study: Survey 1

Introduction

As part of the Walk the Talk study we are interested in your views about your health, employment, training, education and job search activities.

If you have any questions, please contact us at walkthetalk@uws.edu.au

Instructions

• The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

• Please don't exit the survey before completing it because you can't return to the parts you haven't completed after exiting.

• Always use the Previous and Next buttons at the bottom of each page to move between pages.

• Please answer all questions.

• If you are unsure about how to answer a question, please give the best answer you can. There are no right or wrong answers.

• The information you provide is confidential so no one will know you have taken part in the study.

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

Walk the Talk Study: Survey 1

1. What is today's date?

| DD | MM | YYYY |

Today's date is: [   ] / [   ] / [   ]

* 2. What is your date of birth?

| DD | MM | YYYY |

My date of birth is: [   ] / [   ] / [   ]

* 3. Please enter your email address:

[   ]

* 4. What is your gender?

○ Female

○ Male

○ I identify as:

[   ]

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

5. Do you identify as:

○ Heterosexual (i.e. straight)

○ Non-Heterosexual (e.g. gay, lesbian)

○ I identify as

6. How would you describe your current relationship status?

○ Single

○ Partnered-living together (e.g. married, de-facto, civil union etc.)

○ Partnered-not living together

○ Other (please specify)

2

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

7. What is your country of birth?

[ ]

8. What is your ethnic background?

◯ Anglo-Australian

◯ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

◯ Other (please specify)

[ ]

9. Do you receive any of the following government payments?

☐ Youth Allowance

☐ Newstart Allowance

☐ ABSTUDY

☐ Austudy

☐ Disability Support Pension

☐ Mobility Allowance

☐ Youth Disability Supplement

☐ Rent Assistance

☐ Parenting Payment

☐ I don't receive any government payments

☐ Other

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

☐ If other (please specify):

[   ]

10. If you receive government payments, for how long have you been receiving them?

[   ]

11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ Up to year 10 (e.g. leaving certificate

○ Year 12 / HSC/ QCE / SACE / VCE / WACE (e.g. higher school leaving certificate)

○ Tertiary Diploma or trade certificate / TAFE

○ University degree or higher

12. Please enter your current postcode:

[   ]

13. When did you begin looking for work?

○ Less than 2 years ago

○ 2 years to less than 5 years ago

○ More than 5 years ago

○ Did not look for work

14. When did you last work?

○ Less than 2 years ago

○ 2 years to less than 5 years ago

○ More than 5 years ago

○ Have never worked

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

Walk the Talk Study: Survey 1

Questions About Work Activities

These questions ask about work activities that you may have been involved in within the past month, and your thoughts about work in general.

19. Have you been involved in any of the following work activities in the last month?

	Yes	No
Work experience	○	○
Voluntary work for family/friends/people you live with	○	○
Voluntary work in the community (including helping to run a group)	○	○
Short course in job-search skills (e.g resume writing)	○	○
Skills training group or agency (e.g jobactive provider)	○	○
Work for the Dole	○	○

Other (please specify)

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

Walk the Talk Study: Survey 1

Questions About Work Activities

21. If YES, was the work:

○ Casual

○ Temporary

○ Part-time

○ Full-time

○ Other

If other (please specify)

[   ]

22. If YES, was the work for:

○ Less than 10 hours per week

○ 10 to 20 hours per week

○ 20 to 30 hours per week

○ 30 to 40 hours per week

○ More than 40 hours per week

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

20. Have you been involved in any paid work activities in the last month? (i.e work you get paid for)

○ Yes ○ No

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

Walk the Talk Study: Survey 1

Questions About Work Activities

21. If YES, was the work:

○ Casual

○ Temporary

○ Part-time

○ Full-time

○ Other

If other (please specify)

[   ]

22. If YES, was the work for:

○ Less than 10 hours per week

○ 10 to 20 hours per week

○ 20 to 30 hours per week

○ 30 to 40 hours per week

○ More than 40 hours per week

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

APPENDIX C: Demographics survey items from online survey

23. Are you still working in this position?

○ Yes

○ No

24. Are you looking for paid work at the moment?

○ Yes

○ No

25. If YES, what kind of paid work are you looking for?

○ Casual

○ Temporary

○ Part-time

○ Full-time

○ Other

Other (please specify)

[   ]

Participant Information Sheet - Interview

Walk the Talk: An online study for young people who are unemployed

Invitation

We would like to invite you to participate in an interview to help us gain new knowledge and understanding of how unemployment affects mental health in young people aged 17-25.

This study is being conducted by the Centre for Health Research at Western Sydney University in partnership with UNSW Australia and is funded by Australian Rotary Health

The researchers/investigators on the study are Dr Vanessa Rose, Prof Janette Perz, and Mr Andrew Kellett.

To help you decide if you want to take part in an interview, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore young people's experiences of looking for work and their experiences of participating in an online, self-directed program called 'Walk the Talk', designed to improve the mental health of young people who are unemployed. The Walk the Talk program consists of four video modules, activities, downloadable worksheets, website links and tips to help you with interviews, cold calling and looking for work. We hope to learn if the program is useful to young people who are unemployed in staying mentally healthy, job searching and gaining employment.

Who are we looking for?

- Young people aged 17-25 who are looking for full-time work;
- Have access to a desktop computer, tablet or smartphone, an email account and an internet connection;

APPENDIX D: Youth participant information sheet

- Are able to complete English-language material;

- Live in Australia

Do you have a choice?

Participation is voluntary. If you decide to be involved, it will not affect you in any way and it will not affect the relationships you have with any of the organisations involved. You can withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

What is my role?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to:

- Take part in 2 interviews. If you are willing to take part inthe interviews, we will send you a Participant Consent Form via email or post. An interview will then be scheduled at a time that suits you. We generally do our interviews over the phone, although a face-to-face interview can be organised in the Sydney metropolitan area at a time and place convenient to you.

- Complete a survey and watch a series of online video modules. You can watch the videos at your own pace and re-watch them as many times as you like. After 6 weeks we will ask you to complete another survey and take part in the 2nd interview. You will be asked about your thoughts and experiences looking for work, and your thoughts about the online program.

- Complete a 3rd online survey sent to you via email 6 weeks later.

How much time will this study take?

A telephone or face-to-face interview takes between 30-45 mins. Watching the online video modules takes about 90 minutes in all. Completing the online surveys takes about 20 minutes each time.

What are the benefits / positives?

The interview and the surveys will provide the research team with an understanding of your experiences looking for work. This information and knowledge will be used to informproviders who are engaged in youth mental health and employment organizations to deliver interventions and facilitate support for young people and prevent difficulties and distress with looking for work.

APPENDIX D: Youth participant information sheet

Are there any risks?

Research shows a link between unemployment and depression. If you feel very upset, distressed or depressed for more than two weeks, please contact your GP, mental health professional, nearest headspace clinic (http://www.headspace.org.au/headspace-centres) or the study principal investigator, Dr Janette Perz at j.perz@westernsydney.edu.au

Alternatively, please see below for some numbers that you can call for help. Trained staff are ready to take your call and provide the appropriate service to you:

• Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 – 24 hour service

• The Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 – This is a telephone service for young people aged 5-25 years

Confidentiality / Privacy

Everything you say to us will be confidential. No one will know you have taken part in this study except those you tell or the researchers involved in the study. We will make sure no one will find out that you have taken part. All your information will be stored safely and securely at the Western Sydney University.

Will taking part in this study cost me anything, and will I be paid?

Participation in this study will not cost you anything. If you were to take part in an interview with us, you will be reimbursed for your time and reasonable travel expenses to the amount of $30 (as a voucher) for each interview.

What will happen with the results?

We plan to talk about the results with other organisations

Whenever we present or discuss the results, your name will not be mentioned and no one will know you participated in the study. If you wanted to know the findings of the study, please contact us via email for any updates.

Complaints

APPENDIX D: Youth participant information sheet

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (ID: H10672). If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, or your rights as a study participant, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer on ☏ 02 4736 0229 or ⌨ humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.

Contact details

If you wish to participate, or if you would like to know more about the study, please contact a member of the research team on:

☏02 4620 3412

⌨a.kellett@westernsydney.edu.au

⌨**Walkthetalk@Westernsydney.edu.au**

This information sheet is for you to keep and thank you for taking the time to consider this study.

APPENDIX E: Youth participant consent form

Human Research Ethics Committee

Office of Research Services

Ethics Approval ID: H10672

Participant Consent Form

<div style="background-color:#8B1A2A; color:white; padding:20px; text-align:center;">

Study: Walk the Talk- An online study for young people who are unemployed

</div>

Name of Researchers and investigators: Prof Janette Perz, Dr Vanessa Rose, and Mr

Andrew Kellett

1. I understand that the researcher will conduct this study in a manner conforming to ethical and scientific principles set out by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia and the Good Clinical Research Practice Guidelines of the Therapeutic Goods Administration.
2. I acknowledge that I have read, or have had read to me the Participant Information Sheet relating to this study. I acknowledge that I understand the Participant Information Sheet. I acknowledge that the general purposes, methods, demands and possible risks and inconveniences which may occur to me during the study have been explained to me by _____ ("the researcher") and I, being over the age of 17 and capable of providing informed consent, acknowledge that I understand the general purposes, methods, demands and possible risks and inconveniences which may occur during the study.
3. I acknowledge that I have been given time to consider the information and to seek other advice.
4. I understand the interview will be audio recorded.
5. I acknowledge that I am volunteering to take part in this study and I may withdraw at any time.
6. I acknowledge that this research has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee.
7. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.
8. I understand my identity will not be disclosed to anyone else or in publications or presentations.

Name of Participant:	**Name of Researcher:**
Signature:	**Signature:**
Date:	**Date:**

Participant Information Sheet –Service Provider Interview

<div style="background-color:#8b2332; color:white; text-align:center; padding:20px;">

Walk the Talk: An online study for young people

who are unemployed

</div>

Invitation

We would like to invite you to participate in an interview about your experience working with young people aged 17-25 to help us gain new knowledge and understanding of how unemployment affects mental health in young people in this age group.

This study is being conducted by the Centre for Health Research at Western Sydney University in partnership with UNSW Australia and is funded by Australian Rotary Health

The researchers/investigators on the study are Dr Vanessa Rose, Prof Janette Perz, and Mr Andrew Kellett.

To help you decide if you want to take part in an interview, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore young people's experiences of looking for work and their experiences of participating in an online, self-directed program called 'Walk the Talk', designed to improve the mental health of young people who are unemployed. We hope to learn if the program is useful to young people who are unemployed in staying mentally healthy, job searching and gaining employment. The study will also explore the knowledge and experience of youth and employment service provider professionals who regularly work with young people who are unemployed.

APPENDIX F: Broker sample participant information sheet

Who are we looking for?

Service providers aged 18 years and over who work with, or have worked with an unemployed person/s aged 17-25 in their capacity as:

- Youth mentors

- Transition to work program managers

- Recruitment agents

- Counsellors

- Mental Health professionals or;

- Other employment service providers

Do you have a choice?

Participation is voluntary. If you decide to be involved, it will not affect you in any way and it will not affect the relationships you have with any of the organisations involved. You can withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

What is my role?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to:

- Take part in an interview. If you are willing to take part in an interview, we will send you a Participant Consent Form via email or post. An interview will then be scheduled at a time that suits you. We generally do our interviews over the phone, although a face-to-face interview can be organised in the Sydney metropolitan area at a time and place convenient to you.

How much time will this study take?

A telephone or face-to-face interview takes between 45-60 mins.

APPENDIX F: Broker sample participant information sheet

What are the benefits / positives?

The interview will provide the research team with an understanding of your knowledge and experiences working with young unemployed aged 17-25 who are looking for work. This information and knowledge will be used to developbetter interventions for young people and prevent difficulties and distress with looking for work, as well as inform service providers' provision of support to young people who are looking for work.

Are there any risks?

If you feel very upset, distressed or depressed for more than two weeks, please contact your GP, mental health professional or the study principal investigator, Dr Janette Perz at j.perz@westernsydney.edu.au

Alternatively, please see below for some numbers that you can call for help. Trained staff are ready to take your call and provide the appropriate service to you:

• Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 – 24 hour service

Confidentiality / Privacy

Everything you say to us will be confidential. No one will know you have taken part in this study except those you tell or the researchers involved in the study. We will make sure no one will find out that you have taken part. All your information will be stored safely and securely at the Western Sydney University.

Will taking part in this study cost me anything, and will I be paid?

Participation in this study will not cost you anything. If you were to take part in an interview with us, you will be reimbursed for your time and reasonable travel expenses to the amount of $30 (as a voucher) for taking part in an interview.

What will happen with the results?

APPENDIX F: Broker sample participant information sheet

We plan to talk about the results with other organisations. Whenever we present or discuss the results, your name will not be mentioned and no one will know you participated in the study. If you wanted to know the findings of the study, please contact us via email for any updates.
Complaints

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (ID: H10672). If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, or your rights as a study participant, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer on ☎ 02 4736 0229 or ⌨ humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.

Contact details

If you wish to participate, or if you would like to know more about the study, please contact a member of the research team on:

☎02 4620 3412

⌨a.kellett@westernsydney.edu.au

⌨**Walkthetalk@Westernsydney.edu.au**

This information sheet is for you to keep and thank you for taking the time to consider this study.

APPENDIX G: Broker participant consent form

Human Research Ethics Committee

Office of Research Services

Ethics Approval ID: H10672

Participant Consent Form- Youth/Employment Service Provider

> ## Study: Walk the Talk- An online study for young people who are unemployed

Name of Researchers and investigators: Prof Janette Perz, Dr Vanessa Rose, and Mr Andrew Kellett

1. I understand that the researcher will conduct this study in a manner conforming to ethical and scientific principles set out by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia and the Good Clinical Research Practice Guidelines of the Therapeutic Goods Administration.
2. I acknowledge that I have read, or have had read to me the Employment Service Provider Participant Information Sheet relating to this study. I acknowledge that I understand this Participant Information Sheet. I acknowledge that the general purposes, methods, demands and possible risks and inconveniences which may occur to me during the study have been explained to me by _____ ("the researcher") and I, being over the age of 18, acknowledge that I understand the general purposes, methods, demands and possible risks and inconveniences which may occur during the study.
3. I acknowledge that I have been given time to consider the information and to seek other advice.
4. I understand the interview will be audio recorded.
5. I acknowledge that I am volunteering to take part in this study and I may withdraw at any time.
6. I acknowledge that this research has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee.
7. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Service Provider Participant Information Sheet.
8. I understand my identity will not be disclosed to anyone else or in publications or presentations.

Name of Participant:	**Name of Researcher:**
Signature:	**Signature:**
Date:	**Date:**

APPENDIX H: Youth Interview schedule

1. **Could you describe what it is like for you to be unemployed?**

   - How long have you been looking for work?

   - What area of work or jobs are you mainly looking into?

   - Are you doing any training related to your job searching?

   - Positive experiences?

   - Negative experiences?

   - How would things be different if you were employed or had more work?

2. **How easy or difficult do you find it to manage your time commitments?**

   - For example, your social activities, sport or clubs etc.?

   - Family commitments?

   - How do you manage job seeking as well as these other activities?

3. **Could you tell me about a time when you experienced a challenge or setback in your job searching activities?**

   - For example, has your health interfered with looking for work?

   - Have your family commitments?

6. **Have there been any advantages/disadvantages to being a man/woman when seeking a job?**

   - For example, if you were a person of the opposite gender, how do you think your experiences would be different?

   - Have you or encountered or seen any of these differences?

   - How do you see such differences as a man/woman?

7. **How have things such as transportation, housing or finances affected your ability to seek work?**

   - For example, government organisations such as Centrelink, job networks?

   - Other everyday factors such as clothing, filling out forms etc.

8. **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

APPENDIX I: Broker Interview Schedule

1. Could you describe what support that your organisation offers to young people looking for work?

- For example, what aims or objectives does your organisation have concerning youth unemployment?

2. Could you describe your responsibilities in that area?

- For example, job title, main daily responsibilities, any training or relevant experience.

3. How do you manage youth mental health?

- For example, what supports do you have in place to deal with young people who may be distressed, frustrated, have complicated circumstances or lack motivation or confidence?

- What programs do you already run? Are they based on a particular theory/research?

4. Could you describe some of your experiences with unemployed youth?

- What is it like working with young jobseekers?

- For example, past negative/positive experiences

- Past successes/or challenges in getting young people into work

5. How would you describe a typical appointment or meeting with a young client?

- What would the meeting cover and what would be the result?

- Strategies for getting young people into work

- Strategies for communicating about issues important to young people

6. How do you see your role in the sector?

- Do you enjoy the job/is it challenging?

- What external organisations do you work with?

- What legislation or guidelines do you refer to?

- What personal attributes/professional skills or experience do you bring to the job?

- Why do you continue in the organisation or the job?

7. What were your impressions of the Walk the Talk online program?

- For example, what were the strengths and limitations of the program from your perspective?

- Your preferences for the delivery/ facilitation of the program?

APPENDIX J: Youth follow-up interview schedule

1. **Could you describe your experiences seeking work since doing the online program?**

   ▪ For example, job interviews, areas of work, training activities

   ▪ Have there been any major changes to what you are doing or how you are approaching these?

2. **How have you found managing your time commitments since doing the online program**

   ▪ Have these changed?

   ▪ Have you changed any activities or how much time you spend on them?

3. **Could you describe any changes to how you feel about yourself overall since doing the online program?**

   ▪ E.g. Positive/ negative changes

4. **Could you describe any changes to the way you cope with challenges or setbacks in job-seeking since doing the online program?**

   ▪ E.g. Positive/ negative changes

5. **Could you describe any changes to how confident you feel with looking for work since doing the online program?**

   ▪ E.g. Positive/ negative changes

   ▪ E.g. Writing resumes

   ▪ E.g. Job applications

   ▪ E.g. Interviews

6. **How do things such as transportation, housing or finances affect your ability to seek work?**

   ▪ Has there been any change to the impact these have?

- E.g. Job networks, Centrelink

- Other everyday factors

7. What were your overall impressions of the online program?

- How useful was it?

- Which parts of the program were most useful to you?

- Which parts of the program were least useful to you?

- Do you have any suggestions?

8. Is there anything you would like to add?