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**THE IMPACT OF INVOLUNTARY REDUNDANCY  
ON MATURE FEMALE CLERICAL WORKERS IN  
THE AUCKLAND AREA**

*A thesis presented in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree  
of Master of Arts  
in Psychology at  
Massey University*

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2003

## ABSTRACT

Mature women losing their jobs through redundancy is a relatively unexplored facet of unemployment in New Zealand. The current study used a qualitative approach to investigate the experiences of 12 women aged 40 and over who had lost their clerical jobs through involuntary redundancy. Audiotaped interviews were conducted with the 12 women participants plus 5 recruitment consultants. The recruitment consultants were added to the study to gain some understanding of employer attitudes towards mature women and to see how the two perspectives compared. Grounded theory was used to analyse the transcribed data and to construct a theory of the experiences of mature women made redundant. The findings are organised into four main categories. These are the redundancy itself; unemployment; the job search and reemployment. The redundancies had a profound effect on the lives of the majority of the women involved. They resulted in a lower standard of living and psychological distress for almost every participant, even after reemployment. The study also found that approaching recruitment agencies for advertised positions was generally a discouraging and humiliating experience for the mature female clerical workers. Recruitment agencies were mostly perceived as being unhelpful, frequently offering only temporary work rather than permanent positions to mature job-seekers. According to the recruitment consultants, many New Zealand managers requesting staff from agencies prefer younger employees, especially for front-line roles such as reception and customer service. Mature female workers are often perceived as being less flexible, less technically skilled, less adaptable and less physically attractive. The study illustrated how extensively redundancy affected the lives of the participating women, and showed that middle-aged female clerical workers are particularly disadvantaged by redundancy, often finding it very difficult to gain reemployment suited to their skills.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr Jocelyn Handy who supervised this project and whose sound advice and ongoing support throughout the research project were greatly appreciated.

Special thanks to the 12 women who were willing to tell their stories about being made redundant. Thanks also to the 5 recruitment consultants who took part in this study.

Finally, to my husband Neville, for emotional and practical support when the task of completing this thesis seemed overwhelming.

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# Part One: Introduction and Literature Review

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Study**

This study describes the experiences of female clerical workers aged over 40 who have lost their jobs through involuntary redundancy. The intention is to explore the women's reactions to the redundancy process itself and the ways in which they attempted to cope with the resulting unemployment, job search and reemployment.

Involuntary redundancy can mean an imposed fundamental change in a person's lifestyle, often bringing financial hardship and abrupt exclusion from the social environment that had previously been a large part of their daily lives. Whether people enjoy their work or not, being employed provides a structure for the day, week and year; it enforces involvement in shared purposes; it expands the social horizon beyond friends and family; it defines one's social standing, and it demands reality-oriented activities (Winefield, Montgomery, Gault, Muller, O'Gorman, Reser & Roland, 2002). Work is also strongly linked to the economic necessity of making one's living.

In my work as a career counsellor I meet many people who have experienced redundancy. For many people, losing a job through redundancy can be a difficult time. This seems to be especially true for people aged over 40, who often report that they encounter age discrimination from employers, recruitment agencies and other employees.

In New Zealand, a common image of the mature worker is based upon inaccurate perceptions such as older<sup>1</sup> people being more rigid, and less technically minded than younger employees (McGregor, 2001). I have observed this perception when I teach People

<sup>1</sup>The terms "older" and "mature" are used technically, following the literature's definition to describe people aged over 40. These two terms (older and mature) are used interchangeably within both the literature and this project.



Management workshops for local community education on Auckland's North Shore. In these workshops I meet employers, managers and supervisors. When informally discussing recruitment and selection, hiring older workers is often a topic of discussion. Age bias towards younger employees is often evident in comments made upholding the common negative stereotypes of older workers. For example, older workers are often perceived to be harder to train, are described as being "set in their ways", and seen as unlikely to ever leave if offered a job. This last comment is particularly interesting as it highlights a fear that employers could be "stuck" with geriatric staff who will never leave given that the retirement age is now abolished in the New Zealand workforce. Ironically, legislation which was intended to diminish age-related discrimination within the workforce may have the unintended consequence of increasing it for some sections of the workforce.

My personal experience of listening to the different perspectives of workers and employers has been influential in my decision to choose this particular topic for my thesis. Through my work I have come to realise that the double burden of ageism and sexism can have a highly detrimental effect on the lives of some of the most defenceless women in New Zealand society.

Human Rights legislation regarding ageism does exist in New Zealand, but its efficacy is debatable. In McGregor's New Zealand study, the majority of employers viewed this legislation as being effective in removing references to age in advertising but ineffective in preventing age discrimination in the recruitment process itself (2001). In the same study, over 25% of employers believed that age discrimination legislation had no effect on redundancy decisions. These figures support similar findings overseas (Murray, 2002).

Legislation regarding a candidate's age on job application forms is frequently ignored by employers. A recent study of 229 job application forms from a range of New Zealand employers found that 56% of forms included unlawful questions about the applicant's age (Harcourt & Harcourt, 2002). Given these figures, one wonders how helpful it is for job-seekers to omit age from their CVs in order to avoid age discrimination at the recruitment phase, as often suggested by career advisors.

This research investigates how redundancy is experienced by one of the most vulnerable groups in New Zealand society. The mature female clerical worker is often not only a target

of age discrimination, but also sexism. This is especially significant in certain jobs that have evolved into predominantly female roles, for example front-line positions such as receptionists and secretaries. In our youth-orientated culture, where company image seems to be important, a youthful physical appearance may be regarded as a requirement for some jobs. If this is the case, it is likely that some managers perceive mature female receptionists or secretaries as no longer having the prerequisites for the job, making them less likely to be hired or retained (Onyx, 1998).

Older females are also victims of other negative stereotypical thinking. In a recent New Zealand study, it was found that the majority of employers and male employees perceived women's job performance as declining earlier than men's (McGregor, 2001). If older women who have been made redundant are judged according to negative stereotypes based on ageism and sexism rather than their level of skills and experience, then opportunities for re-employment may be severely limited.

This study also investigates the role of recruitment consultants and how they may help or hinder older female candidates applying for clerical positions. Many advertised clerical positions in Auckland are now controlled by recruitment agencies as employers prefer the consultants to help them find new staff. Recruitment consultants typically act in a "filtering" role for employers, discarding or endorsing candidates based on perceived suitability. These people work closely with employers and are likely to have some insight as to how older workers are perceived by employers. This study juxtaposes the recruitment consultants' perspectives with those of mature women who experienced job loss through redundancy. By so doing, the study is able to analyse the ways in which the different structural positions people occupy within the labour market can influence their perceptions and behaviour.

### **Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study**

If being aged over 40 means any chances of reemployment are limited, and corporate loyalty no longer seems to count (Bloch, 1999), then we could be facing a major rising problem. As losing a job through redundancy is becoming more common, and given that both ageism and sexism exist in the workforce, older women may find it more difficult than younger women to gain employment in clerical roles where they can utilise their skills and experience.

As current research suggests, there are often negative stereotypes present in the New Zealand workforce regarding older females. It is unknown how much effect this has on the mature woman as an employee and as a job-seeker. According to statistics, the population group known as “the baby boomers” will be the largest group of people by the year 2010 and the dominating population the decade following, estimated at about 1.5 million people in New Zealand (Brislen, 2000). Given that the retirement age has recently been abolished in the New Zealand workforce, and the superannuation eligibility for women is now 65, the impact of redundancy and re-employment on older women is worth investigating.

The significance of this study is that it investigates a population group in which multiple negative stereotypes are combined. Older female clerical workers who have lost their jobs through involuntary redundancy have not been specifically studied before. Because of the different issues of male and female unemployment, with older women more likely to encounter the “double-jeopardy” effects of sexism and ageism, research focusing exclusively on older females has been advocated (Onyx, 1998). Existing research on redundancy has focused largely on men and is quantitative in orientation. Hopefully the present study has made some progress in redressing the imbalance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WORK AND UNEMPLOYMENT

This chapter briefly outlines theories concerning the psychological and economic importance of work in people's lives. It also overviews some key findings concerning the effects of unemployment.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK

##### **The Definition of Work**

Sigmund Freud once argued that what is important in life is "leiben and arbeiten" – the ability to love and to work. For most people, work is an important part of life, meeting financial, emotional and social needs. Employment not only provides the possibility of financial security in old age, but also a purpose and structure to life, strongly influencing self-esteem (Gilberto, 1997).

Early research into unemployment tended to concentrate on male workers and either ignored women or assumed their experiences were similar to male experiences. Researchers are beginning to question whether existing models developed from men's occupational experience are adequate reflections of women's experiences in the world of work (Chester & Grossman, 1990; Pienta, Burr & Mutchler, 1994). Australian researcher Encel argues that "women face different problems to those encountered by men" (1998, p.44). For women, a common pattern is withdrawal from paid work to look after children or sick parents. This often results in mature women wanting to re-enter the workforce but finding that their age, lack of experience and lack of up-to-date qualifications presents a barrier. Unlike women, most men remain in paid work throughout their working lives. Societal norms have made caring for family members the woman's responsibility.

### **Jahoda's Functional Model**

The negative impact of job loss on mental health is well established, implying that work is actually conducive to mental health. One theoretical model supporting this implication is Marie Jahoda's (1988) functional model. Jahoda and Lazarsfeld's early research on the effects of male unemployment was conducted in the Austrian town of Marienthal during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The local factory closing down created a period of prolonged unemployment for many of the people. Without the imposed time structure provided by employment, time seemed to lose its meaning for many men, resulting in a steady decline in attitude to the point of apathy, with much time spent sleeping. Women, whose domestic roles were less affected by unemployment survived better psychologically, although family relationships were often severely strained by male unemployment. Jahoda's experience at Marienthal was influential in helping her to create the functional model. The model explains work as being a social institution, in that it provides social contact, an occupational and social identity, and a daily structure for participating in meaningful activities. This may help to explain why some people suffer psychologically when employment is lost, regardless of their financial situation. As Burchell (1992) has noted, this model is limited in that some jobs can be so stressful that becoming unemployed may be of psychological advantage. Nevertheless Jahoda's work has had an enduring influence on subsequent research and remains a cornerstone of empirical and theoretical research into unemployment (Fryer, 1992).

### **Warr's Vitamin Model**

Another well-known theoretical model is Warr's (1987) vitamin model which builds on Jahoda's earlier work and has many similarities to it. Using a health analogy based on the body's need of vitamins for physical health, Warr identifies nine environmental features (vitamins) which are important to mental health. These are: opportunity for control; opportunity for skill use; externally generated goals; variety; environmental clarity; availability of money; physical security; opportunity for interpersonal contact and valued social position. According to Warr's model, if the levels of these environmental 'vitamins' are low, then a person will have lower mental health. This model is better able to explain how an unemployed situation may be psychologically better than employment, given the right environment. However, a limitation of this model is that it focuses on the environment rather than on the individual's interpretation of their experience of the environment, which may be two different things (Ezzy, 1993).

## **THE EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT**

### **Financial Concerns**

Previous research findings indicate the importance of including economic issues in any studies on the impact of unemployment. Financial stress and strain were both positively related to psychological distress indicating the importance of money for unemployed people (Feather, 1990; Whelan, 1992; Fryer, 1995). Financial difficulties and poor support have been shown to be the two biggest predictors of deterioration in mental health resulting from job loss (Dew, Bromet & Penkower, 1992).

A commonly held stereotype is that women, especially middle-aged women, work for “pin-money” rather than from economic necessity (Snyder & Nowak, 1984). As women are now more likely than men to be single heads of households, unemployment for them is probably at least as stressful, if not more so, than it is for men (Dew, Bromet & Penkower, 1992). Research suggests that divorced or separated women are more likely to need paid employment for longer periods and are more at risk of future poverty than women with partners (Loew, 1995, cited by Myers 2001).

But women with partners may suffer from unemployment in different ways, as the loss of economic independence means a sudden reliance on their partner. Hancock’s New Zealand study on women and redundancy highlighted the fact that many of the married women disliked having to rely on husbands for financial support. They found the loss of autonomy and economic independence to be a distressing experience (1982).

### **Psychological Consequences of Unemployment**

As previously mentioned, taking away a regular wage can easily lead to disruptions in psychological as well as financial well-being (Feather, 1990). Although money may be the prime reason for most women working, there are other motivating factors involved such as social contact, occupational identity and habitual structure of the day.

Evidence supporting the notion that money alone is not the key motivator was provided in a study by Hall & Johnson in 1988 (cited by Dew et al, 1992). These researchers found that

Swedish women who had lost their jobs through redundancy continued to be paid 90% of their pay, plus services for medical care and education by the government. In spite of this, they experienced distress regarding “the lack of involvement in one of life’s most basic activities” (p. 753). A New Zealand study examining self-esteem and work found that a large proportion of participants expressed a desire to continue working regardless of financial circumstances (Brook, 1991). Participant age, gender and occupational differences were not significant, suggesting a strong commitment to work in general.

The negative impact of job loss on mental health is well established. There is a wealth of research confirming that the unemployed are more likely to suffer from loss of self-esteem, depression and anxiety than those in employment (e.g. Feather, 1990; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Vosler, 1994; Miller & Hoppe, 1994). This is not surprising as job loss rates near the top of life stressors. It can create as much stress as the death of a loved one, and is often considered more stressful than divorce (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986).

### **Self Esteem**

Interpersonal contact is important for self-esteem (Warr, 1987). Social isolation and loneliness are common consequences of unemployment and the removal of a daily routine can lead to feelings of boredom and a lack of purpose.

In losing their jobs, people may also lose their self-esteem. The older woman who has experienced feelings of rejection during the redundancy itself is also likely to feel personally rejected in the job market when she starts looking for new work. Job loss, especially when followed by prolonged unemployment, is a traumatic experience resulting in loss of self-esteem and social disruption (Snyder & Nowak, 1984).

Self-identity has been defined as “an individual’s psychological relationship to particular social category systems” (Frale, 1997, cited by Farr & Ringseis, 2002, p. 40). Perceiving oneself as being “old” in the workforce may negatively affect self-identity because of age-related stereotypes (Farr & Ringseis, 2002). In other words, if an older woman seeking work believes that she is now less competent, less attractive, and less desirable than a younger job applicant simply because she has reached the age of 40, this is bound to have a strong

negative effect on her self-identity and self-esteem, not only as a worker but also as a human being.

### **Depression**

Pernice's study on long term unemployment and mental health in New Zealand found that "being female, being older and being a European New Zealander was significantly related to lower mental health" (Pernice, 1992, p.178). There is now growing evidence to suggest that older women have a stronger motivation to work for its own sake than do older men (Onyx, 1998). A British study by Ginn & Arber (1996) investigated men and women aged 40 to 59 who were not employed. While both sexes were concerned about financial need for a paid job, "women but not men were also concerned for the psychosocial need for a job" (cited by Onyx, 1998, p.91). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why empirical evidence suggests that job loss is more devastating for women than for men, with higher levels of depression recorded for women who have lost their jobs (Dew et al, 1992).

Supporting this notion, a more recent study confirmed that employed middle-aged women were more psychologically healthy than middle-aged women without jobs (Bromberger & Matthews, 1994). This contrasts with Rosen's study (1982) showing that the women who had experienced redundancy but had found new work were just as depressed as those who were still unemployed (although there is no mention of their ages in Rosen's research). It seems that for some people, experiencing a redundancy can have a profound psychological impact, even when adequate re-employment follows (Snyder & Nowak, 1984).

Further investigation found that the group of people with the highest risk of developing depression were unemployed divorced women (Cochrane & Stopes-Roe, 1981). As older divorced females may no longer have family responsibility as an alternative role, these women are likely to identify more with their occupational roles. Thus, removal of their occupational identities may leave such women more vulnerable to depression compared to other social groups.

### **Families of the Unemployed**

Unemployment not only affects the individuals who have lost their jobs, it can also have a negative effect upon their families. Research has shown that the wives of unemployed men are more likely to experience an increase in marital conflict, and be less physically and



mentally healthy than women with husbands in employment (McKee & Bell, 1985; McGhee & Fryer, 1989).

Children of long-term unemployed men are also more likely to be negatively affected compared with children of working fathers. Overseas research from Holland reported declines in school performance by children whose fathers were unemployed (Te Grotenhuis & Dronkers, 1989). This supports earlier research by Oakley (1936) who found that unemployment in parents often led to lower scholastic performance in their children. A review by McLloyd (1989) concluded that emotional problems such as low self-esteem, antisocial behaviour, depression and withdrawal from others are more likely to occur in children of the unemployed more so than in children with working fathers.

Several studies have shown that unemployed women are likely to spend more time on family and social activities than unemployed men (Laite & Halfpenny, 1987; Martin & Wallace, 1985; Walsh & Jackson, 1995). This may be explained by the fact that most women have the alternative nurturing roles and responsibilities within the family. However, for the divorced older woman with adult children who have left home, the alternative nurturing role may be no longer available.

### **The Redundancy Experience**

How the redundancy is handled by an employer can have a powerful influence on the employee's attitude and feelings toward the situation. Company restructuring is likely to continue to be part of the working environment, therefore it is important that managers and employers are trained in handling redundancy announcements with care and sensitivity. For most people, especially those in older age-groups, losing a job is a huge issue, often accompanied with life-changing consequences. How managers structure and handle this situation is therefore of great importance.

British women being made redundant at a Manchester computer centre in the early 1970s described **how** they were made redundant as the most significant aspect of their experience (Woods, 1981 cited by Marshall, 1984). Whether a person is made redundant along with other colleagues or singly often determines how they react. This was confirmed by Miller & Hoppe (1994) who found that it is psychologically less damaging to be made redundant along with other colleagues than to be the only redundancy in the department. The same

study produced other interesting findings. Firstly, emotional distress is higher for the person being made redundant when it is perceived as a personal put-down from the employer. Secondly, negative psychological reactions were found to be most pronounced amongst those people who lost their jobs because of some personal reason such as age or lack of training.

Self esteem is very closely tied to organisational identity and redundant workers may feel betrayed by the company to which they had devoted a considerable part of their lives (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997). This represents a form of violation of the “psychological contract” (a set of beliefs regarding the terms of one’s transactional relationship with the company), which developed over the period of employment (Farr & Ringseis, 2002). Hence, employees with long tenure are likely to feel a strong sense of resentment and betrayal if their jobs are suddenly terminated.

Sometimes managers feel awkward when announcing a redundancy to an employee and fail to provide clear information. They may give false hope or minimise the importance of the situation. Giving false hope not only leaves the employee confused, but they may not make any serious attempt to look for other work and find themselves unprepared for an unpleasant situation later on (Kets de Vries et al, 1997). Showing that the company cares about a redundant worker by providing them with career counselling and psychological counselling can often “make the best of a precarious situation” (Kets de Vries et al, 1997, p.45).

### **Timing of the Job Search**

The timing of the job search seems to be an important factor. The earlier a person starts looking for work, the more successful they are likely to be. This was found to be the case in research by Martin & Wallace (1984), showing that the women being made redundant who began looking for work while still employed had more success than those who began their search after they had left the company. The reason for this was not mentioned by the researchers but may be attributed to how confident a person feels when attending an interview. Being employed may project more of a sense of value compared to being unemployed when job-hunting. Research by Burchell (1994) suggests that employers are reluctant to employ people who have been out of the labour force for more than a few months. Support for this was found in a UK study by Atkinson, Giles & Meager (1996)

involving 800 employers. These researchers found that employers are more wary of hiring unemployed job applicants as they tend to believe that motivation, behaviour and skills deteriorate during unemployment.

McGregor & Gray found the first 4 to 6 months of unemployment to be the most important period for the older job-seeker (2001). After this time, negative psychological effects are increasingly likely to erode confidence and self-esteem.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter briefly outlined the importance of work in people's lives. As demonstrated, unemployment is often accompanied with financial difficulties and negative psychological effects. Family functioning can also be negatively affected. The two well-known models of work by Jahoda and Warr were overviewed, addressing their strengths and weaknesses.

The next chapter looks at ageism in the workforce and how recruitment agencies can be influential in maintaining age discrimination in the job market.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AGEISM WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

This chapter examines issues of ageism within society and relates these to older workers' experiences in the labour force. It also discusses recruitment agencies' role as a conduit between employers and job seekers, and shows their activities help shape both employer attitudes and mature women's experiences of job search and unemployment.

Barriers to reemployment of older workers can be attributed in part to the misguided perceptions of many employers. Previous research shows substantial evidence of a generalised negative stereotype operating against older people in the workforce (e.g. Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Solomon, 1995; Burns, 2000; McGregor & Gray, 2001).

#### **The Older Worker**

At what age does a person become an "older worker"? According to the US Department of Labour an "older worker" is defined as 40 or older (Palmore, 1999). US recruiters now class anyone over 40 as having "professional minority status" acknowledging a labour market disadvantage (Munk, 1999, cited by Murray, 2002, p.12). In corporate America "40 is starting to look and feel old" (Segrave, 2001, p.153).

Research in Britain found that a commonly imposed age-bar for job applications is 40 (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993). Many employers believe that employees become "older" at around age 40 (Wilson, 1996, cited by Clabaugh, 1998). According to Warr (1994), most empirical literature views 45 and over as defining the 'older worker'.

For women in New Zealand, 40 or even 35 is suggested as being "the age when women are deemed older workers" (McGregor & Gray, 2001, p.3). This seems somewhat ludicrous considering the age for superannuation eligibility for women in New Zealand is 65.

## **Ageism in the Workforce**

The term 'ageism' was coined by psychiatrist Robert N. Butler. He described ageism as a disease involving "those negative attitudes and practices that lead to discrimination based on a person's age" (Shenk & Achenbaum, 1993, p. 137). In 1992, discrimination on the grounds of age was made unlawful in New Zealand, but in spite of this there is much evidence to suggest that employers do discriminate against older workers.

It is a well documented fact that older workers remain unemployed longer than younger workers (e.g. Mallinckrodt, 1990; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Labich & Erdman, 1993; Palmore, 1999). This is not surprising given the commonly held negative beliefs regarding older workers. Research by Itzin & Newman (1995) found that negative stereotypical views of older workers were widespread among line managers including perceptions that older workers were "less able to cope with change; more difficult to train; and less able to learn new skills, particularly in the area of new technology" (cited by Taylor & Walker, 1994, p. 574). Line managers are often influential in recruitment and selection decisions, although human resource managers and personnel staff may also be key decision makers. One would expect staff in such responsible positions to be educated with regard to discrimination in the workforce, but a UK study by the Institute of Personnel Management in 1997 suggests otherwise. This study found that personnel managers under the age of 40 were often prejudiced against older employees (Lyon & Pollard, 1997). These managers equated only young employees with enthusiasm, flexibility and future success, while applying the typical negative stereotypes to older employees. These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of UK personnel specialists maintain negative stereotypical views of older employees. Similar Australian research supported these findings (Falconer & Rothman, 1994, cited by Encel, 1998).

A 1989 New Zealand Department of Labour survey showed an increasing rate of unemployment amongst people aged 45 and over with many people in this category being unemployed for more than 2 years. This trend was also noted in a later New Zealand study showing that 80% of the older unemployed (age 40 and over) had been looking for work for 1 year or more (Oliver, 1994).

Similar results were also noted in research by the New Zealand Employment Services in

1996, in that 85% of people over the age of 50 and 58% over the age of 40 felt that age discrimination was a barrier to employment. This study found that job-seekers perceived age discrimination to be the second highest barrier to employment, after limited mobility.

Obviously, the perceptions of older job-seekers will be influenced by their own experiences and may not be an accurate reflection of employers' actual beliefs and behaviour. However, a later survey by Burns (2000) asked New Zealand human resource professionals and recruitment consultants which groups of people they thought would be most likely to experience discrimination in the workforce. The results indicated that older people were the most likely group to experience discrimination (78%) followed by those with a non-New Zealand accent (70%), and those with disability third (62%).

Other recent surveys conducted in New Zealand found that many employers still hold negative views of older workers, and prefer younger employees (Sparrow, 1999; McGregor & Gray, 2001). Since younger workers are more likely to be given training than older workers, they are also more likely to be promoted to management positions. Managers are getting younger and evidence suggests that managers are likely to hire people around the same age as themselves or younger (Steinberg, Walley, Tyman & Donald, 1998; Wallace, 1999).

In New Zealand, managers appear to be the main source of discrimination against older workers (Burns, 2000). This may be because more managers are now under pressure to perform and meet company targets, making employing an older person a less likely option because of perceived disadvantages and therefore perceived risks.

### **Technical Training**

Advances in technology now require workers to continually engage in on-going training and upskilling. Much harm has been done over recent years by inaccurate perceptions regarding older workers' lack of ability to learn new skills, particularly when these skills involve computers and technology. Despite the lack of evidence, there is a general belief that job performance declines with age. Previous studies have failed to show any consistent relationship between age and job performance (e.g. Waldman & Avolio, 1986; McNaught & Henderson, 1990; Encel, 1992). As companies restructure and staff are made redundant, it is

the older worker who experiences massive discrimination in the workforce. This is particularly relevant in today's more technically orientated workforce.

In spite of older workers being perceived as lacking technical skills, their access to employee training programmes is restricted. This 'Catch 22' situation compounds the problem, denying older workers the opportunity of correcting a perceived deficiency. A British survey by Taylor & Walker (1994) found that older employees were considerably less likely to have received training from employers. Significant numbers of employers surveyed stated that they did not provide training for staff over the age of 50. Generally, older workers have less access to retraining opportunities than younger workers, in spite of research validating the ability of older workers to do well in retraining (e.g. Kern, 1990; Caro & Morris, 1993; Carnevale & Stone, 1994).

Older workers are however less likely to actually seek retraining from their employers (Steinberg et al., 1998). This may be due to the older worker recognising a reluctance in the employer to offer training, combined with diminished self-confidence, rather than a lack of interest. According to research by Colquitt, LePine & Noe (2000) employees who are confident are more likely to seek training and feedback from their employers than those with lower self-esteem (cited by Farr & Ringseis, 2002).

McGregor's (2001) New Zealand research supports overseas findings that employers commonly hold the view that older workers are more likely to have problems with technology. Being "too old to train" was a key comment made by New Zealand employers in a recent survey for the EEO regarding upgrading the technical skills of their older workers (Burns, 2000).

Given these perceptions regarding older employees and training, it is not surprising to find that there is a tendency by employers to target redundancies at older workers (Taylor & Walker, 1994). Older workers are favoured targets of redundancy programmes (Wallace, 1999). When a US company Gerber Products made 389 employees redundant in 1998, nearly 70% of them were over 40 (Segrave, 2001). Many US companies have used downsizing as a means of getting rid of unwanted older employees (Sacks, 1992; Lee, 1995, cited by Clabaugh, 1998). An Australian survey of 3,500 employers found that about 33% of companies had replaced employees aged 45 and over with younger staff (Murray, 2002).

From these figures, it seems that mid-to-late working life is, for many workers, a period of considerable vulnerability because of the unwillingness of companies to retrain and retain their older employees. As the workforce in general is becoming more technical and computer literate, the prospects for older workers have never looked so bleak. If older employees are perceived as not worth training, they are more likely to be replaced by younger “more trainable” staff.

Some interesting figures from a recent British study by Pitman Training (2000) suggested that older workers earn significantly less than their younger colleagues in IT, administrative and secretarial positions (cited by Murray, 2002). This contrasts with the commonly held view that older workers usually earn more than their younger colleagues because they are likely to have been employed at the same company for a longer period of time. Perhaps when the type of work involves technology, it is the younger employees who are perceived as being of more value to employers.

### **Recruitment Agencies**

The role of recruitment agencies is to help employers find new staff. As recruitment consultants have some influence over who is deemed “desirable” and who is not, it is important to look at the ways in which these organisations may help or hinder the unemployed older woman. Because the employer is the customer paying the recruitment agency, and not the job-seeker, it is likely to be a case of “he who pays the piper calls the tune”. In other words, the customer’s requirements will be the dominant factor.

One New Zealand recruitment consultant guessed that about 75% of clients (employers) discriminate when they describe the type of employee they want: “because the client pays us to find that employee, we in turn have to discriminate every day ...the bottom line is the company’s needs” (Burns, 2000, p. 18).

In Britain, research by the Department of Employment (1991) found that their own staff at Job Centres around the country used advertisements that barred applications from the over-fifties and actively discouraged older people from applying for many jobs (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993). The results from this research prompted a study of private recruitment agencies and found that approximately 33% of a sample of 2,585 job advertisements



included direct upper age-bars and inferred preferences for younger applicants (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993).

In New Zealand, placing age-limits in recruitment advertising is banned but it is not uncommon to see advertisements using words with stereotypical youthful associations such as “energetic”, “dynamic”, “bubbly” and “fitting in with a young team” to discourage interest from older applicants. When older applicants do apply they may be rejected on the grounds of being “overqualified”, a form of disguised discrimination (Murray, 2002).

Recruitment agencies are used to filter out undesirable candidates so the employer is less likely to be seen as being prejudiced. If older people are perceived by employers as ‘risky’ and therefore undesirable, recruitment consultants may go along with this in order to keep their customers satisfied. Over time, employer’s preferences may “condition” recruitment consultants to accept discrimination as the business norm (Burns, 2000).

Recent evidence suggests that British managers are becoming younger and tend to prefer younger subordinates (Worsley, 1996). When interviewing staff from recruitment agencies, Worsley was informed that some managers don’t want older staff as they could become a threat to their own standing and authority. Also younger personnel agency staff (to whom the responsibility for large-scale recruitment is often entrusted) tend to recruit employees in their own image. Worsley mentions the case of an experienced trainer made redundant by one of Britain’s biggest employers. This person recounted the stated opinion of a prominent recruitment consultant: “in the current job market, realistically, at 42, you are 10 years past your use-by date” (p. 24).

Although prejudice exists in times of both high and low unemployment, its effects are worse when unemployment is high making it easy for employers and recruitment consultants to be very selective. While there is a large pool of job-seekers, older workers are likely to be ignored by recruitment consultants, in spite of having marketable skills and experience (McGregor & Gray, 2001). According to Wallace (1999) “recruitment consultants admit that they screen out people over 50 because that’s what their clients brief them to do” (p. 133). An Australian study supports these findings, noting that several recruitment agencies refused to have candidates over 50 on their books (Encel & Studencki, 1996).

Of some concern are the results of a national postal survey of British employers' attitudes towards older workers which found evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of employers used age as an important consideration when recruiting staff and held negative attitudes regarding older workers (Taylor & Walker, 1994). Although recruitment consultants are not allowed to ask candidates their age, they may try to guess this from asking questions about schooling and from their own observations regarding the candidate's physical appearance. Australian research confirms this "filtering" method is commonly used. It found that most recruitment consultants ask candidates life history questions regarding schooling as a method to find out their ages and thus evade possible accusations of age discrimination (Encel, 1998). Another "filtering" method is when the consultant looks for "team fit", implying that the older candidate will not fit in with the existing younger team. This seems to be the most common type of discrimination used against older workers (Burns, 2000).

In Britain, it has been calculated that more than half of all job vacancies are agency based, leaving employers anonymous while applicants are "filtered" to best meet the customers' preferences (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993). Findings suggest that the employers' preferences are for younger staff. There is little doubt that some recruitment agencies are influential in promoting age discrimination, and the prediction that use of their services will increase is likely to also increase discriminating practice (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993).

Other British research found that recruitment agencies openly admit using age-limits to cut down the number of applications (Worsley, 1996). At about this time Britain was considering bringing in anti-ageist legislation, but in countries where this was already established, there appeared to be little success as covert discrimination is hard to prove (Worsley, 1996).

The majority of respondents in McGregor & Gray's project described their experiences with New Zealand recruitment agencies as being negative (2001). The same project mentions concerns identified by the EEO Trust (2000a) regarding "the behaviour of recruitment agency staff toward mature job-seekers" (p. 30). It seems inconsistent that older candidates are accepted as being suitable for temporary positions more than for permanent positions, as Segrave notes "for whatever reason, ageism does not come into play when

hiring temporary workers” (2001, p. 165). Women seem to be over-represented among temporary employees, and although this way of working may be better than unemployment, studies have shown that temporary work is “intimately connected to recurrent unemployment” (Korpi & Levin, 2001, p. 127). This makes women’s position in the labour market likely to be less secure than men’s, especially for older women (Korpi & Levin, 2001).

Figures from a different survey of 243 human resource professionals and recruitment consultants in New Zealand showed that only 34% of the recruitment consultants were aged over 40, with 25% under 30 (Burns, 2000). These figures suggest that on average recruitment consultants tend to be relatively young and as such are more likely to have a natural preference for younger candidates. In addition to this is the fact that many recruitment consultants are driven by commission structures (Burns, 2000), and it may be more cost-effective for them to focus on “easy to place” candidates such as younger employees to meet employers’ preferences.

### **Re-employment**

Discriminating attitudes encountered in the job-market make it difficult for the older worker to leave a new or existing job, even if they are not happy and would prefer to leave. Once reemployed, the older worker is likely to stay in a job they are over-qualified for or do not enjoy, in order to avoid the trauma of job-hunting (Markson, 1983; Worsley, 1996).

According to research by Bromberger & Matthews (1994), emotional problems do not necessarily decrease with a new job. An older employee who feels “trapped” in a new job may choose to stay, in spite of feeling as depressed as when unemployed. Other research suggests that downward status moves can have a negative impact requiring a great amount of psychological adjustment (West, Nicholson & Rees, 1990, cited by Farr & Ringseis, 2000). Redundant workers often accept new jobs with lower pay and less satisfaction, as the alternative may be permanent unemployment (e.g. Hancock, 1982; Mallinckrodt, 1990; Gilberto, 1997).

Many older workers are aware of their vulnerability in the workforce, as evidenced by an Australian survey which found that around 33% of workers aged 40 and over worried about

losing their job (Ng & Gee, 2000). This may be because being over 40 appears to have become a common criterion for redundancy (Murray, 2002)

### **Positive Attributes of Older Workers**

From the research literature already mentioned, it seems many employers believe that employing older workers is somehow “risky” for business. However, there is plenty of evidence indicating that the opposite is more likely and this is discussed below.

With the baby-boomer generation entering middle-age, several businesses now recognise the importance of matching the age profile of their workforce to that of their customers. The large bookstore WH Smith in the UK found that employees in their late forties and early fifties tend to stay with the organisation five times as long as those in their early twenties (Worsley, 1996). This company also found that older workers have lower absenteeism and accident rates, greater reliability, and older customers prefer to be served by someone closer to their own age group. Other UK retailers such as TESCO and B & Q reported similar positive experiences with older employees (Encel, 1998).

If making a company profitable is the main goal of being in business, then age discrimination does not seem to make good business sense. Experience rather than age was found to be a better indicator of performance across 111 different occupations (Maule, 1996, cited by Steinberg et al, 1998).

There is a wealth of literature supporting the positive qualities of older workers. Positive attributes mostly associated with older workers are reliability, loyalty, people skills and productivity (e.g. Steinberg et al, 1998; McGregor, 2001; Farr & Ringseis, 2002). Most reviews and meta-analyses report little consistent relationship between age and work performance (Griffiths, 1997, cited by McGregor, 2001). In fact many studies (e.g. Rhodes, 1983; Labouvie-Viet, 1985; McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Warr, 2001) found the notion of necessary decline in cognitive and productive abilities to be unsupported until individuals are in their sixties and beyond (Schaie, 1994, cited by Farr & Ringseis, 2002).

In New Zealand, two thirds of workers over 50 had been with their employer for at least 10 years compared to around one third of those in their late thirties (Murray, 2002).

However, many employers do not seem to reward or recognise this loyalty as evidenced by the exclusion of older workers from training opportunities. According to research by Encel “experience and loyalty to the firm are found to count for very little” (1998, p. 42).

Employees who find their ‘company loyalty’ is not reciprocated are likely to suppress this characteristic. This was the case in a study by Labich & Erdman (1993) who found that older workers who had been through the redundancy process decided that “loyalty didn’t pay” and in their next jobs made a conscious effort to withdraw emotionally from the company.

### SUMMARY

In spite of research showing the many positive attributes of the older worker, age discrimination in the workforce seems to be ubiquitous in New Zealand and other Western countries. As demonstrated in the literature, this discrimination seems to be caused largely by the misconceptions of managers regarding older workers. Rather than challenge these perceptions, recruitment agencies often compound the problem of age discrimination in the workforce by adhering to employers’ specific requests for younger staff.

The next chapter looks at sexism in the workforce and how sexism combined with ageism affects the older female worker.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SEXISM AND OLDER WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

This chapter examines the experiences of older women within the workforce and discusses the ways in which sexism and ageism combine to create a “double jeopardy”. The chapter concludes by comparing and contrasting other studies on women and redundancy to the present study.

#### **Discrimination Against Older Female Workers**

When two types of prejudice such as ageism and sexism are combined, this is known as a “double jeopardy” or “gendered ageism”. There is growing evidence to suggest that age discrimination hits women harder than men (Segrave, 2001). In many areas, both sexism and ageism combine to intensify the problems of older women. For example, women of all ages tend to earn less than men, but in addition to this, older women often earn less than younger women (Coyle, 1997). As mentioned previously, this seems to be more evident in IT, secretarial or administrative type work where computer skills have now become the main requirement for the job.

A survey by the global recruitment advertising company TMP World identified ageism as the most common form of discrimination, closely followed by sexism (Murray, 2002). It has been suggested that older women experience different problems to older men in the workforce (Encel, 1998) and there are some disturbing findings that suggest older women are perceived to be less competent and generally less attractive than men of the same age. Women are classed as “old” at a younger age than men, with 35 to 40 a common cut-off point (Onyx, 1998).

A British survey of 449 local authorities found that their line managers perceived women as being “older” earlier than men, this being particularly pronounced regarding women in their fifties (Itzin & Newman, 1995). These findings were supported by a Scottish study (Loretto, Duncan & White, 2000), which found the majority of 460 Business Studies students at Edinburgh University believed that the performance of female workers begins to decline at a younger age than men. The students’ ages ranged from 17 to 29, with 55% being

males. New Zealand research also supports these findings. A recent survey found that many employees as well as employers believed that female job performance declines earlier than men's (McGregor, 2001). It should be noted that 76.4% of the respondents in McGregor's study were male.

The perception that women's job performance deteriorates earlier than men's is of some concern, given that women need to work longer now because the New Zealand retirement age for women has recently been raised to 65. Equally importantly, women are now more likely to be the sole head of households because of rising divorce rates.

As well as being perceived as less competent than males of the same age-group, older women are also deemed less attractive. An early study by Berman, O'Nan and Floyd in which pictures of individuals aged 35 to 55 were judged according to their attractiveness, found that men rated middle-aged women considerably lower than neutral and considerably less attractive than middle-aged men (1981). Younger women may be unwilling to identify with women older than themselves and are often rejecting of or distancing from older women (Pearlman, 1993). This is commonly thought to be because in a youth orientated culture, older women represent what younger women fear eventually becoming.

The older female worker may feel more vulnerable in her job than her younger colleagues, but it is only when she begins a job search that she is likely to experience the full effects of ageism and sexism. If she is looking for a job where sex-stereotyping is entrenched, for example in a front-line role such as receptionist or secretary, and where company image is deemed important, the older woman's capacity to compete successfully against younger applicants for the job is diminished. A British survey found that workers are only really safe from age discrimination in their thirties, with the ideal age being 35 (Wallace, 1999). For "secretarial and clerical positions, the ideal age was even younger at around 25" (p. 133).

Of all social categories of workers, semi-skilled older women are among the most unfairly treated (Onyx, 1998). Matthews (1999) describes older women workers in lower paid jobs as "a particularly vulnerable part of an already vulnerable group" (cited by Murray, 2002, p. 56). This seems especially true of clerical workers compared to such occupations as nurses or teachers, where a youthful appearance is not deemed to be important for the job.

These conclusions are supported by Encel who described age and gender interacting “to create a subclass of highly vulnerable workers” (1998, p.44).

### **Sexual Stereotyping of Jobs**

In modern times, it is unusual to find a male secretary or receptionist as these jobs have become sex-typed. The organisational experience of women is now largely found in clerical positions and previous studies have shown how women are concentrated in certain jobs which have become sex-typed as female (e.g. Barker & Downing, 1980; Davies, 1982; Zimmeck, 1986; Walby, 1986; and Bradley, 1992). The service area commonly studied by sociologists and historians is clerical work, and is one of the major employers of women (Bradley, 1992).

In a British study, women were found to be massively over-represented in the sex-segregated occupations, constituting 75% of all clerical workers (Itzin & Newman, 1995). New Zealand figures are similar, showing clerical occupations constituted 17% of the total workforce and comprised of 75% of female workers with a total of 30% of all women working in this group (Olsson, 1992).

More recent New Zealand figures (1999) from Career Services *rapuara* show that of 227,400 clerical jobs, 79% were held by women, and 23% of all women working were in clerical roles.

These skewed sex ratios are likely to result in a sexualised work environment. In such an environment, especially when there are younger male managers, women are expected to be attractive and to dress accordingly (Mills & Tancred, 1992) This sex-role “spill-over” may be largely responsible for sexism playing its part in the workforce.

An Australian study found that the majority of 104 employers surveyed preferred clerical workers to be 25 or younger, and expressed minimal interest in recruiting workers over 45 (Steinberg et al, 1998). If the majority of clerical workers are female and the majority of employers tend to favour younger clerical staff, this leaves the older female clerical job-seeker in a difficult situation. This is especially true in times of high unemployment when employers can afford to be very selective.



## Physical Attractiveness

With clerical duties becoming “women’s work”, the entire job comes to be perceived as embodying stereotypically female traits when women constitute the majority of workers. If stereotypical female traits involve being “feminine”, then discrimination on the basis of physical attractiveness is likely to occur. “Attractive” women are more likely to be considered for the “feminine” jobs of receptionist and secretary. According to a male recruiter for a large firm in America “if you have two women walk into your office to be recruited, and both have the same grades, the nice looking one will get hired and that’s a simple fact” (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). However, it seems to depend on what the position is. Beauty helps when the job is clerical, but not for a management role (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986).

A British study found that line managers (who were mainly men) preferred not to employ older women as they were perceived as being less sexually attractive (Itzin & Newman, 1995). In the same study the male head of a personnel department referred to a “psychological dislike of appointing women age 40 and over to any position” because of “that age” or “the change” (p. 85). A similar British study by Itzin & Phillipson (1995) suggested that women workers were primarily sought for their youth and physical attractiveness, and were seen as being “too old” by 35. It appears that physical decline is seen as worse in women than in men (Coyle, 1997).

More recent findings support these views (Palmore, 1999). As managers are now likely to be younger, the older female clerical worker, in spite of her skills and experience may find she no longer fits the “feminine” societal stereotype. An example of this type of bias is the case of J. a 51 year old woman who was made redundant, only to return a few weeks later to see an attractive younger woman working in her previous position (Rife & First, 1989). Although this case is taken from a US study, a respondent in McGregor’s study claimed that in New Zealand “middle-aged women were more likely to be made redundant” because “young bosses prefer younger people” (2001, p.15). There are official regulations covering redundancy, but as Bloch points out, worker protection legislation is often ineffectual and companies can find ways of laying off workers without too much trouble (1999).

The older woman's self perception was the topic of research by Berkun (1983). The researcher interviewed 60 women aged 40 to 55 and found that the women who worked were the most concerned about their appearance. How they looked was "a haunting presence" and what was once an asset in the workforce was now "a handicap" (cited by Markson, 1983, p.31). Gerike's 1990 study of older women and appearance found that aging is a more negative experience for women than it is for men, largely because of society's association of physical youthful looks with female sexual attractiveness.

For the older woman who may have already experienced feelings of rejection and betrayal through being made redundant, seeking new work in a clerical role, especially a front-line position such as a secretary or receptionist, is likely to lead to a further erosion of self-esteem in response to discrimination on the part of employers. The double jeopardy of age and sexism within a youth orientated labour market is likely to create a tough barrier for the older female clerical worker.

### **Positive Attributes of Women Workers**

Although older female clerical workers are often discriminated against, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting they bring a number of positive attributes to the workplace. Women are particularly sought after for call centre work because of their natural ability to "smile down the phone", a desirable quality for customer service work (Belt, Richardson & Webster, 2002). Research interviews indicate that mature women are being "specifically targeted by call centre employers" for their perceived social and leadership skills (Kerfoot & Knight, 1994, cited by Belt et al., 2002, p. 28). This makes older women more valuable as front-line staff dealing with customers or clients (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993). Unfortunately as the literature suggests, youthful physical appearance is deemed to be important in this type of work, but in call-centre work, the older women can be "heard but not seen".

As older workers have more life experience and therefore more people skills than younger workers, they are also more likely to have good team building skills. A 3 year study involving a UK insurance company found that employing "entrant" mature clerical women worked very well because of their contribution to team building developed from previous life experiences (Kerfoot & Knight, 1991, cited by Wright, 1994). Teams were built around

the “family metaphor”, the managers believing that social skills were the essential property of mature women. Hiring older women as clerical workers proved to be a big advantage for the company as staff turnover rates dropped from 50% a year to 13% and productivity rose from 70% to a consistent 95%. These women were described by the managers of the company as being “very grateful to be given a job” and their presence in the teams was viewed as being conducive to improving efficiency and service standards (Kerfoot & Knight, 1991 cited by Wright, 1994, p. 131)

There is now growing evidence to suggest that older women workers are more likely than men to be at the peak of their career potential in their forties and fifties (Onyx, 1998). This “golden decade” for women (around 45 to 55) when they have renewed energy and often engage in further training is not recognised in the workforce. On the contrary, many of these women are judged as being “too old” and “menopausal” to be considered worth employing at all (Onyx, 1998, p. 96).

## **EXISTING STUDIES ON WOMEN AND REDUNDANCY**

This chapter will now examine previous overseas and New Zealand studies on women and redundancy, comparing and contrasting them to the present study.

The majority of existing overseas research on redundancy and unemployment has tended to focus on male unemployment, with common gender stereotypes de-emphasising the importance of work for women (e.g. Rife, 1989; Fritz, 1990; Miller & Hoppe, 1994; Platman & Tinker, 1998). Employment has often been assumed to be less central to a woman’s identity because of her additional family role and in many earlier studies women were surveyed merely as the “wives” of the unemployed men.

### **Overseas Studies**

An early British research project examined the attitudes and experiences of women who were made redundant at five factories in 1981 and 1982. The 279 participants were involved in manual and non-manual occupations and ages ranged from 15 to 59 (Martin & Wallace, 1984). Six months after being made redundant, over 70% remained unemployed. The women aged 35 and over were much less successful than the younger women in securing

full-time work. The majority of older women interviewed suspected that their age was a handicap in finding new work. Although there are similarities between Martin & Wallace's study and the present study, there are major differences. For example their work is now over 20 years old and therefore covers a different social milieu; it is a British study; the participants came from a variety of occupations and their ages differed widely.

In 1987, Rosen investigated 142 married female factory workers in New England who lost their jobs. Rosen found that the women who had become reemployed at the time of the interviews (6 months post job loss) were as demoralised or despairing as those who remained jobless (Rosen, 1987). This is interesting because it suggests that the psychological effects of job loss were so strong that re-employment was not enough to counteract them. These findings are supportive of Warr's vitamin model because although the women were re-employed, their personal experience of work still left them feeling demoralised. The average age of participants in Rosen's study was 37 compared to 52 in the present study.

Hall & Johnson (1988) conducted a cross-sectional empirical study on 96 female production workers who had been made redundant 2 years previously when their manufacturing plant in Sweden was closed. None of the women had become re-employed in the 2 years since losing their jobs. After controlling for marital status, social support and recent life events, the redundant women had substantially higher scores on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) than the comparison group which was made up of 51 female production workers from a nearby manufacturing plant where they had been continuously employed for the prior 2 years. These findings support other studies regarding the negative psychological effects associated with women losing their jobs. Obvious differences from the present study include the fact that it was quantitative and more focused on measuring levels of depression than the overall experiences of the women who lost their jobs.

An American dissertation by Gilberto (1997) looked specifically at how redundancy affected 18 women aged 50 and over. Of all the research I have been able to find on older women and redundancy, this seems to be the most similar to the present study. It explored older women's reactions to redundancy, the barriers to their reemployment, their coping behaviour and reemployment experiences. Gilberto found that the unmarried women and those in traditionally low-paid occupations suffered more from financial and psychological difficulties than did the married women. The women who managed to find new work had

accepted jobs with less pay, fewer benefits and less job security. Attending job interviews at offices staffed solely by young people reinforced their belief in the existence of age bias in clerical positions. One clerical worker recalled her first impression of going for an interview: "it looked like high school... and many times the person interviewing you looks like your son or daughter". Gilberto concluded that losing a job late in one's career left many of the women with a higher risk of current and future economic insecurity. Differences between Gilberto's study and the present study include the fact that this was an American study, and the women were from a variety of occupations whereas the present study involved clerical workers only.

### **New Zealand Studies**

An early example of qualitative New Zealand research looking exclusively at women and redundancy is Hancock's 1981 study involving the closure of the Mosgiel textile and clothing company in Dunedin (Hancock, 1982). Interviewing 25 of the women made redundant, Hancock highlighted the negative financial and psychological effects of redundancy on women, calling into question the assumption that unemployment and redundancy are felt more severely by men. She discovered that many of the women in their forties and fifties found it very difficult to find alternative employment, and over 25% of them were 'pushed' into involuntary retirement. Women who were sole income earners described experiencing huge financial problems brought on by their sudden job loss. The married women in the study found relying on husbands for financial support took away much of their autonomy and economic independence. As well as financial problems, redundancy also brought feelings of depression and loneliness. Hancock criticised the New Zealand Department of Labour and Social Welfare for their harsh treatment of the women.

Similarities between Hancock's research and the present study include a qualitative interviewing approach with the participants being exclusively women who had lost their jobs through involuntary redundancy. There are also several differences. The women in Hancock's study were mostly textile workers rather than clerical workers; there was a wide variation of participants' ages and the city was Dunedin rather than Auckland. Hancock's study revealed "the devastating effect which unemployment has on women's lives with little cognisance made of this in New Zealand" (Hancock, 1982, p.178).

Keys (1991) research study for a Masters degree through Waikato University looked at how redundancy changed the lives of 12 women in the Waikato area. Unlike the present study, the participants' ages were diverse, ranging from 21 to 61 and covered a variety of occupations with the majority of participants being cleaners. All of the women felt that their managers had not dealt with the redundancy in a professional manner. The few older women in the study found it difficult to find new work and attributed this to their age. Age seemed to have more influence than skills and experience in the job market. Despite the trauma and difficulties resulting from the redundancy, many of the women did manage to find new jobs with better pay and conditions. Similarities between Keys' study and the present study include a qualitative approach, and the 12 participants were New Zealand women. However, Keys' study did not look specifically at older women from the same type of occupation, as the present study does.

Drewery's (1998) case study examines the negative effects of unemployment on Sonya, a middle-aged New Zealand woman who was made redundant from her job as a night cleaner. Similarities between Drewery's study and the present study include the fact that Sonya was middle-aged when made redundant and she is a New Zealander. Differences between the two studies include the fact that this is a case study, focused on 1 participant, whereas the present study investigates the impact of job loss on 12 women. Sonya lost a cleaning job, whereas the participants in the present study all lost clerical positions.

Myers' (2001) research on the careers of older workers investigated the working lives of 8 women aged 45 to 57. Only 2 of the participants had experienced redundancy. Although 1 participant found the process of redundancy to be daunting, the overall outcome was positive. The other participant had felt "traumatised" and described her experience as "shocking", spending several months trying to find new work (p. 24). Only 1 participant in the study was mentioned as working in a clerical administrative role. Although this study did focus on older working women, most participants had not experienced redundancy, unlike the present study.

It is clear from a review of the existing literature on redundancy and unemployment, that in this context women are "a seriously understudied group" (Dew et al, 1992, p.762). This is demonstrated by the dearth of literature exclusively on women and redundancy, especially older women working in clerical jobs in New Zealand.

## SUMMARY

This chapter looked at the negative effects of sexism combined with ageism on older women in the workforce. In spite of research showing many positive attributes of older female workers, the “double jeopardy” of age and sexism can make their search for new work (especially front-line clerical positions) a distressing and humiliating experience.

The chapter concluded by comparing and contrasting other studies on women and redundancy to the present study. In the following chapter, the rationale for using grounded theory methodology and a qualitative framework will be explained.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This chapter discusses qualitative methodology in psychological research and provides reasons why I decided to take this approach. The suitability of using grounded theory for the present study is also discussed, along with a theoretical and philosophical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses associated with grounded theory methods.

#### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research has been defined as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Qualitative research is used to study social processes in groups, individuals or organisations.

This type of research is often undertaken when there is an attempt to uncover the nature of personal experience, for example illness or addiction, where particular information may not be known. It provides intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to produce with quantitative methods, and can add a fresh slant to topics on which there is already a lot of information known.

According to Henwood and Pidgeon (1995), there are two main advantages associated with qualitative research. Firstly, it provides an alternative to hypothetico-deduction as it is more concerned with the creation of theory rather than testing a pre-conceived hypothesis. Secondly it permits the researcher to generate analyses that are in touch with the reality of the participants' socially situated worlds. The qualitative researcher tends to be concerned with the quality and texture of experience rather than identifying cause-effect relationships (Willig, 2001). Although psychological research is still a predominantly quantitative field, more psychologists are becoming increasingly aware of the advantages of qualitative studies (Woolgar, 1996).

The purpose of selecting a qualitative design using a semi-structured interview format was to provide a detailed picture of how redundancy was experienced by older women and



the ways in which it affected their lives. A qualitative methodology using an in-depth interview format also acknowledges the fact that a traumatic experience such as job loss needs to be investigated with respect for the feelings of the participants. Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details of phenomena such as thought processes and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn from quantitative methods.

For slightly different reasons, a qualitative format was also chosen as being suitable for interviewing the recruitment consultants. Although the consultants would not be discussing an upsetting personal experience, they were likely to have concerns regarding the subject of age discrimination in the job market. The role of a recruitment consultant is often fraught with contradictions and ambiguities which are better explored through qualitative techniques.

Such methods are especially suited to capturing rich details of complex experiences such as redundancy and unemployment, as these subtleties could be missed in quantitative research. For example, a quantitative study utilizing a structured questionnaire and a Likert scale is quite limiting and could obscure the intricacies of participants' viewpoints. A qualitative approach provides a perspective on the redundancy experience via the voices of the people who have lived it. This gives the reader a view of the participants' personal perspectives by using their own words as quotations in the thesis.

As qualitative research stresses meanings in context rather than numerical data, this approach seemed more likely to provide new insights into how redundancy affects older women. Feather (1990) points out that there is a great deal of information already in existence on the subject of unemployment and its effects, but it needs to be supplemented by 'more intensive, in-depth studies of unemployed individuals in their daily lives' (p.24). Qualitative methodologies of inquiry into working women's lives are recommended by Chester & Grossman, (1990, cited by Gilberto, 1997) and a qualitative study on job loss and how it impacts on older women is recommended by Onyx, (1998).

### **Reflexivity of the Researcher**

An important aspect of qualitative research is the reflexivity of the researcher. This means that the researcher needs to be aware of their own presence in the research project (Willig, 2001). All interpretation is made within the framework of the researcher's own concepts. By

adopting a constructivist approach, the researcher is able to acknowledge their own influence on the study (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996).

As the researcher of this study, I am aware that my own personal, cultural and ideological assumptions and experiences may have helped shape the research from its beginning to conclusion. For example I am a mature female with prior experience of working in a clerical role. Personally, I have never been made redundant from a job, but I know many women who have been and I have some understanding of how difficult the experience was for them. My own social and cultural background makes me sympathetic towards the women participants in the study and this may in some way have been influential in my interpretation of the data.

My personal experience of recruitment consultants is more limited. Although I have not worked with them closely, I did work for a large company that employed recruitment consultants as well as career counsellors. I acknowledge that my own life experience may have influenced my interpretation and analysis regardless of any conscious attempt to remain impartial. I also acknowledge that in this respect, qualitative research can be perceived to be limiting.

The words used to describe experiences also play a part in constructing the meanings we give to experiences. Language does not mirror reality, rather it has a constructive component, therefore critical language awareness needs to be acknowledged as a part of reflexivity (Fairclough, 1995, cited by Willig, 2001). With this in mind, I recognise that the choice of words used in the semi-structured interview questions, and the categories and codes created during the research process may have helped to shape the findings of this study.

## **GROUNDED THEORY**

For the researcher embarking upon a qualitative study, there are numerous methods available. For example, interpretative phenomenology, discursive psychology, Foucauldian discourse analysis and grounded theory. A grounded theory is one that is discovered and developed through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher does not begin with a theory, only

with an area of study. The data collected that is relevant to that area is allowed to “emerge” to form the theory. The concept of theory simply “emerging” from data has created an ongoing debate among researchers and this will be covered in more depth later in this chapter.

As well as being described as a scientific method, creativity is an important component of grounded theory. The creative ability of the researcher is demonstrated in recognising and naming categories; making free associations required for generating relevant questions and comparing and contrasting data, all of which leads to discovery (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The aim of grounded theory analysis is to produce theories that are grounded in the data.

The two founders of the grounded theory method were Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Unfortunately, they could not agree on exactly how grounded theory should be approached. Glaser claimed Strauss’ version to be too controlling in that it “forced results rather than let them emerge, that it asked directing rather than neutral questions, and that analysis was based on preconceived ideas rather than being open to emergent categories” (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999, p. 189). This division eventually led to grounded theory methods becoming the subject of debate among researchers.

### **The Epistemological Conflict within Grounded Theory**

According to Charmaz (1990), qualitative research can be interpretive in its approach or at the other extreme, it can be positivistic. An interpretive approach attempts to describe, explain and understand the lived experiences of a particular group of people. It starts with and develops analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person. The aim of interpretive research is to capture the personal worlds of the participants through their own voices.

Grounded theory is often described, sometimes pejoratively and sometimes approvingly, as one of the more positivist approaches to qualitative research. As well as being grounded in the data, a theory of the phenomenon being studied must be developed and explained, and be more than a descriptive account. The inductive or positivist label is often given to grounded theory because of its emphasis on all aspects of the process being grounded in the data (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999). A positivistic researcher takes an objective stance, similar to the quantitative approach in that the data itself is acknowledged as being “factual” rather

than having been manipulated by the researcher. The implication of a positivist epistemology is that production of objective knowledge is the goal of research. This means that any understanding or knowledge must be impartial and based on a view from “the outside” with no personal involvement on the part of the researcher (Willig, 2001). This approach is no longer acknowledged as realistic as most researchers accept that observation and description are selective and any researcher’s understanding of the world is partial and therefore limited. To be labelled an unreconstructed positivist now constitutes an insult! (Willig, 2001).

Van Maanen (1988 cited by Charmaz, 1990) claimed that grounded theory studies are realist works whether they begin with interpretative or positivist assumptions. Just as quantitative research is criticised for being too limiting, qualitative research has also been criticised. In grounded theory, agreeing with the concept that theory “emerges” from the data takes the positivist/inductivist perspective. This view has been criticised, as theory cannot simply “emerge” from data without interpretation by a human being (the researcher). As the researcher has prior opinions, preferences and social and cultural biases, it is impossible for interpretation not to be “contaminated” in some way by the researcher.

### **Constructivist Argument for Theory Generation**

The constructivist approach to generation of theory is an alternative to the inductivist/deductivist view. Grounded theory’s positivist tendencies have been challenged by researchers preferring to develop a social constructionist version of the method (Willig, 2001). The constructivist view acknowledges that the researcher is part of the study, regardless of how objective they may try to be, as their individual perspective influences and guides the topics during the interview stage. The researcher’s individual philosophical stance will also influence interpretation of the data and any decisions regarding what can be discarded and what can be built up to help form the theory (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995).

This ‘tension’ within grounded theory has resulted in different versions of grounded theory. This is not surprising given that the two founders could not agree on what grounded theory actually is. It is therefore important for the researcher to state their own views on grounded theory, whether it be in favour of the constructivist or the inductivist/positivist approach. As already mentioned, my preference was to take the constructivist view for the present study.

In spite of the limitations of grounded theory, the coding process itself helps the researcher to remain close to the data. Although I believe it is impossible to have a totally objective human being as a researcher in a qualitative study (or any other study), grounded theory does offer a more empirical approach than some other forms of qualitative methods. I believe this is an advantage rather than a disadvantage, especially given my prior associations with women who had been made redundant and recruitment consultants. Below is a brief summary of the strengths and weaknesses of grounded theory.

### **Strengths of Grounded Theory**

As grounded theory is qualitative research, it is able to provide rich detail regarding personal experiences, providing new ideas and fresh slants on previously studied phenomena. It provides a set of procedures which ensure that the researcher engages in close and detailed analysis based on the data. A further advantage of grounded theory is its flexibility in that it can accommodate many different epistemological and ontological positions, for example the constructivist perspective, the inductivist/positivist perspective or be adapted to be compatible with a feminist perspective. This makes grounded theory a very flexible approach for qualitative researchers with differing epistemological points of view (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999).

### **Weaknesses of Grounded Theory**

The concept of theory being able to simply 'emerge' from the data is highly debatable, however, the social constructivist view addresses this concern by recognising researcher reflexivity.

## **GROUNDING THEORY IN THE PRESENT STUDY**

For the present study, grounded theory methods were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, grounded theory is investigatory in nature, providing an exploratory approach. As very little is known about how mature women experience redundancy in New Zealand, using grounded theory seemed a suitable method. Recommendations in the literature have also influenced my decision to choose grounded theory.

Another reason why grounded theory was selected is because of its ability to provide detailed, rich data. Rich data reveals thoughts, feelings and actions which can help the

researcher to discern what the participants mean and how they define their experience (Charmaz,1990). As a research method, it is useful for rigorous research because it provides a systematic process for dealing with what can seem to be an overwhelming amount of raw data. Using the systematic processes involved in grounded theory methods, the researcher can allow the data itself to help in controlling the creation and development of concepts and codes. This may sound a little like a positivistic view, but staying close to the raw data allows the researcher some objectivity, although the researcher's own unique perceptions will influence the process to some extent.

Using grounded theory has been described as embarking upon a journey of discovery as the concepts, the direction of the research and the end-product (the theory) are generated from the data and are unknown to the researcher at the commencement of the study. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, there appears to be only one other study (Hancock, 1982) that investigates the impact of redundancy on women in New Zealand. However Hancock's study did not use age specifically as a defining variable and did not look exclusively at clerical workers. As there is so little known about the impact of redundancy on the older female worker, especially those in sex-stereotyped clerical occupations, using grounded theory methodology for the present study was synonymous to embarking on a journey of discovery. As an example of this, during the research process I was surprised to discover that 3 of the women made redundant described feeling stigmatised by their redundancies. As redundancy is now such a common occurrence in the workforce, I found this quite remarkable. Entire companies were being closed down with all staff made redundant, yet these women still felt that redundancy was "a bad mark" against them in the job market. This is an example of how grounded theory can help to uncover new concepts from phenomena that have already been researched.

## **EVALUATING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Scientific neutrality may be the aim of quantitative research, but evaluation of psychological research of a qualitative nature uses different criteria. To ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research, the qualitative criteria includes a number of processes which are mentioned below.

## **Triangulation**

According to Stiles (1993) “triangulation” can help to produce more accurate findings. Triangulation involves the researcher seeking data from multiple sources and checking it against the theory developed from their own study. For example, in the present study data were produced from 5 recruitment consultants and compared with data produced from the 12 women participants. The fact that both the women and the consultants identified the “double jeopardy” of ageism and sexism suggests that this is a genuine structural issue within the New Zealand labour market, rather than simply the inaccurate perceptions of the women. The reasoning behind triangulation is that the more sources of information presented and compared, the more objectively accurate the study’s findings are likely to be.

## **Coherence**

The coherence of the researcher’s interpretations is a form of evaluation. Asking questions such as ‘does the interpretation made by the researcher make sense from the data presented?’ can be helpful. In grounded theory, a way to ensure this is by working closely with the participants’ own words to form the concepts (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Presenting evidence in the form of raw data (the participants’ own words as quotes in the report) helps the reader to ascertain whether or not the researcher has made a correct interpretation and to think of possible alternatives.

## **Independent Audit**

As a way of evaluating qualitative research, Smith (1996) suggests that all the data be recorded so that another person could undertake an independent audit. In grounded theory the coding system used to develop and create theory provides a record of the steps used during the research process and can be reviewed by another person (see Appendix J).

## **Verification by Second Person**

Having another person verifying that the findings correspond with the participants’ accounts of their experiences is a way of evaluating the accuracy of the study. The grounded theory coding process in this study was checked by myself as the researcher and by my supervisor. The codes generated were found to match the descriptive data from the participants’ own words as recorded in the transcripts.

## **Summary of Findings to Participants**

Inviting participants in the study to comment on the summary of findings can also provide an opportunity to evaluate the validity of the study's findings. This is done to check that the researcher has understood the participants' experiences correctly. In this study, all participants were sent a summary of the findings and their comments solicited. (See Appendices A and B).

Smith (1996) points out that many participants find it easier to agree with the researcher rather than to question interpretations. This may be true, but sending participants a summary of findings for comment is useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provides participants with an overview of the research findings which they will probably be interested in reading. Secondly, it does give them an opportunity to comment on the findings and is a way of acknowledging their continuing importance to the study. Thirdly, sending a summary of the study's findings can be influential in producing catalytic validity. Catalytic validity refers to the impact of the research on a participant. Realising that other participants shared similar traumatic experiences can be helpful and perhaps empowering for the individual participant.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter discussed the rationale for choosing a qualitative rather than quantitative approach for the present study. The main reason being that an in-depth interviewing approach is more suitable for studying a complex and traumatic experience such as job loss and the ambiguity and confusion regarding the role of recruitment consultant. The literature also recommends a qualitative study in this area, especially looking at job loss and older women.

The chapter also provided a theoretical discussion on grounded theory covering its strengths and weaknesses. It also explained why grounded theory methodology was chosen. The main reason was that grounded theory has the ability to provide detailed rich information, taking an exploratory approach to the study. As this particular population had not been studied before in New Zealand, an exploratory approach was deemed the most appropriate.



The following chapter focuses on the aims of the present study and the methodology components such as research design, participants and procedures. Ethical considerations and data analysis are also discussed.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE PRESENT STUDY

The following chapter comprises four parts. Firstly the aims of the study are presented, outlining the main reasons for choosing this topic. The second part is the methodology, which covers the research design, the participants and procedures. The third part looks at ethical considerations and the final part describes the grounded theory method of data analysis.

#### **Aims of the Study**

The study has two main objectives. The primary aim is to use grounded theory methods to investigate the experience of mature female clerical workers who have undergone involuntary redundancy.

The second aim is to find out how recruitment agencies in Auckland help or hinder mature women in finding new work. Primarily the recruitment consultants were interviewed to provide their views as to how employers (their clients) regard older workers. Secondly, comparing recruitment consultants' views of mature female applicants, their perceptions regarding employers' preferences and how the mature women participants view themselves adds depth to the study and enables some triangulation of the workers' and the consultants' perspectives.

#### **Research Design**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 women who had lost their jobs through involuntary redundancy in the last 5 years. The interviews covered a wide range of topics, including previous career history, reactions to the redundancy and unemployment, coping methods, job-search techniques, the nature of any new job and recommendations or advice for other mature women facing a similar situation.

Five recruitment consultants were interviewed in addition to the 12 women. Recruitment consultants are in the powerful position of determining which candidates are presented to employers, therefore it was important to find out how they perceive mature female job-

seekers and how they perceive employers' requirements. It was important to get these views for several reasons. Firstly, recruitment consultants typically act in a 'filtering' role for employers. Their own attitudes and their perceptions of employers' attitudes are important factors affecting the mature women's experiences in the job market. Secondly, the majority of clerical position vacancies in Auckland now go through recruitment agencies rather than being directly advertised by employers. This gives recruitment consultants a controlling influence over the job market in general. Thirdly, these extra five interviews provide another perspective to the research. The ideal situation would have been to interview employers directly to find out how they perceived mature workers, but given the current legislation on age discrimination, it would have been likely that honesty would be compromised.

The topics covered when interviewing the recruitment consultants included what types of problems they encountered when trying to find jobs for mature female clerical workers; the perceived strengths and weaknesses of mature women; how these women compare with younger applicants; how employers generally view older workers; what employers generally perceive as being the "ideal" candidate for a front-line (receptionist) job; ageism in the job market and whether male employers and female employers require different qualities in new staff.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Two groups of participants were interviewed for this study. These were the 12 women participants and the 5 consultants. Interviews were conducted with the two groups from May 2002 to August 2002.

### **The Women**

The 12 women participants had experienced involuntary redundancy during the previous 5 years. Each met the following criteria:

- Female
- Age over 40
- Job loss through involuntary redundancy in the last 5 years
- Worked a minimum of 20 hours per week in the job from which they were made redundant

- Worked in a clerical role (i.e. receptionist, secretary, etc) when made redundant
- Lived in the Auckland area during the last 5 years

The ages of the women at the time of the interviews ranged from early forties to early sixties (see Table 1). Redundancies occurred 2 months to 5 years prior to the interviews.

Eight of the 12 participants were volunteers who responded to advertisements in local newspapers (See Appendix H), and 4 were gained through personal contacts. I had previously worked with 2 of the women as their manager, and 1 woman had been my client for career counselling. I was introduced to the fourth woman by a mutual friend who knew I was looking for participants.

Recruitment of women for this study was more difficult than had been anticipated as there were no participant responses from 'advertisements' left in the reception area at Career Services *rapuara* in Takapuna or the reception area at the Work and Income office in Takapuna (see Appendix I). The managers of these organisations granted permission for the 'advertisements' to be left in the reception areas. Once I realised that I was not finding participants this way, I approached a North Shore newspaper company to find out how much it would cost to place the 'advertisement' in local newspapers such as The North Shore Times and The North Harbour News. One of the journalists became quite interested in the topic and wrote two brief articles on the proposed research without any charge. These articles were printed in the local newspapers (see Appendix H).

At the time of their redundancy, 8 of the women were divorced or separated, 3 were married, 1 was a widow and 1 lived in a de facto relationship (See Table 1). The marital status of the women at the time of the interviews was the same as at the time of their redundancies.

The majority of the women were sole income earners, living alone and paying a mortgage, therefore the money they earned from working was extremely important to them.

**Table 1.**

**Characteristics of Women at Time of Interviews**

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>n=12</u>
<b>Age (years)</b>	
40 – 45	2
45 – 50	1
50 – 55	6
55 – 60	1
60 – 65	2
<b><u>Marital Status</u></b>	<b><u>n=12</u></b>
Married	3
Divorced or Separated	7
Widow	1
De Facto	1

All of the women had children, the majority of which had grown up and left the family home. Only 2 participants had school age children living at home.

All participants have been given pseudonyms. The following is a brief introduction to the 12 women.

**Anna** is a 52 year old divorced women who was working as a full-time secretary when she was made redundant 2 years ago. This was Anna's first redundancy and she was the only person in the company who lost their job. After spending 3 months doing temporary work while job-seeking, she was finally offered a permanent though less well paid clerical position. She described feeling a "huge relief" to be employed again.

**Carol** is a 61 year old married woman who was made redundant 18 months ago. She was employed by the same company as a receptionist for 14 years and had felt happy and competent in that role. About 100 people were made redundant at the same time as Carol,

and being the receptionist she was one of the last to leave. After 9 months of applying for clerical jobs and not being offered a position, Carol's confidence had diminished to the point where she gave up. She now works as a home aid (mainly cleaning work) and describes this as being a big step-down from her previous job.

**Claire** is a 61 year old widow who was working full time as an office administrator when she was made redundant 4 years ago. Once unemployed, Claire soon lost her confidence. She applied for advertised positions, but was not offered any interviews. After 12 months of unemployment, Claire gave up trying to find clerical work and found work as a home-aid.

**Diana** worked as an executive PA (Personal Assistant) in India before emigrating to New Zealand. She was married with two children aged 12 and 5 years old when she was made redundant from her job as a receptionist in an Auckland company. From the time she knew she was to be made redundant, Diana spent 5 months job-seeking before finding a suitable position. Diana is in her early forties and is the only participant with a tertiary education (a Bachelor of Commerce degree).

**Eve** is a divorced woman in her early fifties who had worked for 15 years for the same company in a senior clerical role when she was made redundant last year. Eve was shocked when she found how difficult it was trying to find another job. After 5 months of applying for jobs, she was offered a permanent position. The new position pays much less than her previous job and although of a clerical nature, it is not the type of work she enjoys.

**Fiona** had worked as a receptionist for 3 years in the same company when she was told that she was being made redundant. Fiona is a divorced woman in her mid-fifties and spent nine months unemployed, looking for new work, before being offered a job. Six weeks after starting her new job, she was made redundant again. Through "word of mouth" she heard of a job vacancy at the company from which she was first made redundant and was accepted for that position.

**Helen** experienced her second redundancy 3 years ago while working as a secretary. She is divorced and aged 58. After spending 11 months applying for jobs, she was offered and accepted a position which involved a significant drop in pay compared with her previous job.

**Jessie** is a divorced woman in her mid-fifties who experienced her fourth redundancy last year. From the time she knew of the redundancy, she spent 4 months applying for jobs before being offered a clerical position with less pay and less responsibility.

**Jill** is a married woman in her late forties who had been working for 5 years with the same company as a PA (personal assistant) when she was made redundant last year. As soon as she heard of the redundancy she started applying for jobs. After 3 months of job-seeking, the sister company of Jill's previous company offered her a job which she gladly accepted.

**Linda** had worked in the same company for 14 years when she was made redundant from her receptionist/clerical position. She is in her early fifties and lives in a de facto relationship. The redundancy occurred over 2 years ago and Linda spent 3 months applying for jobs before finding a new position.

**Maggie** is a solo mother in her early forties. She is separated from her husband and has two children aged six and seven. She had been in her receptionist job for 10 months when she was told she was being made redundant. After spending 3 months looking for reception/clerical work without success, Maggie gave up and accepted work as a home aid.

**Marianne** is a 54 year old divorced woman. Last year she was made redundant from her job as an office administrator. This was her first redundancy and she was the only person made redundant by the company. At the time of our interview Marianne had spent 10 months applying for clerical jobs without success and was thinking about giving up trying to find a clerical job and doing home-care work instead.

At the time of the interviews, 10 of the 12 women described themselves as being worse off financially since they were made redundant. The following table shows the work from which they were made redundant and their new work at the time of the interviews (see Table 2).

Table 2.

**Types of Work Before and After Redundancies**

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Previous Work</u>	<u>New Work</u>
Anna	Secretary (PA)	Secretary
Carol	Receptionist	Home Care Provider
Claire	Office Administrator	Home Care Provider
Diana	Receptionist	Clerical/Warehouse
Eve	Senior Clerical Worker	Assistant Clerical Role
Fiona	Receptionist	Call Centre Worker
Helen	Secretary (PA)	Office Administrator
Jessie	Clerical Worker	Clerical Worker
Jill	Secretary (PA)	Secretary (PA)
Linda	Receptionist	Receptionist
Maggie	Receptionist	Home Care Provider
Marianne	Office Administrator	Still Unemployed

**The Consultants**

Five recruitment consultants (1 male and 4 females) were also interviewed for this study. All had experience in recruiting clerical workers for employers. The recruitment agencies were based in the Auckland area, and all but 1 of the consultants were currently working in recruiting. This participant had worked for over 12 years as a recruitment consultant but had recently become a human resources manager for a manufacturing company. All participants were initially approached by me. Four were found through personal contacts and 1 from the Yellow Pages.

As with the women participants, the consultants have been given pseudonyms. The following is a brief introduction to the recruitment consultants and agencies.

**Paul** is the owner of a large up-market Auckland recruitment agency, and also works there as a senior consultant. He is aged in his mid-forties. Most of the other staff at this agency are women aged in their twenties and thirties. The female receptionist appeared very young and most of the clients coming in were young Asian women.

**Janet** works as a recruitment consultant in a central city agency in Auckland. Janet was 29 at the time of the interview. She was dressed in stylish corporate clothes and again the female receptionist appeared very young.



**Rachel** worked for 12 years as a recruitment consultant in the Auckland area but is now employed as a human resource manager where recruitment and selection for a company is part of her job. Rachel is a 33 year old glamorous woman.

**Annette** works for one of New Zealand's largest recruitment agencies. Annette is in her early-thirties and has worked in the recruitment industry for several years. As with Paul's agency, the staff (about 30 people) were aged mainly in their twenties and thirties. Once again, the receptionist appeared to be very young.

**Cara** is a smartly dressed attractive woman in her late twenties. She is a recruitment consultant with a fairly new agency but has worked in the recruitment industry for several years.

## **PROCEDURE**

All respondents were provided with an Information Sheet (see Appendix F for the women and Appendix G for the consultants) detailing the participants' rights and the requirements of the research. An interview time and place was then arranged over the telephone with each participant. Each participant was invited to telephone myself or my supervisor if they required any further information.

Prior to each interview, all participants were asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix E). Before each interview, I outlined the purpose of my research, discussed the printed information, and invited questions. I reminded them of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time and to have the tape recorder turned off at any stage. While setting up the recording equipment I attempted to establish rapport and set the participant at ease before starting the interview.

### **The Women**

Eight of the interviews took place in the participants' homes. Two preferred to visit me in my Takapuna office, and 2 chose to be interviewed elsewhere.

A semi-structured interview ranging in duration from 45 minutes to 90 minutes was conducted with each participant. When necessary, I used a list of topics as a prompt to raise issues not already covered by participants and to help initiate further discussion. After the first three interviews, this list was expanded as new issues arose with each subsequent interview. (See Appendix C).

Near the end of each interview, all participants were asked if they had any further comments. Some participants expressed feelings of gratification that topics such as redundancy, unemployment and older women were being researched.

All audiotapes were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Pseudonyms were used throughout the transcripts to ensure anonymity of participants. It is not possible to capture all the subtleties of spoken language in a transcript, so I found it useful to listen to the tapes again after the analysis of transcripts.

### **The Consultants**

All the recruitment consultants were interviewed in their offices at work. The semi-structured interviews were shorter, averaging around 35 minutes and the list of guiding topics was different (see Appendix D) as was the information sheet (see Appendix G).

### **Summaries of Findings**

At the end of the data analysis, separate summaries of research findings were posted to each group of participants as this seemed the most appropriate and sensitive way of appraising the participants of the research findings. The women received a summary of the findings related to their interviews (see Appendix A) and the consultants received a separate summary of findings related only to their interviews (see Appendix B). All participants were invited to comment on the findings in the light of their own experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Peer approval for this study was granted by senior psychologists at Massey University, Palmerston North. Informed consent and issues of anonymity and confidentiality were handled in accord with Appendices E, F and G.

## **Sensitivity**

As redundancy is often a traumatic experience for people, a sensitive and non-threatening approach was adopted, with no pressure placed on participants to discuss issues they found distressing or uncomfortable.

Should any participant have suffered distress as a result of their participation in this study, a counselling option was made available. At the conclusion of each interview, the women participants were offered a professional card with contact details of a registered psychologist experienced in cognitive behaviour therapy. Participants understood that this would be at their own expense.

## **DATA ANALYSIS USING GROUNDED THEORY**

In grounded theory, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and continuously inform each other. The main feature of grounded theory research is “grounding concepts in data” with analysis being the interplay between researcher and the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1996).

After the first three interviews had been transcribed, I began to examine the data. A process took place which involved reducing raw data into concepts which were then collated into categories. Using line-by-line examination, open coding generated a substantial number of categories, and from these I formulated several higher level categories and concepts. Three further interviews were then carried out and the data provided by these transcripts added weight to the initial codes as well as generating a number of new codes. This in turn generated more higher level categories and concepts, and new topics were added to the semi-structured interview schedule for subsequent participants. An example of this is the concept of unemployed people undertaking temporary work. This was not on the original list of topics, but all first 3 participants mentioned it. As a result of this new topic emerging from the initial interviews, “temp work” was added to the semi-structured interview sheet as a topic to be raised with subsequent participants. This is an example of grounded theory in action.

This process continued until saturation point was reached when no more new categories were being generated from the data. Saturation point occurred when data from the 11th transcript provided no new categories. As a 12th volunteer was interested in being a participant in the study, the interview went ahead. As with the 11th participant, this final interviewee provided no new categories. At this stage I decided not to interview any more women for my study.

With the recruitment consultants, saturation point was reached by the fifth transcript so no more interviews were arranged with this particular group. As the researcher, I found interviewing the recruitment consultants to be slightly frustrating. Although I believe I came across as empathic, most seemed to remain fairly guarded as to what they divulged during the interviews. I suspect this was more to do with the topic of ageism in the workforce and the legalities surrounding this subject rather than the style of interviewing.

Using line-by-line examination, 209 raw open codes were initially generated from the 12 interviews with the women and 120 raw open codes were generated from the consultants' interviews. These were formulated into a final 82 open codes from both groups. Sixteen axial codes and four selective codes completed the grounded theory (See Appendix J).

The main characteristics of grounded theory are described below.

### **Theory is Developed from the Data**

Rather than being theory-driven, qualitative research can generate theory. The theory emerges from the data rather than the researcher commencing the study with a specific hypothesis to be tested. Grounded theory involves an inductive analysis with the researcher becoming immersed in the details of the experiences being explored. Grounded theory is not theory driven as it is the data itself that generates and forms the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In other words, the theory must emerge or be developed from the data, and not from predetermined hypotheses (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999). As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the concept of theory emerging from data is a debatable point. Many would argue that theory cannot simply "emerge", as it is a dialectical process.

## **Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis**

Each occurrence identified in the data is compared with others looking for both differences and similarities. This process should occur simultaneously throughout all stages including data collection, coding and data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The process is back and forward (cyclical) rather than linear as each new concept is compared with existing data.

## **Codes and Categories**

Coding is the process of defining what the data are all about. Codes need to be created from the data as it is studied. Line-by-line coding involves analysis of each line of the transcript, keeping notes of each raw code created, and comparing and contrasting these with others to form categories. Line-by-line coding provides leads to pursue in subsequent interviews with new participants.

In grounded theory, the coding process creates three categories known as open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The open codes are concepts, mainly descriptive in nature which are formed into axial codes. Axial codes involve linking the open codes into higher categories. These higher categories (the axial codes) are then condensed into the selective codes which make up the theory of the study (see Appendix J).

Rather than fitting data to codes and categories, grounded theory works the other way around, in that the data itself is used to create the codes and categories. The researcher does not start with preconceived categories. By applying the systematic procedure of coding and creating categories, the data controls the outcomes. The researcher allows the data to lead the research in its own direction, using the participants' own words in line-by-line coding to ensure that they stick closely to the data. Theory is built from the ground up and helps to keep any preconceived ideas of the researcher under some control, although what is "found" in the data must inevitably be influenced in part by the researcher's own perspectives.

Data analysis using grounded theory consists of three phases:

- Open coding (open sampling, generating a large number of categories from initial interviews in keeping with theoretical sampling)

- Axial coding (relational sampling, making connections between the open codes to form a number of separate categories)
- Selective coding (discriminate sampling, grouping the axial codes into logical formats linked together to construct the grounded/saturated theory)

### **Memo-writing**

Memo-writing is used to make comparisons and to organise the data as it is processed. This activity is an important part of grounded theory research and should be carried out as early as possible. It helps to make comparisons by bringing verbatim material together, aiding in the recognition of patterns and any underlying assumptions (Charmaz, 1990). Researchers can find themselves overwhelmed by the amount of raw data, and memo-writing is essential for differentiating the researcher's conjecture from actual data. It helps to clarify which categories are important and which are more minor, providing some shape for the research. For example, with the situation of the women undertaking temporary work mentioned earlier, I initially assumed that they actually preferred temporary work rather than permanent work when they became unemployed, as this seemed to be the pattern. However, by using memo-writing to make later comparisons, it appeared that the women approached recruitment agencies for permanent work, but were only offered temporary work. Although "temping" was a pattern, it was not a preference. It is important for all memos to be dated, stating where the data was from (Willig, 2001).

### **Theoretical Sampling**

Theoretical sampling means adhering to the needs of the study as it progresses. For example, during data collection and analysis, only including new participants with potential for extending the developing theory. Sampling is driven by theoretical concerns, allowing the researcher to be selective in what topics are added to the semi-structured interview sheet and what topics can be removed (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Early theoretical sampling may bring premature closure to analysis. For this reason it is recommended that the researcher gives relevant issues a chance to develop before introducing theoretical sampling to the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, cited by Charmaz, 1990).

## **Theoretical Saturation**

In grounded theory, the researcher continues to collect and analyse data until no new codes or categories are being generated. When this situation is reached, it is known as saturation point. Unlike other research methods, in grounded theory the researcher does not commence the study knowing how many participants will be required. The data itself determines how many participants are needed to reach saturation point, which indicates that the interviewing process is complete.

## **GROUNDED THEORY CODING IN THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **Open Coding**

During the initial phase of the data analysis known as open coding, the transcripts were scrutinized line-by-line and phrase-by-phrase to help identify concepts in the data. Constant comparisons were made between emerging concepts, allowing them to be discarded or connected.

As advocated by Carpenter (1995) the initial raw open codes were generated using the participants' own language. For example the redundancy process was variously described as being "handled diabolically", "poorly handled" and "confusingly handled". All these negative descriptions of how the redundancy was handled could be split into two open codes. These are Confusing/Ambiguous Notice and Insensitivity/Patronising. These two open codes come under the axial code Exacerbating Factors (factors which increased the negative responses) which is part of the selective code called The Redundancy.

### **Axial Coding**

Axial coding involves linking the open codes to form a number of separate categories. This linking occurs at a conceptual rather than at a descriptive level. Strauss & Corbin (1997) describe axial coding as "the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of the properties and dimensions" (p. 124).

Some categories emerged which, although coming under the same code, were at opposite ends of the same phenomenon. For example, when the redundancy was announced, 1 participant described her feeling as "more anxious than anything" while another said "I was

quite relieved to be leaving". These are examples of raw open codes which make up the open codes Anxiety and Relief which both come under the one axial code called Emotional Response. The open codes Anxiety and Relief can be seen as opposite ends of the larger category Emotional Response, one being a positive feeling and the other a negative feeling.

In axial coding, the goal is to systematically relate and develop categories, gradually moving the research towards the theory.

### **Selective Coding**

The main theme of the research is the "central categories", or what the research is all about (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the researcher, there were times when I found myself confused and feeling overwhelmed by the amount of raw data I was working with. With hindsight, this can be partly attributed to not organising the data early enough through the use of memo-writing. By reading the transcripts again for the "big picture" rather than for the detail, and asking myself what were the main issues that these people seemed to be grappling with, several main stages of their experience became evident. These were: the redundancy itself, being unemployed, the job search and reemployment. Each code represented the most logical grouping of the axial codes and all four concepts were linked to make the grounded theory.

A theory that is grounded in data should be "recognisable to participants, and although it might not fit every aspect of their cases, the larger concepts should apply" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.161). In this study, 3 women participants (Anna, Marianne and Carol) responded to the summary of findings sent to them. Their comments mainly confirmed the interpretation of the findings as being in line with their experiences. They also expressed feelings of reassurance in discovering that other women in the study had faced similar experiences. Carol wanted me to know that after our interview she had felt motivated to continue looking for suitable work rather than giving up the search, and that the interview itself had been therapeutic for her.



## SUMMARY

This chapter covered the aims of the study, methodology and the process of data analysis. The main aim of the study was to use grounded theory to find out how redundancy affects mature women in clerical positions. The second aim was to find out how recruitment agencies in Auckland help or hinder mature women in finding new work.

The study involved interviewing 12 mature female clerical workers who had experienced redundancy, and 5 recruitment consultants. The chapter briefly introduced each participant using a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. Grounded theory methodology using selective, axial and open coding was used in the analysis of the data provided by participants.

The following chapter provides a brief outline of the findings of the study and explains how they are organised in the thesis. Most of the chapter describes and analyses the findings involving the redundancy process itself.

# **Part Two: Findings: Description and Analysis**

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS AND THE REDUNDANCY PROCESS**

Chapter Seven is the first of four chapters which comprise the results section of this thesis. This chapter presents a brief overview of the findings and outlines the way in which they are organised in the thesis. Following this, the bulk of the chapter is committed to the first of the four main parts of the findings. Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine will present the findings produced by data from the women's interviews using the same analytic scheme. Chapter Ten discusses and analyses the interviews with the recruitment consultants.

The conceptual model used to organise the findings can be divided into four temporal segments suggested by the women participants themselves. These temporal segments are: the redundancy process itself, unemployment, the job search and reemployment. The conceptual model includes the following five parameters:

1. Emotional responses
2. Physical responses
3. Intellectual responses
4. Exacerbating factors
5. Alleviating factors.

The model is used as an organising framework for each stage of the redundancy experience. In choosing to divide the data in this way, the study is not only following the divisions suggested by the data itself and by the participants who broke their experiences into fairly clear temporal segments, but also by existing literature. The following table illustrates the analytic scheme for the stages of the redundancy experience (see Table 3).

**Table 3.****CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE REDUNDANCY EXPERIENCE**

	Chapter 7 The Redundancy Process	Chapter 8 Unemployment	Chapter 9 The Job Search	Chapter 9 Re-employment
Emotional Responses	Shock, Disbelief, Confusion, Anger, Betrayal, Rejection, Relief, Humiliation, Fear, Anxiety, Sadness	Depression, Anxiety, Fear of poverty, Loss of self esteem	Discouragement, Confusion, Diminished self-confidence	Initial relief, Insecurity, Lowered level of job satisfaction
Physical Responses	Concentration difficulties, Sleep disturbance, Somatic problems	Apathy, Fatigue	Exhaustion, Apathy	Return to normal sleeping patterns
Intellectual Responses	Anticipation of redundancy, Redundancy as a theoretical concept	Concern over lack of qualifications, Perceived stigma of redundancy	Concerns about age and physical appearance	A changed attitude to work in general
Exacerbating Factors	Confusing/Ambiguous notice, Managers' insensitive and patronising attitudes, No professional help, Delayed search for new work, Lack of support from family/friends	Financial concerns, Cutting back on general expenditure, Social isolation and boredom, Perceived lack of support	Unrealistic initial expectations, Highly competitive job market, Devaluation of long tenure, Changed interviewing process, Recruitment agencies	Different types of work, Lower standard of living
Alleviating Factors	Collective redundancy, Professional support, Redundancy payment, Emotional support from family/friends/colleagues, Farewell function /gift/speech	Support from family, Temporary work, More spare time	Temporary work	Steady income, Feeling useful and appreciated

**THE REDUNDANCY**

This part of the chapter covers the period from when the participants first found out about the redundancy to the time they actually left the company. A range of emotional reactions to

the redundancy were described by the participants including: shock; disbelief; confusion; anger; betrayal; rejection; relief; humiliation; fear; anxiety and sadness.

### 1. Emotional Responses

It is not surprising to find that all participants experienced some form of emotional response on learning they were being made redundant. For the majority of participants, the initial reaction involved feelings of **shock** and **disbelief**. The following quote from Jill is a typical example of this:

*I actually do think shock set in, I can remember spending the next few hours not quite knowing, it was like being in a car accident you know, you just... everything around you is not quite registering.*

Carol described her feelings of disbelief being similar to the initial part of the grieving process:

*It was a bit like grieving, you don't accept it at first, we didn't believe it, we thought "oh they'll keep us on, we won't go, they need us" right up until the end.*

Eve felt shocked when she learnt of her redundancy because she had been assured a few weeks earlier by her manager that all the redundancies in the company had been completed and her job was now "safe".

Seven of the 12 participants described feelings of **confusion** as they were not sure if they were being made redundant or not. Four of the women were called into meetings but their managers were reluctant to tell them directly about the redundancy. Three participants were told it was a "possible redundancy" which left them feeling very confused. Eve and Jessie were told that they could stay with the company if they could find themselves another job within the company or come up with ideas about keeping their job. Eve described her feelings of confusion:

*I was called into her office [the manager's] and virtually told that if I could come up with any ideas, I could keep my job...that it was a "possible redundancy" ... I think about it from time to time, and I still don't know what they expected me to come up with for a job.*

Jessie wasn't sure if she was supposed to be leaving the company or not:

*Initially I was supposed to leave on the Friday, but he [the manager] said unless I could find myself another job within the company, I would be without a job on Friday.*

Once the shock and confusion subsided, the majority of the participants experienced a sense of **anger**. Maggie was angry when she realised that her employers would have known about the company's closure 10 months earlier, when they offered her a job as receptionist. Most of the participants felt anger towards their companies because they believed what was happening was unfair. Helen had experienced redundancy twice and felt angry on both occasions describing it as being "just as hard" the second time.

When Jessie found out that she was losing her job, her feelings of anger centred on the thwarting of future plans:

*The thing that really pissed me off was...I had been thinking, you know, I've just paid the bloody mortgage off and I can start buying myself things, but now I can't.*

Feelings of **betrayal** and **rejection** were common. Four of the participants had worked for the same company for over 12 years and described feeling a strong sense of betrayal. Many of the women said they had exercised a good work ethic, "giving 100% to the company". Fiona describes her feelings of rejection:

*I've always pumped a lot into my job and it's a shock when you get a sense of rejection. I'd been with the company for twelve years, so I did feel rejected.*

Eve described her feelings of rejection and betrayal as being similar to having something stolen from her:

*I was handing over all these things of 15 years and I was handing them over to someone else and it felt like my job was being stolen from me.*

These findings support the literature on organisational downsizing which suggests that employees who have devoted a considerable part of their lives to a company are more likely

to feel betrayed and rejected than those who have only spent a short time in a job (Kets de Vries et al, 1997). Although most of the women described feeling betrayed and rejected, those who had been in their jobs for longer periods felt it more keenly.

Eve, Diana and Claire expressed a sense of **relief** when told that they were being made redundant. Diana knew that the company was closing down and staff numbers were dwindling each week. She described what it was like for her going into work:

*Sometimes you didn't feel like going into work because the atmosphere had so changed, it was like walking in and wondering when the axe was going to fall on your head...it was just a question of when...then it was a relief.*

Although the redundancy was a shock for Eve, she was also relieved as she had felt pressured to leave voluntarily. She believed that the company wanted to get rid of her without paying out the redundancy package as she had been there 15 years and was on a fairly good wage. Her new boss "picked" on her in an attempt to "squeeze" her out, so when she was told about her redundancy, along with many other emotions, she described feeling a sense of relief.

Claire also felt relieved when her manager suggested that she might like to consider taking redundancy. She was working with a group of women in an office at the time and one of them had been giving her "a hard time". Although she felt afraid of becoming unemployed, she described the redundancy situation as being "a relief".

Some women felt **humiliated** when they discovered they were losing their jobs. Marianne's position was being advertised in the newspaper while she was still employed by the company and without any communication with her:

*I was humiliated...they announced it at a meeting, and they read out that they were going to advertise...and one of the receptionists was taking the minutes and she came and showed me the minutes which said that the ad for the new position [Marianne's job] was going in the paper on Monday.*

Helen described feeling humiliated when her new male bosses (who had just taken over the company) replaced her with a new younger personal assistant (PA). Helen was asked to help train her replacement:

*She didn't have the skills or experience that I had, and for about three or four months afterwards, I was being rung on a regular basis as to what to do... but she was more of a dolly-bird than I was... and they were young guys and I was older than them.*

Jessie was also asked to stay on and help train the new younger woman who was taking her position in the company. Like Helen, she found this humiliating, but acquiesced to the manager's requests rather than "make a fuss".

The last two examples support research by Itzin & Phillipson (1995) who found that male managers tend to prefer younger "attractive" females for clerical positions. Making existing staff redundant in order to exchange them for younger employees is illegal in New Zealand, but while employees are prepared to leave quietly (to secure a reference from the company) then this sort of discriminatory behaviour is likely to continue. These examples also support research indicating that older workers are favoured targets of redundancy and are likely to be replaced by younger employees (Wallace, 1999). However, Helen and Jessie's experiences also highlight the fact that the new younger women were not as skilled because the older women were requested to stay on to help train them. This directly opposes the stereotype regarding older workers being less skilled than younger workers.

Initial feelings of **fear** and **anxiety** were experienced by nine of the 12 participants. The words "scared" and "frightened" to describe their feelings were commonly used. In Claire's case, she described feeling:

*Very scared, because I'd never been out of work before.*

Maggie felt "gutted" and worried about having to go back on the domestic purposes benefit because she had two young children. Her job had been "perfect" because it was local and she worked 9am to 3pm (school hours) which fitted in very well with her parenting role.

A predominant feeling experienced by the participants was **sadness**. A strong sense of loss was felt, especially by those who had been in their jobs for many years. Carol explained:

*...it was a horrible situation, because we were having farewells every week for all our friends...and by the time I came to go, I was the only one sitting there at the table, the only one in the café, I didn't want to go for breaks. It was so sad...*

Several of the women mentioned struggling to continue working without breaking down crying. Helen described her experience:

*It was very hard to remain professional and not burst into tears, and I was determined to remain professional while I worked there...I'm sure you would have found my mouth full of bite-marks.*

Overall, it is obvious that all participants experienced a variety of emotional responses to being made redundant. All the emotions described were negative apart from relief. However in this study the feelings of relief mentioned were associated with being removed from a distressing situation at work.

In keeping with the findings of other studies on this topic, the participants found being made redundant to be a distressing and confusing experience.

## **2. Physical Responses**

Some physical responses experienced during the redundancy phase were concentration difficulties, sleep disturbances and somatic problems.

Several participants described experiencing **concentration difficulties**, finding it hard to concentrate on their work knowing that their jobs would soon be coming to an end. Fiona explained:

*I couldn't think clearly, my mind was drifting, looking back on it now I realise that, I just couldn't think clearly...*

Jill described similar feelings:

*It was very difficult to stay focused. Like everything you did, you felt, "is there a purpose to this?"*

Several women experienced **sleep disturbances** and **somatic problems** such as feeling sick or some other physical discomfort such as pain. Eve recalled what it was like for her:

*I just felt sick. I wasn't sleeping, I'd be waking up every night, every hour on the hour..*



Fiona and Jill required sleeping tablets during this period. Jill had never taken sleeping tablets before in her life and explained why she needed them:

*I did end up going to the doctor and getting some sleeping tablets, because I had a bout of not being able to sleep for nights on end with worry...and I decided I better seek some help because I hadn't slept in weeks.*

Marianne felt "exhausted" from lack of sleep and realised how seriously affected she was when she fell asleep at the wheel while driving to work one morning. As well as sleeping problems, Marianne developed sore eyes due to the stress involved during the redundancy process at work:

*...towards the end, I was ill. I had problems with my eyes, I was having sharp pains in my eyes and it was a form of neuralgia brought on by stress, that's what the specialist said.*

It is well known that the symptoms mentioned such as sleep disturbance, somatic complaints and lack of concentration are often related to emotional problems such as anxiety and depression.

### **3. Intellectual Responses**

Intellectual responses experienced by the women during the redundancy phase included an anticipation of the redundancy and viewing redundancy as a theoretical concept.

For most of the participants, there was plenty of evidence that the company was not prospering or they had heard rumours about takeovers or mergers. Their **anticipation of the redundancy** was commonly mentioned. Eight of the women suspected that there was a possibility of redundancy occurring in their companies. Linda knew that many of her company's branches were being closed down, but was still surprised when her branch became a target:

*We were aware that redundancies would be happening throughout the country, but our manager had been working so well with us and keeping our budgets so tight and everything was going so well, we were still surprised when it happened.*

Helen knew 6 months in advance that her company was in the process of being taken over by another company as she had dealt with all the related correspondence. In spite of having this knowledge, she still felt angry when her own job was lost. Claire described her feelings of anticipation:

*In my particular area there were redundancies going on around the place, there was restructuring all the time...I could see that I was going to be made redundant, I could see the writing on the wall...*

To try to understand or make sense of the situation, some women attempted to rationalise redundancy as being an inevitable part of modern life. Claire rationalised redundancy by discussing it as a **theoretical concept**:

*I think the way companies change, people are likely to be restructured or moved on...the company I worked for is a completely different company to what it was twenty years ago.*

Helen recognised that redundancy was a useful way of forcing people to change jobs, although she did not approve of how often it was occurring:

*I don't like the way redundancy is now becoming a commonplace thing, but I recognise that it's good for people to change jobs.*

Despite the fact that the majority of participants had anticipated redundancy, these people still experienced a range of negative emotions when it finally occurred.

#### **4. Exacerbating Factors**

The emotions experienced by the participants were found to be heightened by four situations during the redundancy phase. These were:

- Confusing/ambiguous redundancy notification
- Insensitive/patronising attitudes from managers
- No professional help
- Search for new work was delayed.

As mentioned previously, many of the women felt confused and were not sure if they were being made redundant or not. **Confusing or ambiguous notice** was caused by the

managers not making the situation clear. Some managers could not even bring themselves to use the word “redundancy”, perhaps for fear of upsetting the employee or being wary of any legal ramifications. This type of ambiguity was not helpful as it left the employee feeling confused and more anxious.

Five of the participants described not realising that they were being made redundant. For example Anna was in the middle of a performance appraisal with her manager when he implied that she was being made redundant:

*I think it was one of the most shocking parts, the way it occurred. The thing was that the person who I worked for as PA was conducting my performance review and wanted to discuss matters which he saw as coming up in the company and I just became more and more alarmed as I sat there, and he never said the word “redundancy” ...*

Fiona described a similar experience:

*There was a meeting where I think my function within the company was discussed...and possible changes, but he didn't indicate that I was losing my position...it was very uncertain, the entire thing.*

When Jessie was handed a letter to read regarding the future of the company, she was pleased, thinking her new boss was keeping her involved and seeking her opinions. However, she was later informed by the managing director that the letter was actually her redundancy notice.

Failure to provide clear information regarding a redundancy announcement can make the situation worse for the employee. Confusion and anxiety are likely to be heightened when a person is not sure whether they are losing their job or not. In these situations some of the women avoided asking for clarification for fear of appearing stupid, especially as they were already feeling insecure. In Jessie's case, she was completely oblivious to the fact that she was being made redundant and felt “silly” when the content of her letter was explained. These findings are in keeping with studies by Kets de Vries et al, (1997) who reported that ambiguity regarding redundancy notice can exacerbate the situation for the employee.

Seven participants felt that their managers had displayed **insensitivity**. There are several examples of this. Carol was upset when the new people who were taking over the office began moving in their equipment while Carol and a co-worker were still working their notice as receptionists:

*These people had come into our office and taken over. They were decorating our office for Christmas, and we hadn't gone.*

Helen had always organised farewell presents for everybody in the company, but when her time came to leave, nobody thought of organising a gift for her, as it had always been left to Helen look after that type of thing. She found this upsetting as it resulted in her leaving the company without any farewell gift after working there for over 8 years. Helen recalled another example of insensitivity before she left the company:

*They had me preparing employment contracts for everybody and I thought, here I am going out the door and they've got me typing out employment contracts for everybody else...it was tactless, really soul-destroying.*

Maggie's company organised a farewell function for the people being made redundant at a time when they were not able to attend because of certain work commitments. Maggie pointed out:

*They'd put a function on for people knowing we couldn't go to it.*

In an attempt to be helpful, Jessie's manager only made things worse for Jessie by his **patronising** behaviour:

*He just went around telling everybody I'd lost my job and saying "Oh be nice to [Jessie] because she's just lost her job" you know.*

It appears from participants' accounts of insensitivity that many of the managers were lacking in respect for the women. These examples add weight to the "double jeopardy" as older women in semi-skilled jobs have been found to be among the most unfairly treated of all social categories (Onyx, 1998; Matthews, 1999).

The third exacerbating factor was **not being offered any professional help**. Professional help can be practical such as legal or career advice, or counselling for emotional difficulties. Eight participants were not offered any sort of help by their employers. Looking back on

their experiences Jill and Fiona both thought they could have benefited from being given counselling. As already mentioned Jill had suffered weeks of disturbed sleep due to worry before she approached her GP for medication. With hindsight she wondered if having counselling at the earlier stages of her redundancy notice would have helped. When asked what advice she would give to others in a similar situation, Jill advised people to seek counselling even if it was not offered by the company.

Fiona expressed similar thoughts:

*I was just frightened. I was in a permanent frightened sort of state, it was dreadful. I really probably should have had counselling, when I think of it now.*

The final exacerbating factor was a **delayed job search**. Seven of the participants did not look for new jobs while they were working out their redundancy notice. This was mainly caused by three factors. These were: being encouraged to stay to the last day in order to receive any redundancy pay-out; being too busy training others before they left and feeling confident that they could simply “walk into another job” when the time came.

Carol describes the situation which made it difficult for her to start applying for other jobs, even though she knew that the company was closing down:

*You were allowed to get another job only after a certain date, and we couldn't really get another job until we were given this letter of redundancy... and we weren't given it until everybody else was gone.*

Maggie, Claire and Helen were told that they would miss out on any payout if they left before the last day of their notice. This made it difficult for them to look for new work until after they had left the company. Eve was too busy training the remaining staff who were taking over her work to contemplate looking for a new job during her notice period. She also felt confident that she would be able to find new work without too much difficulty once she had left. Unfortunately, almost all of the women experienced difficulties trying to find new work.

These findings support those of Martin & Wallace (1984) suggesting that people who seek new work as soon as possible are often more successful than those who delay this action. At the end of the interviews with the women, I asked them what advice they had for

others in a similar situation. Most of them would advise people to look for a new job as soon as the redundancy is announced. They thought it better to go for interviews while still employed and feeling some level of confidence. The women's comments also add weight to previous research findings indicating that employers tend to be more wary of hiring unemployed job applicants compared to those already employed ( Burchell, 1994; Atkinson et al, 2000).

## 5. Alleviating Factors

The study found five alleviating factors which helped to reduce the women's negative feelings during the redundancy phase. These were:

- Being part of a collective redundancy
- Professional support
- Redundancy pay-out
- Emotional support from family, friends or colleagues
- Leaving rituals such as a farewell function, gift or speech

Nine of the participants experienced being **part of a collective redundancy**. For Linda, all of the ten people working in the company, including her manager were told about the redundancy at the same time:

*... we were all together... being made redundant all together did help, for sure.*

Although Linda still felt sad and anxious about losing her job, she acknowledged that sharing the trauma of redundancy along with her fellow-workers was helpful. Diana felt much the same as she pointed out:

*It definitely helped that everybody else was made redundant and it wasn't just me. We were all in the same boat.*

Carol described the redundancy announcement as being handled with respect and dignity for the hundred workers involved. It was interesting to note that throughout the interview with Carol, she referred to "we" and "us" when recalling the redundancy period rather than "I" or "me" indicating a sense of a shared experience rather than an isolating experience.

These findings are in accord with the research by Miller & Hoppe (1994) suggesting that it is psychologically healthier to be made redundant along with others than to be singled out.

The 3 women who were the only employees in their companies being made redundant felt it was an isolating and humiliating experience for them.

The second alleviating factor identified in this study was **professional support** being offered by the company to the person losing their job. Only 4 of the 12 women were offered any form of professional support. Anna was able to see a career counsellor who helped her with a CV and interview techniques. Carol was offered counselling, but rejected the offer. Linda attended a full day career counselling workshop which she described as being “wonderful”. She pointed out:

*They gave us a course, which gave us a lot more confidence. It was definitely a very positive thing.*

Helen was also offered career counselling by a large Auckland company. She described it as providing “invaluable” practical help with interviews:

*...they concentrated on many things, on how to write your CV, and how to be at interviews, and they would set up mock interviews so we could then look back at what we did and didn't do, and that was invaluable.*

Offering an employee some professional help shows that the company cares about what happens to them when they leave. The above examples agree with the findings of Kets de Vries et al (1997) indicating that an offer of professional help from the company is a helpful gesture, both practically and psychologically.

The third helpful factor was being given **redundancy pay**. This helped alleviate initial financial concerns. Carol had worked for the same company for fourteen years and was entitled to a good redundancy pay-out:

*We got six weeks, plus six weeks for every year. So it was quite good in a way, it was really good for me for fourteen years, so financially they were pretty good to us.*

Although Eve was told by her lawyer (somebody she had organised for herself when she was told about her redundancy) that she had a good case to take the company to court, she preferred to leave quietly:

*What they were offering for redundancy was fair. It was fair, I must admit*

*that...but I was so glad to be out of there, I never bothered [taking the company to court], I thought, it's only money, and they'd paid me well. I also had my superannuation which brought my mortgage down to a manageable figure.*

Without the superannuation and redundancy settlement, Eve said she would have had to sell her home because of the large mortgage repayments.

Support from others was identified as being the fourth helpful factor. For 4 of the participants, the **emotional support of family, friends or colleagues** was found to be very helpful during the redundancy period. Jill and Helen experienced being emotionally supported by the people at work, while Linda felt supported by her daughter:

*My daughter was very supportive. She said "now it's your chance mum, to do something 'special', she tried to give me a lot of confidence and it was very reassuring.*

Eve also found emotional support from her family during this time:

*They were glad I was getting out of there, because they were the ones who had to come round and pick me up when it was very stressful, and hold me together.*

However, a few of the women mentioned feeling isolated at this time. Some presented a "brave face" so that their families and friends did not realise the emotional trauma they were experiencing while working their redundancy notice. As the literature suggests, emotional support is beneficial (Warr, 1987) and with hindsight, some of the women regretted not "reaching out" to others earlier.

The final alleviating factor was being provided with a **farewell function, gift or speech** by the company. Four people mentioned the farewell function as being helpful, however Marianne said that she found it "hypocritical", especially listening to farewell speeches given by the very people who had advertised her job in a newspaper without any communication with her. Marianne stated that she would "rather have had nothing". In contrast Claire appreciated her manager's speech:

*My manager gave a speech, and that was very nice.*



When Helen left, she herself gave a farewell speech which allowed her to let the new owners know how much company knowledge she would be taking with her when she left:

*I did give a speech...I had a lot of knowledge about the company,  
I'd been there eight and a half years, and I had a lot of knowledge, and a lot  
of people had no idea about it.*

Leaving rituals for somebody being forced to leave their job may seem hypocritical, but for a few participants a farewell speech or gift was some acknowledgement of their time spent in the company as well as formalising their departure.

### SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of how the findings of this thesis are organised. It mainly covered the redundancy period, looking at the emotional, physical and intellectual responses of the participants when they learned that they were losing their jobs. A variety of emotions, mostly negative, were experienced by all of the participants, even those who had anticipated losing their jobs. Some tried to intellectualise the situation by trying to understand why redundancy occurs. Physical symptoms such as sleep disturbance and somatic complaints were experienced by some of the women.

The chapter also examined what things were helpful for the women during this period and what things made it worse for them. With hindsight, many of the women regretted not looking for a new job as soon as they learned about their redundancy as attending interviews while still working was perceived by them as being psychologically advantageous. The following chapter looks at unemployment and how this phase of the redundancy experience affected the women participants.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### UNEMPLOYMENT

This chapter examines the women's experiences of unemployment. Using the same conceptual model of the redundancy experience as an organising framework, the women's emotional, physical and intellectual responses to unemployment are examined. Exacerbating and alleviating factors involving unemployment are also covered.

#### 1. Emotional Responses

As previously mentioned, there is a wealth of research confirming that the unemployed are more likely to suffer from loss of self-esteem, depression and anxiety than those in employment (e.g. Feather, 1990; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Vosler, 1994; Miller & Hoppe, 1994). In this study, the emotional responses to unemployment were found to be similar. Feelings of depression, anxiety, loss of self-esteem and confidence, and a fear of poverty were experienced by most of the women while unemployed. The negative impact of job loss on mental health strongly implies that work is actually conducive to mental health.

Five of the participants described feelings of **depression** with associated symptoms. After applying for jobs without success for several months, Fiona described suicidal thoughts:

*I do think it was quite a break-down in a way, when I look back. I inched out of it, but it took a long time. If you ever have to have a hell on earth, that was mine. Without being melodramatic, if I hadn't had children, I would have swallowed my sleeping pills.*

After many rejections while trying to find new clerical employment, Marianne became so depressed that she was sent to see a clinical psychologist who told her that her BDI (Beck Depression Inventory) score suggested that she was suffering from severe depression.

Gaining no pleasure from hobbies or previous interests is often a symptom of depression (Smith, 2002). Prior to the redundancy, Carol enjoyed hobbies such as swimming. But since losing her job, she lost the ability to gain pleasure from such activities. She explained:

*I don't enjoy things like I used to. I don't really enjoy the swimming like I used to. My husband acts as though there is nothing wrong, but I've got no feelings... no excitement, probably because I'm living in this state of guilt all the time, because I think I should be working.*

Carol also felt that her marriage of 40 years was "changing for the worse" since she lost her job. At the time of the interview she had given up applying for clerical jobs and was doing home-care work instead. She described her new work as "degrading".

Feelings of **anxiety** were commonly mentioned by the women. Eight participants described feeling anxious while they were unemployed and looking for new work. Maggie felt permanently "agitated" while Fiona described herself as feeling out of control at that time:

*I had no control of my life, it was a shambles, everything was going crazy...  
I became a gibbering idiot.*

Over the last few years, Jill had been diagnosed with cervical cancer, and undergone a hysterectomy and breast surgery, but she said the most anxious period of her life was when she was unemployed and unable to find new work. Her main worry was not being able to find another job.

Helen said that she felt anxious during the unemployment period, but not depressed:

*I felt anxious, but never depressed. I think that's what everyone was surprised about. I'm not someone to get depressed, but I certainly got anxious and worried and concerned.*

Feelings of anxiety often involved a **fear of poverty**. Three of the women worried that they would have to sell their homes because they could not meet mortgage repayments without a regular income. Despite being paid a redundancy settlement and receiving a lump-sum from the company superannuation scheme, Eve worried that she might have to sell her house. She had used the extra money to reduce the size of her mortgage, but finding the monthly repayments without being employed was a concern:

*I wanted to get a job quick, so I could get back to paying off the mortgage...  
I need the security of knowing I'm going to get a certain amount of dollars*

*every month, otherwise I'd be in shit-street and I'd have to sell my house.*

Jill also was fearful about having to sell her house:

*We had to start thinking about changing lifestyle. It was a very difficult time, and we even got down to the point of having to sell our house and scaling down so we had no debts. So it was a very anxious time, yeh.*

Although Jill was married, her husband was only working limited hours due to ill-health, therefore her wages had been very important. With the prospects of Jill not being able to find new work, they were forced to contemplate selling their family home because they could not meet the mortgage repayments. Jill loved her home and it was during this period that she approached her GP with severe anxiety problems. This is one of the many examples in this thesis supporting the fact that taking away a regular wage can lead to disruptions in psychological as well as financial well-being (Feather, 1990).

Ten of the participants mentioned a **loss of confidence** or **loss of self-esteem** as being one of the most negative aspects of unemployment. Claire finally gave up applying for clerical positions and like Carol, at the time of the interviews, she was doing home-care work. Claire described what it was like for her:

*You just feel that you're not good at anything you do, you know [pause], it took me a long time to get the skills I've got, I mean I've got qualifications and a lot of experience [clerical] but I do housework.*

Maggie had given up applying for clerical work as she had not even been offered an interview. Having two young children, she found it necessary to go on the Domestic Purposes Benefit:

*I feel worthless...being on the benefit, it's hard to try and help yourself ...you've got to try to find work that's not out there.*

Linda had been in the same company for 14 years and felt a lack of confidence entering the job market again. Fiona felt "devastated" when she realised how difficult it was to find a new job:

*I never considered that I couldn't get a job...never... it became a self-esteem thing...devastating!*

Before being made redundant, Carol had felt “confident and competent” in her job. However, once unemployed and realising she was not being offered jobs, she felt differently:

*I still have to fight this feeling of [pause] being not confident. It’s like I’ve had the confidence knocked out of me.*

Helen’s confidence in herself diminished as the period of unemployment continued:

*I got to the stage where I was seriously looking at how I dressed, how I presented myself, and at one stage I thought “why bother going for an interview because they’re not going to want you”.*

Some of the examples in this section show how seriously job loss had psychologically affected the women. Fiona was depressed enough to contemplate suicide and Marianne was diagnosed as being clinically depressed. Despite previous life-threatening health problems, Jill resorted to medication to reduce anxiety only when she became unemployed. Carol’s marriage was suffering because she felt guilty about not working while her husband was. These examples are in keeping with research confirming that middle-aged women without jobs are less psychologically healthy than middle-aged women who are employed (Bromberger & Matthews, 1994).

## 2. Physical Responses

The physical responses to unemployment were mainly apathy and feelings of fatigue (both associated with feelings of depression).

Marianne was still having trouble sleeping after she had left the company and was being treated for depression. For some time she felt **fatigued** and unmotivated to even look for jobs:

*I realised that I needed a rest. At that stage I felt frustrated and unmotivated...I was hardly sleeping at all.*

Linda described feeling too **apathetic** to even send out any Christmas cards during the time she was unemployed:

*I actually did not send out Christmas cards that year. I just couldn’t write to*

*people and I was just feeling [pause] lousy about everything.*

### **3. Intellectual Response**

The women's intellectual responses to being unemployed involved concerns about lack of qualifications and the perceived stigma of being made redundant.

Despite years of experience and good computer skills, 5 of the participants became concerned that they had no tertiary qualifications. However, most of the women had specific job-related certificates in MS Word and Excel rather than university degrees or diplomas.

**Lack of tertiary qualifications** caused Jill to feel "inferior" during interviews:

*I have no tertiary qualifications, but I do have 30 years of skills, which I think is important, but they [employers] don't.*

It seems that many employers are now interested in knowing if candidates have tertiary qualifications, even for receptionist and secretarial roles. Perhaps there are so many applicants now with tertiary qualifications, it has become expected as the new norm.

Eve began to question her own abilities and qualifications during her search for a new clerical position, even though she had helped to train many new clerical staff before she left her previous job:

*Every time I got knocked back I'd question myself a bit more and thought, maybe I'm not as qualified as I think I am, you know, maybe I don't know as much about these jobs as I think I do.*

Although redundancy is now a common occurrence, 5 of the participants had concerns regarding the **stigma of redundancy** in the job market. Anna described feeling apprehensive about having to admit that she had lost her job through redundancy:

*I was always fearful about it, because it was like a bad mark against me.*

Even when entire companies were closed down, the stigma of redundancy was still felt. Carol explained what it was like for her:

*I think the word redundancy is a stigma...even though it was the whole company that had closed down.*

Linda agreed with this. Her company branch had also closed down, but Linda still felt “the shame” of being made redundant.

Despite whole companies being closed down, these examples show that some women felt “ashamed” of being made redundant. The literature indicates that older workers are usually targets for redundancy (Wallace, 1999), but in Carol and Linda’s cases, their entire companies or branches were closed down and all the staff, regardless of age, lost their jobs. Both of these women described themselves as being depressed and it is possible that their thoughts about themselves became more negative due to their depressed states. The other 3 women who described redundancy as being shameful were singled out for redundancy, which is likely to have made the situation worse for them.

#### **4. Exacerbating Factors**

There were many factors that intensified the negative emotions during the unemployment phase. These were found to be:

- Financial constraints such as cutting back on general expenditure and cancellation of holiday plans
- A more limited social life resulting in social isolation and boredom.
- Perceived lack of support

Although there were 3 married women in the study, none of their husbands were in financially secure situations. For example, Carol’s husband only had a temporary job that could be terminated at any time. Jill’s husband was working limited hours due to ill-health, and Diana’s husband was not earning enough money in his job to cover their basic living expenses. Linda was living in a de facto relationship but described her situation as “living together but financially separate” so that when she lost her job, she was struggling to pay the mortgage on her own as her partner did not help out.

All the other women in the study were divorced, separated or widowed and were sole income earners when they lost their jobs. Thus none of the women were in a financially secure situation when they were made redundant, making the financial impact one of the most distressing aspects of the redundancy for them.

Once unemployed, most of the participants said that they had to make a conscious effort to cut back on **general expenditure** that was not absolutely necessary. Although some women received a good redundancy settlement, most had not been in their jobs long enough to be entitled to a substantial sum of money. Regardless of redundancy settlements, the majority of the women exercised caution and restraint in their spending. Carol found that she was not able to spend money on any new clothes for herself:

*I just don't buy. I'm still wearing the same clothes I had when I was at work.  
So I'm a lot more careful now.*

Not having enough money to cover necessities left Maggie feeling stressed:

*I don't think I'm coping very well. I feel agitated, which is to do with the financial worry. When you go from having a small surplus every week to having less than your weekly commitments, money tends to become a focus.*

Maggie had to cancel the planned Christmas holiday with her children as she could no longer afford it. Carol and her husband used to get excited about their **holiday plans**, but since Carol lost her job, neither have been on any holidays. Most of the women did not take a holiday while they were unemployed as any spending was on the basic necessities of living.

Like many of the women, Fiona went took on temporary work to try to make ends meet financially:

*I just did temp work for a while so my small savings were used up. Fear seemed to be the over-riding thing the whole time, I'm not very brave regards finances at all. I simply didn't go out or buy anything for myself.*

Fiona even gave up smoking as she could no longer afford to buy cigarettes, and describes this as being the one positive thing for her that came out of the whole unemployment situation. Marianne described feeling "paranoid about money" and was developing "empathy" with poor people.

The findings of this study agree with previous research (e.g. Feather, 1990; Whelan, 1992; Fryer, 1995) showing that financial stress is positively related to psychological distress. This highlights the importance of money for unemployed people. From interviewing



the women and listening to their stories, it seems that the social impact of unemployment was mainly the result of the financial constraints imposed by being unemployed. Psychological issues contributed to the social limitations because some participants no longer wanted to go out because of a reduction in self-confidence.

Fiona's case describes how the psychological effect of having less confidence resulted in a **limited social life**:

*I have a passion for architecture and homes and I wanted to see this particular open home, and so my daughter drove me...and I got there, and I just couldn't get out [of the car] because there were so many people going in. I was quite antisocial for a while...I just didn't have any confidence in myself.*

Helen described her social life being "non-existent" because she could not financially afford to go out socialising. In Eve's case, she spent most of the day sitting at home waiting for calls regarding job applications:

*I didn't have a lifestyle because my life revolved around reading the paper, applying for jobs, sitting around...you just don't go out because someone might ring for an interview. I really felt quite housebound.*

**Social isolation and boredom** were mentioned by most of the participants, especially when it came to missing their work colleagues. Maggie stated:

*I miss the daily contact with people. I miss the money of course, and it's a status or identity thing. If you've got a job, even if it's only part-time, at least you feel you're contributing.*

It is interesting to note that Maggie did not recognise her current home-care position as "contributing" or having any status. Like Carol (who was also a receptionist before being made redundant and now works in home-care), Maggie views herself as still being unemployed.

Eve missed the routine and social contact provided by employment:

*I really missed work. I missed that getting up and having something to do every day, and I missed the social interaction with people.*

Carol felt embarrassed about being unemployed. She told her friends that she really did not want to go back to work rather than tell them that she was not able to get a job. But the truth was that she missed working very much:

*As far as everybody is concerned, I don't really want a job. The reality is I would love a job. I would love to have structure, I would love to go out and be in the workforce, feel important and meet people. I miss the self-worth, the team spirit.... but more than anything, I miss the people.*

As mentioned previously, Carol was employed as a home-care provider at the time of our interview and it was obvious she didn't see this as "work". Carol's friends did not know how difficult it was for her when she was faced with the possibility that she may not be able to find a new clerical position. Carol described feeling a **lack of support from family and friends**. Her friends assured her she would have no problems finding another job, especially given her skills and experience. Rather than being supportive, these well-meaning remarks only made things worse, prompting her to maintain the pretence that she did not actually want a job. Carol's husband also seemed oblivious to his wife's unhappy state, as she described him as not being interested in her anymore and "uncaring".

Fiona kept her feelings to herself during this period. She recalled:

*I would say that the world didn't know how bad I was feeling, nobody knew except my daughter, I don't know if that's a good thing though, nobody would have had a clue, not my family [pause] not even friends.*

Jessie also felt unsupported by friends and family at this time:

*My friends were [pause] I can't say they were really concerned, you know... and no family support.*

Five participants described a **lack of support from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)** and contact with this organisation was mostly described as being a negative experience. Most of the participants had no prior association with WINZ as they had mostly been employed. Eve was angry and frustrated as she felt it was unfair that she had paid tax since the age of 15 but when her turn came to be helped, there was nothing for her. She described her contact with WINZ:

*I even went and enrolled with Work and Income because I'd got to the point*

*where I thought I was never going to get another job. It was awful, it was a horrible thing.*

Fiona also described approaching WINZ as a negative experience, mainly because she had never been there and did not know the procedures involved such as standing in the right queues for an appointment to see a case manager:

*I had to go and register as unemployed...it was so demoralising, so incredibly demoralising.*

## **5. Alleviating Factors**

Compared to the exacerbating factors involved in unemployment, there were fewer alleviating factors mentioned. These were:

- Support from family
- Having more spare time
- Temporary work

Several women expressed gratitude for the emotional **support** provided by their **families** during the unemployment period. Marianne's family offered to help her out financially if needed, as well as providing emotional support. Anna was surprised at how helpful her family members were during this difficult phase:

*My family were very supportive, much more supportive than I could ever have imagined.*

Many of the women found their daughters to be especially caring during the unemployment period. Eve's statement was fairly typical describing how she managed to cope emotionally during the 5 months of unemployment:

*My daughter was wonderful. The family support! And my grand-daughter, my little four year old grand-daughter, she kept me sane.*

A few women mentioned making use of the unexpected **free time** that was a result of losing their jobs. When Maggie was asked if there was anything positive that came out of being unemployed, she replied:

*Yes. I've got more time to study, to finish my Psychology Diploma.*

Eve found going for early morning walks was a good way of relieving her feelings of stress while she was unemployed:

*I went for my walks, exercise is a great stress reliever.*

Seven of the women mentioned that they did **temporary work** during their unemployment period. This type of work was commonly used as a stopgap measure while attempting to find a permanent job. A temporary job could cover the one full time position in the same company for weeks, or it could be a few hours in several different companies over the course of one day. Temporary work is mostly organised and offered through recruitment agencies. Jessie had been made redundant four times in the past and always went took on temporary work in between permanent jobs. She explained why she did this:

*I need money to live, and the only way I can get that is to go out and temp.*

Many participants approached recruitment agencies for a permanent job rather than temporary work, but were nevertheless grateful to be offered the temporary positions. In Anna's case, she felt so disillusioned by her previous employer's treatment of her during the redundancy process, she only wanted temporary work for the first few weeks of being unemployed:

*I would have continued temping but the pay wasn't good. But it was something I'd never done before, and I had this huge feeling of not wanting to commit myself to another employer. Temping was a solution to this.*

Eve was not offered temporary work from recruitment agencies but a friend's mother offered her some casual work making sheets and pillow-cases which alleviated her worrying financial situation slightly.

Some of the findings in this chapter are in keeping with Jahoda's model in that work was experienced by the women as a social institution, providing social contact, structure for the day and a social identity. For example, Carol wanted to "feel important" again and missed the status she had enjoyed as a receptionist. But Maggie and Carol did not recognise many advantages in being employed in their home-care jobs. This is more in keeping with Warr's vitamin model in that the type of work environment and how it is experienced by the employee is crucial to emotional well-being rather than simply being employed.

## SUMMARY

This chapter examined the financial, psychological and social impacts of being unemployed. These findings were organised in the same framework as the previous chapter, using the conceptual model of the redundancy experience. Most of the women described the period of unemployment that followed redundancy as a negative experience, in spite of any redundancy payments. A loss of confidence seemed to be the dominant factor as this was the most frequently used phrase when describing the emotional effects of being unemployed.

The next chapter examines how the participants went about their job search and the factors associated with the search for new employment. It also covers reemployment, looking at the women's new jobs and conditions, and how their lives have changed since being made redundant.

## CHAPTER NINE

### JOB SEARCH AND REEMPLOYMENT

This chapter examines several issues involved with the women's search for new work. As almost all of the women had found new jobs at the time of the interviews, the chapter also looks at the types of jobs the women were able to find and their feelings about their new work. It also examines their attitudes towards work in general and how they may have changed since their redundancy experience. The same conceptual model is used to organise the findings.

#### 1. Emotional Response

During the job search phase, many women expressed feelings of discouragement, lowered self-confidence and a sense of confusion. Reemployment in new permanent work brought initial relief but some women also experienced lower job satisfaction and continued feelings of insecurity.

Seven of the participants spent more than 5 months searching for new clerical work. The large number of rejection letters received back from job applications was evidence of the difficulty of gaining employment. The women found this to be very **discouraging**. Eve explained what it was like for her after spending over 5 months applying for about 50 jobs with no job offer:

*I felt really discouraged, and again that's when my family kept me up. I could easily have sunk..*

Anna felt very discouraged about the number of rejections she was receiving back from job applications. She described her search for work as being like "a daily battle":

*...Lots and lots of feelings of discouragement. It was like a daily battle because you've been thrust into unemployment, you haven't chosen to be doing this. It was like a kick in the guts.*

Marianne also expressed feeling discouraged when she only received rejections, without even the offer of an interview:

*I feel discouraged when I've had periods of applying for jobs and got the job letters back and I haven't even got an interview. Just rejections.*

Fiona took "quite a pile" of application rejections to Work and Income to prove that she had been making a real effort to find new work. It took Fiona 9 months of being continually rejected, applying for about 45 positions without success before she was finally given a job offer. In Helen's case, after 11 months of applying for about 40 positions with no job offer, she found it increasingly difficult to appear positive during interviews.

In view of the psychological and financial difficulties these 3 women (Helen, Fiona and Eve) endured, it is a credit to their determination that they persevered until they were finally offered new jobs. For the other 3 women who had "given up" their search for new clerical work and had become home-care providers instead, the continuous rejections were more than they could tolerate. After applying for "loads" of clerical jobs over a 9 month period resulting in no job offers, Carol became so discouraged, she gave up. Claire and Maggie also gave up on their search for new clerical work.

Shortly after posting the summary of findings to the participants, I received a telephone call from Marianne. She said that it had now been 12 months since she was made redundant and had still not been offered a permanent clerical position. Although still searching, she was beginning to think about giving up and taking home-care work instead. She described herself as feeling "useless".

Many women commenced their job search feeling confident, but as the months passed and the rejection letters accumulated, they experienced a gradual **diminishing of confidence** in themselves. Eight of the participants believed that their loss of confidence was a contributing factor in explaining why they were not being offered jobs. Fiona described what it was like for her at job interviews:

*I became fear-based, even though I smiled and thought I said the right things, they [the interviewers] possibly sensed my uncertainty and insecurity, maybe what I was inwardly feeling was coming through much more than I thought it was, and was probably working against me.*

Carol's positive approach to job-hunting dwindled until her level of confidence became a problem which she believed was working against her performance at interviews:

*By the time so many months had gone by and I'd been to so many interviews, my confidence was going further and further down. And it's as though everybody thinks, because of your age, you're not up with the play, up with computer skills and all that. This negativity comes through to you from these people and then you start feeling negative about yourself, you start thinking, that's the way I am [pause], I lost my confidence in lots of ways, not just for jobs.*

These comments add weight to the research already mentioned by Farr & Ringseis (2002) in that seeing oneself as 'old' can affect self-identity and self-esteem because of age-related stereotypes.

A feeling of **confusion** was also mentioned by several of the women regarding their job search. Fiona could not understand what employers were actually wanting and why she was not being offered jobs:

*I don't consider myself unintelligent, but in the end, I didn't have a clue. I was so confused. I thought I had qualifications for every job I applied for, and it was always in the area I'd worked and worked well in, and where I had a lot of knowledge, and I was very confused, and I just got more confused.*

It was not surprising that many of the women expressed a feeling of **relief** when finally offered a permanent position. However, for many women reemployment also brought a sense of **lower levels of job satisfaction**. When comparing the level of job satisfaction between the participants' new and previous jobs, 9 described feeling less happy in their new work. Although Diana is earning more in her new job, she described feeling happier in the previous company. Helen is now earning less money in a job she dislikes. She tried applying for other jobs while working there, but without success. Helen now feels as though she has no option but to remain. She described her situation:

*About last October, I'd had enough of here, [the new job] I just had to get out, and actively began a job search again, and I got interviews, one even got back to me for a second interview, but I just didn't get the job. And I just know, well*



*I'm 99% sure that it's my age that's now letting me down, why I don't get there.  
Now it's very hard to remain motivated [pause], just a sense of despondency.*

Linda wanted to leave her new job because her employer had unreasonable expectations of his staff and she was finding the workload stressful. But she felt that she had few options but to stay:

*Because of the lack of employment in the town, I felt I had to stick with that job even though I was extremely stressed by it.*

Fiona also mentioned feeling unhappy and **insecure** in a new job she disliked because there was nowhere else to go:

*I'm quite unsettled and unhappy which is really a sad thing to say. The job has changed completely because there was a merger of companies and we have a new manager and it's just not as nice as it was. I'm still there now, but I'd like to be elsewhere, I mean it's complete insecurity... I would never put my big toe out of line for fear of not having a position again.*

Others also mentioned feelings of insecurity and uncertainty over how long their new positions would remain. Linda pointed out:

*You look at yourself and what your abilities are and realise that everything can come to an end quite suddenly. And it's a time of change and one has to be prepared for that all the time... there's no stability.*

These feelings of insecurity in older workers after being made redundant are in keeping with studies by Markson (1983) and Worsley (1996) who both found that the older worker is likely to stay in a job they are over-qualified for or do not enjoy in order to avoid the trauma of job-hunting.

## **2. Physical Responses**

Two physical responses to the job search were exhaustion and apathy. A physical response to becoming reemployed was a return to normal sleep patterns.

Anna was **exhausted** by searching for a new job and felt that employers are being unfair making older people redundant:

*I was exhausted after the whole experience of redundancy, especially at this time in my life...making a middle-aged or over fifty woman redundant is just...unfair and stupid.*

Fiona also expressed feelings of exhaustion and **apathy** while searching for new work:

*I just couldn't be bothered in the end, I was exhausted.*

Diana's new job involved physical work in a warehouse as well as working in a clerical role. This left Diana feeling more physically tired but **sleeping better**. Once Eve started work in her new job, she was sleeping better than she had for a long time. She explained:

*I'm sleeping better. I'm sleeping better now than I have in years...when I got the job, I felt relief that I was earning again, that I had a steady income.*

### 3. Intellectual Responses

Most of the women became concerned about their age and physical appearance during the job search period. This supports research indicating that aging is a more negative experience for women than it is for men, largely because of society's association of physical youthful looks with female attractiveness (Gerike, 1990). Once reemployed in a new job, some of the women experienced a change in attitude towards work in general.

Eleven out of the 12 participants felt that their **age** was a barrier in the job market. Many believed that employers wanted young attractive people for reception or secretarial positions. Carol described how she was not even aware of her age until she began applying for jobs and attending interviews:

*I was never ever aware of my age...but suddenly your age comes to the fore, and you think, oh my God it does count now, my age does count, you know, nobody wants me because I'm too old.*

Fiona began to wonder if it was her age that was stopping her from being offered a job:

*Every time I got close, and I did get short-listed, there was always somebody who was younger. Every single time a younger person got the job. I do know that, yeh, of those twenty interviews that I know about.*

When Linda found out that a local company was looking for a receptionist, she personally approached the employer to apply for the position. Linda described what it was like being told that she was not the right age for the job:

*I walked in there and the first thing he said was "I'm really looking for somebody younger than you, who can use computers". And I said "oh I can do it".*

In Linda's case, the employer assumed that because Linda was middle-aged she would not have appropriate computer skills. This example supports McGregor & Gray's 2001 study which demonstrated that New Zealand employers tend to perceive mature people as lacking in computer literacy, resulting in a preference for younger employees.

Jill missed out on a job she would have liked solely because of her age. She recalled:

*It was a very up-front job for a very high profile yachting company...but they said they were looking for someone younger. Coming to grips with being told you're too old, that's difficult because you don't always feel like that...we're just not as decorative as we used to be. And I had definitely more than enough skills for the job, but they wanted someone younger.*

From the above examples, it seems that many employers now prefer younger people to run their offices and to perform clerical work, especially for front-line positions such as receptionists. The women's comments are similar to those in Gilberto's findings (1997). In Gilberto's study 1 of the participants searching for clerical work described offices as being staffed now mainly by young people, including the interviewers.

Helen was told at one interview she attended that the manager was a young man who probably would not like her because she was too much "like his mother". Helen wondered if her **physical appearance** was a barrier and speculated on what she could have done to improve her chances:

*I could have lost 10 kilos, got high heeled shoes...just glamorise myself more.*

Claire believed that most employers are now looking for young attractive people for clerical work and that codes are used in advertisements to discourage older applicants:

*I think they're looking for people who are bouncy, get up and go people, young*

*and good-looking...you look in the paper, and I know they're not supposed to say, but you read, "young and vibrant company looking for somebody."*

Helen agreed that there were "codes" in the advertisements because it is not legal to request employees of a certain age. Some examples she had read were:

*"Fun person" and "energy"... I hate that word "energy". "Bubbly" is another.*

These findings regarding physical appearance and age are in keeping with the "double jeopardy" mentioned earlier, and support the findings of Onyx (1998) who found that women are perceived as being less competent and generally less attractive as they become middle-aged.

This last part of the Intellectual Responses section looks at the ways in which the experience of redundancy has changed the participants' attitudes towards work. Eight participants described feeling a sense of **reduced commitment** and a new **cynicism** towards work in general following their redundancy experience. Before the redundancy, almost all of the women described being fully committed to their work, putting in 100% effort. The sense of betrayal on being made redundant altered their attitudes. In Eve's new job, she made sure that she took her tea-breaks and left the office when it was her finishing time. This was the opposite of what she did in her old job. She described why she has changed her attitude towards work:

*Thinking back, I felt betrayed. I really did feel as though they had betrayed me. I had given them more than you should give a job and it got me made redundant... At the moment, I don't do any extra... whereas before I used to work through the whole day starting at 7 o'clock in the morning, I'd stay late at night, I'd go in on weekends to get the work done, and didn't get any extra for it...And now, I take my morning tea-break, take my hour for lunch, and leave at 5 o'clock on the dot.*

The above quote is an example of somebody who has experienced a violation of their "psychological contract" (Farr & Ringseis, 2000). Eve felt that she had kept her part of the psychological contract with the previous company by working hard and being committed to its success. However, according to Eve's perceptions, the company did not maintain its part

of the “contract” when it made her redundant. This resulted in Eve feeling a sense of betrayal and her new attitude is a reflection of this.

Helen also spoke of having a more casual attitude towards her new job because of how she had been treated by her previous companies:

*The two jobs I've been made redundant from, I'd given them my all, now that I'm in this job, I take it very casually and don't do anything more than I absolutely have to, which is against my own work ethics. But I feel as if you get nothing, no rewards for selling your soul.*

Diana now holds herself back emotionally from her new job because she does not want to feel upset again as she did when she was made redundant:

*I haven't allowed myself to get attached to the new job...But the other job where I was made redundant, I did get attached to that job. I had settled in so well, I would like to have remained there. I could get attached to this job in various ways, but I feel that I am holding back... I go to work, I do my best, I do a good job, and I get praise for it, but I'm not allowing myself to get attached to it.*

These comments also support the findings of Labich & Erdman (1993) showing that older workers who had felt betrayed were more likely to develop a cynical attitude in future jobs, often withdrawing emotionally from the company.

#### **4. Exacerbating Factors**

Some factors that made the job search worse for the women were:

- Unrealistic initial expectations regarding finding another job
- A highly competitive job market in Auckland
- Long tenure no longer valued in the job market
- Ways in which employment interviews had changed
- Recruitment agencies

On learning of their redundancy, the **initial expectation** of 5 of the participants was that they would have no difficulties in finding new work. This was mainly because they viewed themselves as having good up-to-date marketable computer skills, relevant experience and a stable work history. Having these expectations only helped to decrease their level of self-

confidence when they realised that finding new work was going to be far more difficult than first anticipated. Eve's comment was typical:

*I easily believed that I had all the skills, and I could just walk right into another job. Wrong!*

Helen described her initial expectations regarding finding new work:

*I felt positive that I could get a job and I was really determined because I've got an awful lot of skills.*

Carol too felt positive at first, dressing smartly for interviews. But once she realised that it was not going to be easy, she lost confidence:

*I started out very positive, going out dressed to the nines in the beautiful corporate suits and that type of thing, but then I started to go down...*

It was natural for these women to assume that they could find another job easily. But unfortunately in today's job market, having skills, experience and a stable work history does not guarantee success, as the women gradually discovered.

While applying for advertised clerical positions, 6 of the participants became concerned when they discovered it to be such a **highly competitive job market**. Claire began to see that computer skills were widely held so that just about anybody could apply for a clerical position:

*The sort of work I do is a dime a dozen, I mean, everyone's got computer skills now...*

Maggie believed she was not offered any interviews because of the large number of applicants seeking work in the Auckland area. She explained:

*In one of the jobs I applied for, I was told it was very difficult as there were over 70 applications, and that was for a part-time job. And that gives you an idea of just how many women are out there trying to find some kind of work.*

Jill was told by a prospective employer that the majority of applicants for the clerical job she had applied for were aged between 20 and 30. She described it as being “very hard competing against 20 year olds”.

Fierce competition for jobs made it very difficult for respondents to find new work. This seemed to be especially true for participants living on the North Shore. The volume of traffic into Auckland city each morning has become very heavy, making the journey across the Harbour Bridge extremely time-consuming. Advertised clerical jobs situated on the North Shore have attracted up to 300 applicants (for example a receptionist position at Rangitoto College’s Community Education Department). According to local North Shore employers that I speak to when taking People Management classes at Rangitoto College, around 70 to 100 applicants is an average figure for a clerical position.

The recruitment consultants in this study also agreed that the number of applications for clerical jobs in Auckland is very high. Rachel now works as a human resource manager in charge of recruitment and selection for a large company and she agreed that between 80 and 100 applications for the one job is “about the norm”. Cara agreed with these figures. It would appear that employers in Auckland can afford to be very selective.

Three of the women felt that **long tenure** in the same company was not valued anymore and such a work history, once evidence of stability and reliability, was now perceived as undesirable when job hunting. Eve spent 15 years employed by the same company and came to the following conclusion:

*I don't think they [employers] want people to stay that long now, I really don't. I think they do want people to move on, then they don't have to give pay rises, they can keep employing people on what they paid before.*

Fiona agreed that employers today prefer younger people because they are more likely to “move on”. She pointed out:

*Longevity in a position was once to be a loyal employee and stay in the one position, that was what we strove for...I don't think it is now. People don't tend to stay there and it isn't expected of them, and I felt in the end, that's why they [employers] went for the younger ones.*

These comments support Encel (1998) who found that company loyalty is not valued as much as it used to be.

Compared to the number of applications for advertised positions, offers of interviews were few and far between. Some of the participants failed to gain a single interview for a clerical position. Many of the women, especially those who had been in the same company for many years, described the **interview process** as having greatly changed compared to 10 or more years ago. Linda described her experience attending an interview:

*It was an hour and a half of bombardment of questions and I'm not a terribly spontaneous person, and although I can think of things afterwards, I'm one of those people who can't actually say there in front of them, say I can do things or respond in the way they might think is right, it's not easy for me.*

Jessie described interviews of 10 years ago as being far easier than they are today. If people had the right skills, a good personality and communication skills, then they would probably be offered the job. Jessie described what interviews are like now:

*Now it's just a totally different type of thing, you learn with some help from your friends, and you have to practice for your interview. It's a lot harder, whether the prospective employer gains a better person through this way they interview people is beyond me. You know, "give me an example of this, and what are your strengths and weaknesses" and so forth. You have to memorise it like a swat so that when they ask you the questions, you can sort of pop these answers out...*

Jill also wondered if today's interviewing methods are effective in finding the best person for the job:

*Well, 20 years ago they were interested in what you could do for them skill-wise, if your skills matched the job and they liked your personality, then you were pretty much guaranteed to get a job, but in this day and age, personality doesn't appear to come into it...it's what sort of tertiary education you've had...*

Perhaps the large number of applicants for clerical jobs now means that employers can afford to look beyond skills and personality, perhaps specifying a certain age-bracket, physical appearance and tertiary qualifications as requirements too.



The final exacerbating factor affecting the job search was **recruitment agencies**. Although most women felt grateful for any temporary work offered by agencies, some of the participants felt discouraged when they approached them. Mainly this was because they believed that only younger women are offered the permanent positions being advertised. This will be covered in more depth in the following chapter which looks exclusively at recruitment agencies.

Some aspects which made the reemployment situation worse involved only being offered jobs with lower pay and in many cases of a different nature to the type of work that the women were looking for. Less pay resulted in a lower standard of living and most women described themselves as being worse off than before the redundancy.

Almost all of the participants eventually found new work. This part of the study compares their new work and conditions to the work they did prior to being made redundant. Eleven of the 12 women were in new employment at the time of the interviews. The **types of work** the participants found were in clerical or in home-care. Out of the 11 women in new work, 8 found clerical positions and 3 were doing home-care as a result of giving up hope of ever finding clerical work. As already mentioned Marianne was still seeking permanent clerical work 12 months after being made redundant. She is now considering applying for home-care work instead.

Of the 6 women who had previously worked as receptionists, only Linda managed to find another receptionist position (her new employer had initially told her she was too old for the job but employed her anyway).

Many of the other women had found new clerical roles that were “a step down” from what they had previously been doing before their redundancies. Eve pointed out:

*I'm just credit control. I just answer to the credit controller. I've taken a job I don't particularly like. I have to spend most of the day ringing people up and asking them for money, which I really don't enjoy doing.*

Carol described her new work in home-care as being “degrading”:

*It's less pay, less everything. I feel [pause] in this job I've got, I'm referred to*

*as a carer, but I'm not, I'm only a cleaner. I feel degraded.*

These findings suggest that downward status moves can have a negative psychological impact, supporting existing research by West et al, 1990, (cited by Farr & Ringseis, 2000).

Most of the participants mentioned that their **standard of living** was now lower than it was before they were made redundant. This can be ascribed to the fact that of the 12 women interviewed, only 2 were earning more money in their new jobs than they were before their redundancies. Most had taken jobs with less money, less responsibility or less hours than they had in their previous jobs. Ten of the women now described themselves as being worse off financially. This was in spite of the fact that all but 1 were reemployed in permanent positions. These findings are similar to Gilberto's (1997), indicating that women who lose their jobs late in their careers have a higher risk of current and future economic insecurity. As in Gilberto's study, the women who managed to find new work had accepted jobs with less pay, fewer benefits and less job security

## **5. Alleviating Factors**

Most alleviating factors revolved around the relief of having a steady income again once reemployed. To feel useful and appreciated was another alleviating factor associated with reemployment. During the job search, the only alleviating factor was being provided with temporary work, mainly from recruitment agencies. This has already been covered in the previous chapter as an alleviating factor for unemployment and will be covered again briefly in this chapter. Temporary work will be covered in more depth in Chapter Ten.

Despite earning less money and doing work of lower status, 4 participants mentioned feeling a great sense of relief and gratitude when finally offered a new job. Having a **regular income** was important to the majority of the women. Anna described her feeling of relief at not having to be still "out there" looking for work:

*It was a relief to be working again [pause] I wouldn't want to be out there again.*

Fiona felt "enormous gratitude" when she was finally offered a job back with her old company, even though it involved working in the call-centre rather than reception. Although Fiona has not been very happy in her new job, she was grateful to be employed at all. In Claire's case, she had felt despondent and lacking in confidence after spending 12 months

trying to find a new clerical position. When she was accepted for home-care work (cleaning), she felt a renewed sense of self-worth. Although earning far less money, she felt **useful and appreciated** again:

*It makes you feel good that you can do something worthwhile. It doesn't sound worthwhile, but when somebody comes home and walks into their lovely clean home, it just feels good. It's like a boss congratulating you on doing a good job... the people I work for, they do appreciate me and I suppose that's part of it, being appreciated.*

Claire continued to utilise her computer skills by working in a volunteer role as a secretary for a local club. She enjoyed this activity because it helped her to still feel “useful”.

As well as **temporary work** being an alleviating factor for financial concerns as mentioned in the previous chapter, Helen enjoyed doing temporary work because she felt appreciated and learnt a lot of different skills. She pointed out:

*I loved temping, had it been better paid, I would have stayed with it... I could pick up a lot of computer skills, so I learnt a lot. And one of the biggest positives when you've just been made redundant is to get feedback on how wonderful you are. And you're appreciated when you're temping because you're doing something that others haven't got time to do, or don't want to do.*

There is no doubt that for some women temporary work was helpful for many different reasons. But temporary work gained through employment agencies very seldom leads to permanent work and has been linked to recurrent unemployment (Korpi & Levin, 2001). This suggests that a temporary worker's position in the labour market is potentially weak. Temporary work and recruitment agencies will be further discussed in the following chapter.

## SUMMARY

Chapter Nine covered the women's experiences of searching for new work. Some concerns involved age and physical appearance, interviews and the devaluation of long tenure in a company. This chapter also looked at the women's levels of job satisfaction and

standards of living now (at the time of the interviews) compared to their situation before they were made redundant. Ten of the 12 women described being financially worse off now in their new jobs than prior to their redundancy. Although many felt relieved to be working again, some women had developed a more cynical attitude towards work in general.

The next chapter looks at how older women candidates are viewed by recruitment consultants and how employers generally perceive older job seekers, according to the recruitment consultants. The chapter also covers how the women in the study experienced recruitment agencies in general.

## CHAPTER TEN

### RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

The majority of clerical jobs in Auckland are now filled through recruitment agencies. According to Nick Campbell of the New Zealand Herald's Marketing Department, around 80% of clerical jobs in Auckland are advertised by recruitment consultants on behalf of employers (personal communication). This places recruitment consultants in a powerful position, especially given the fierce competition for jobs in the current Auckland job market. Their participation in this study adds an important dimension to the research by helping clarify employers' attitudes towards hiring mature female clerical staff.

Seven issues involving recruitment agencies are covered in this chapter. These are:

1. Temporary work
2. How recruitment agencies are generally discouraging for mature women
3. The role confusion of recruitment consultants
4. Conflicting values of recruitment consultants
5. The negative stereotypical view of older workers
6. Emphasis on physical presentation
7. Team fit

The first two issues involve using quotes from the women participants. Issues 3 to 7 will focus on the findings from the interviews with the recruitment consultants and quotes used here will be mainly from this group.

#### **1. Temporary Work**

In spite of being grateful for the temporary work, some of the participants felt discouraged when they approached the agencies regarding permanent positions advertised in newspapers by agencies. Some women felt that they were offered temporary work only and never permanent positions. Jessie had been made redundant four times and had always taken temporary work in between permanent jobs. She did not find the agencies helpful in finding her a permanent job as she explained:

*I don't have a lot of faith in them [agencies] anymore. I would not trust an agency to get me a permanent job because they're not interested. They advertise a position and perhaps you're already registered with them, so you know, you ring up the person who ran the ad and say, "hey you've already got my CV", and they say "ah, OK, yes, we've got you on file and we'll have a look at your CV and let you know". But they don't get back to you... so since my first redundancy back in 1996, trying to find a permanent position through an agency is impossible.*

Eve expressed the same frustration with recruitment agencies as Jessie, leaving her CV with them, but never hearing back from them, even when they were advertising jobs in the newspaper that Eve felt she could easily apply for.

When Anna was made redundant she had never done temporary work before. The agency she approached offered her temporary work, but not a permanent position:

*They could find me temp work, but not a permanent position. They weren't really very helpful in that area.*

In spite of the popular belief that temporary work can often turn into permanent work, Helen never experienced this. Even when a permanent job came up in the company where she was temping, her application for it was declined. She described her experience:

*I find it disconcerting when people say temp jobs turn into permanent jobs, because that never happened in my case. The one job where I'd been there 12 weeks, and then invited back for another nine weeks, when a vacancy came up and I said "I've done a lot of temp work here, and I like this company and the people", I was told that I didn't fit the culture. The people were in their thirties. They didn't want me permanent, so I found that hard.*

At one stage, Helen's ambition was to keep doing temporary work until she was aged 60. She explained why she thought she could do this:

*...because with temp work people don't look at who you are, they only look at what you're doing.*

Helen's comments, and to some extent, the previous examples support research by Segrave, (2001) who found that ageism does not seem to come into play when hiring temporary workers, unlike the situation with permanent workers.

Performing temporary work is not easy. Continually adapting to new situations, and learning new systems can be very demanding as Jessie pointed out:

*It can be hard, like you go into strange places, you feel like everyone's looking at you, you know, and you've got all these different systems and 5 minutes later, you have to know it all. It's a bit daunting, but what's the choice? If I've got no other means of income, I have to go temping because the dole money's only \$164 a week.*

Accepting temporary work while searching for a permanent job was obviously beneficial for the women. However, as already mentioned, temporary work has been found to be "intimately connected to recurrent unemployment" (Korpi & Levin, 2001, p. 127) and the fact that recruitment agencies tend to offer older women temporary work rather than permanent work is an issue that warrants further investigation.

## **2. Recruitment Agencies and Mature Women**

Many of the women described being treated poorly by recruitment consultants. Fiona found that the more recruitment agencies she went to, the more demoralised she became. She believed that recruitment consultants are not interested in older workers:

*Being on the telephone, I can sound animated, and I would often get called in for jobs, and then they would see me, and not that I looked bad, but I looked my age, and they instantly weren't interested. There were so many incidents [pause], they're run by young, upwardly mobile stunning young women. The issue really was, once they saw you, heavens, that wasn't what they wanted, someone of your age, really! They wanted a younger person that looked like them.*

Helen described a similar experience at a recruitment agency:

*...when the consultant walked in the room, I could tell from her body language, she didn't even discuss the job, she just said "oh no, I don't think this position would suit you". She didn't bother to find out anything about me, I just knew straight away it was an age thing because when I look at employment agencies,*

*most of the girls are young, and they would look at me and see their mother.*

Carol was told by one recruitment consultant that they could not help her because she was “too old”. She found consultants to be generally discouraging:

*The girl at the agency, she made me feel incompetent, she said “Oh you’re too old and you’re not good enough”. They were not encouraging at all, it was as if they took one look at you and that was it.*

Claire described herself as not having the confidence to even approach an agency and several other participants did not want to contact them because they had heard such negative reports from others. Maggie’s impression of the agencies was as follows:

*Some women I knew who were wanting to return to the workforce, they were just told to go away by the agencies and ended up feeling worse than before they went in. So instead of trying to help you, they send you away feeling worse.*

Most of the women described the recruitment consultants they had met as being much younger than they were. Helen also noted that employers now tend to be younger:

*I hate saying this but most bosses these days are young guys, and someone goes to an agency to get a job and they’re talking about the “fun” things that they do and I’m not perceived as being a “fun” person... Companies are now being run by younger people, and so they’re looking to getting a team of people around them who are of similar ages.*

It is interesting to note that the only participant who was offered interviews for permanent positions by recruitment agencies was Diana, an extremely attractive woman who looked at least 10 years younger than she actually was.

### **The Consultants’ Position**

The rest of the findings for this chapter emerged from the interviews with the 5 recruitment consultants. When the consultants speak about their “clients”, they are referring to employers. People who visit recruitment agencies looking for jobs are referred to as “candidates”.



### 3. Role Confusion

There did seem to be some confusion regarding what the consultants perceived as their main function. They did not agree as to what the role of the consultant was, and there was also inconsistency at a personal level. For example Janet was quite adamant when she stated:

*You'll appreciate that we're basically driven by what the client wants, so we're usually looking for what they are looking for.*

In cases where the employer is wanting a young person, and older candidates are interested in the job, Janet describes the employers' attitudes as being unrealistic:

*I think it's shocking, employers need to get a lot more realistic, and realise that they're missing out on really good people...some candidates who come in, who have been made redundant, it's hard, some of those ladies haven't been interviewed for 10 or 15 years or more, but we're here to assist as much as anything.*

In Janet's case there seems to be an inherent conflict between finding what the employer wants and assisting candidates.

Rachel described a "reluctance" on the part of employers that "wasn't verbalised because of laws and things" when it came to employing women in their mid-forties and over. But she further explained that it was the role of the consultant to educate and counsel the employers when they specifically requested a younger candidate:

*We became very skilled at counselling them [employers] and asking why they specifically thought someone in that age group was going to be suitable. I know they generally had in mind the sort of person or age group they were going to be getting, but I did find that was part of my role.*

Cara agreed that the role of the consultant was to "condition" the clients to appreciate skills rather than age because "we don't want to be seen as being discriminating". In spite of the role confusion and desire to not appear discriminating, these comments are in keeping with Burns (2000) study which found that employers' preferences may in fact "condition" recruitment consultants to accept discrimination as the business norm. The employers are the "clients" and therefore the paying customers. Candidates are only useful if they are what

customers want. If a client specifically or implicitly requests a younger employee, then the consultant would probably be wasting everybody's time by referring older candidates.

#### 4. Conflicting Values

The recruitment consultants were not only confused over their roles but there was also evidence of conflicting values. For example, most described feeling shocked by some employers' attitudes towards older candidates, yet they allowed themselves to be driven by the employers' directives to provide them with what they wanted, which mainly seems to be younger candidates.

Depth of experience was repeatedly put forward as being a desirable asset, yet anybody who had been in the same company for a long time was viewed as being "a problem to place". According to Cara:

*Twenty years in the one company used to be OK for demonstrating stability and loyalty to the company, but now it's 5 years. Five years with the same company and you've learnt all you're going to learn and you're staying too long.*

It is interesting to note that the above comment by Cara backs up the concerns the women had during the job search stage regarding employers preferring younger employees because they are more likely to "move on", devaluing long tenure in a job. In an age where more than 5 years tenure with the same company starts becoming questionable, CV's showing 14 or 15 years tenure could be a liability for the job-seeker.

While claiming to be disinterested in a candidate's age, Annette stated:

*You can usually judge how mature somebody is from when they went to school, so for example, if they finished school in the early 1980s, then you know they are probably mid-thirties, if they finished school in 1963, then they're probably mid-fifties.*

It seems clear that this is a technique to estimate age rather than an interest in the candidate's education, and is in keeping with Encel's (1998) Australian study which indicated that this method of finding out a candidate's age is a way of evading possible accusations of age discrimination.

Annette continued to extol the excellent qualities of mature women candidates, yet when asked how she could improve her chances of employment if she were aged 45, she replied:

*If I were in that age bracket, and thanks for knowing that I'm not, but if I were in that age bracket and looking old, I'd make sure my skills were as high as they could be.*

Annette was grateful not to be in that mature age bracket. While discussing ageism in the workforce, Janet mentioned that she herself would be turning 30 this year, exclaiming "Oh my God, I'll be 30 soon!" as though it were an alarming event. These comments seem to be in keeping with the research by Pearlman (1993) who found that younger women often try to distance themselves from older women because of their own fears of aging.

Some consultants were quite open about the fact that most employers seem to prefer younger employees, especially for reception and customer service. According to Rachel, employers generally want receptionists aged under 30. Cara added that they also like them to be "good-looking". These statements support the observations and experiences mentioned by the women in this study. For example Jill and Linda were told directly by the interviewers that they were too old. Others suspected ageism when they were continually rejected in favour of younger applicants. Eleven out of the 12 women believed that their age was a barrier in the job market. These statements by the consultants also add weight to the research by Wallace (1999) who found that employers generally preferred women to be "around 25" for secretarial and clerical positions (p. 133).

All of the consultants claimed they could not understand this preference for younger employees. Interestingly, the majority of consultants I observed while working on this study were young females, especially the receptionists at the agencies who looked very young. The only exception was Paul, who was the owner of the recruitment agency. Paul was in his mid-forties. My own observations of the staff at recruitment agencies corresponds with those of the women participants in that the majority of consultants tend to be stylishly dressed younger women.

## 5. The Negative Stereotype of Older Workers

All but 1 participant believed there was a negative stereotype associated with older candidates. When asked to describe how they believe employers generally view older female clerical candidates, Janet replied:

*...when they [the candidates] are more mature, they might not pick things up as quickly [pause] you know, that kind of thing...*

Cara agreed with Janet:

*Some clients do see mature as old, not being able to pick things up quickly... err, so they need to keep up with the times and have good computer skills.*

According to Rachel, many employers perceive older candidates as generally having less confidence than younger candidates and being less technically skilled:

*Older women have fewer technical skills in general, and perhaps are less, a little less flexible to adapt new skills and new roles.*

Yet when describing the qualities required for temporary workers, Rachel claimed:

*Temp work requires very hard work, a lot of flexibility, a lot of energy because you're going into new environments all the time and that's tiring.*

Rachel's comment above supports Jessie's earlier description of temporary work being a difficult role. It seems contradictory that many of the women participants complained of only ever being offered temporary work by the agencies rather than permanent work, yet the qualities required for temporary work seem to directly oppose the negative stereotype regarding older candidates. For example, being flexible, having lots of energy and being able to continually adapt to new work situations is the opposite of the stereotype of older workers previously described by Rachel and Janet.

Cara believed that mature women are less likely to "move on" compared to younger women:

*With the more mature person, they're quite happy to [pause] they've had their career, a lot of them, all they want is to keep their mind active, a nine to five job, with no stress.*

This statement contrasts with the findings of Onyx (1998) who suggested that the “golden decade” for women is from age 45 to 55 when they are at their peak.

## 6. Physical Presentation

All of the consultants placed great emphasis on physical presentation. Paul did not support the notion that women became less effective as they aged, but did state that physical presentation can be a problem for older female candidates:

*The presentation may not be up to it...so I think mostly the physical presentation is probably the key thing. We place value on experience, and some people, it surprises the life out of me, have the perception that you're clapped out when you reach a certain mileage on the clock. It seems to be a beauty thing, so I guess as you become more mature, some people might perceive that you're not so attractive, so there are some companies that might want flash young folk [pause] there is, I suppose, some perception out there.*

The majority of the recruitment staff I observed at Paul's agency were young. His comments are also in keeping with the experiences of several of the women participants mentioned earlier in that while they sounded acceptable over the telephone when inquiring about jobs, they were considered unsuitable as far as their appearance was concerned once they presented at the agency.

Annette recalled that her clients used to ask for “only pretty girls” but would now “get crucified if they even thought like that”. Yet according to Cara, they still do that sort of thing:

*You get some men clients...and they just want blond, but I guess it's just human nature and they like to say what they want, at reception they always want good-looking at reception.*

## 7. Team Fit

Team fit was mentioned by 3 consultants as being an important factor when placing any candidates. According to Cara the definition of team fit is “fitting the personality of the candidate to the existing team they may be moving into”. Janet explained further:

*...obviously nobody's meant to discriminate on [pause] based on age or that sort of thing, but I think what people say is “team fit”, because they've got a*

*young team, then they don't necessarily want an older person, even if they are young at heart, or young in their approach.*

Rachel explained her understanding of team fit:

*I think it comes down to the attitude of the person more than their age, and you know, certain attitudes go with a certain age, as a general rule...*

The above comments are in keeping with the study by Burns (2000) who found that "lack of team fit" was the most common type of discrimination used against older workers.

Cara noted that during the last few years there had been a shift towards younger managers in the workforce:

*I think the management of most companies is a lot younger than what it used to be. Now managers are around 35, and before they were about 50 to 55, so it definitely has, management teams now, if you look at most companies, if they're small, medium or large, you will find the management teams made of mid-thirties, even early thirties.*

Cara believes that this "management shift" makes it harder for older female candidates to find jobs. Helen's comments earlier in this chapter observing that "most bosses these days are young guys" support Cara's observations regarding managers now being younger. This is also in keeping with the situation mentioned in the previous chapter when Helen was told at an interview that she wasn't suitable for the job because she would seem too much like the boss's mother. Worsley (1996) found that managers in general are now tending to be younger. These findings are also in keeping with Wallace (1999) and Steinberg et al., (1998) suggesting that managers are likely to want to employ people the same age as themselves or younger.

From the data presented by the consultants and women participants, it seems that age discrimination in the Auckland job market may be aggravated by younger managers specifically requesting younger staff to be found by young recruitment consultants.

## SUMMARY

This chapter looked at seven issues involving recruitment agencies. Although the offer of temporary work was appreciated by the women, they also felt discouraged because the agencies very rarely seemed to offer them permanent work. Many of the women believe this was because of their age.

Role confusion and conflicting values were found amongst the consultants regarding their attempts at fulfilling employers' requests for younger candidates and counselling them on the values of employing more mature workers. The fact that there was a negative stereotypical view of older workers operating within the workforce contributed to age bias towards younger workers. All the consultants placed much emphasis on physical presentation of candidates when applying for jobs, acknowledging that some companies only want young glamorous employees, especially for front-line positions. The chapter concluded by looking at team fit, and how this concept is used to exclude older workers from jobs.

The next chapter is the final chapter of the thesis. It presents a summary and discussion of the study's findings, the limitations of the research and suggestions for further research.

# **Part Three: Conclusion**

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **Discussion, Limitations, Suggestions and Recommendations**

This chapter presents a summary and discussion of the key findings in terms of the study's aims. Limitations are acknowledged and suggestions for further research are offered. Finally, recommendations are presented in the light of these findings.

#### **The Findings in Terms of the Study's Aims**

There were two main aims of the current study. The first was to use grounded theory methods to investigate the experiences of mature clerical workers who had lost their jobs through involuntary redundancy. The second aim was to examine the ways in which recruitment agencies may help or hinder mature female candidates seeking clerical positions. The aims of this study have been met and the findings of the study in relation to these aims are outlined below.

#### **The Experience of Mature Female Clerical Workers Made Redundant**

The findings of this study raised many interesting issues. Some of the key findings regarding redundancy as experienced by mature clerical workers are summarised and discussed below.

For the majority of the women participants, the overall experience of redundancy was profoundly distressing resulting in a negative impact on their lives. At the time of the interviews, 10 of the 12 participants were financially and emotionally worse off than they were before being made redundant, supporting Gilberto's (1997) study of mature women and redundancy. Gilberto concluded that losing a job late in one's career left many women with a higher risk of current and future economic insecurity. Not only do the women in the present study now have a reduced standard of living, but most of them also feel severely limited in their future employment opportunities. Like Hancock's New Zealand study of



over 20 years ago, this study has shown that redundancy has a devastating effect upon the lives of women. One would imagine that a large city such as Auckland would offer more opportunities for skilled and experienced office workers than Dunedin did for the textile workers in Hancock's study. But this has not been the case.

During the actual redundancy process, one of the factors which made the experience worse was the lack of professional help offered by organisations to the women being made redundant. Losing a job at a late stage in life was experienced as a "huge" event, resulting in some women needing medical treatment for depression and anxiety. With hindsight, several women commented that they probably would have benefited from some form of psychological or career counselling at the redundancy stage. The 3 women who were provided with career counselling described feeling more positive about embarking on their job search than some of the other women. It was interesting to note that 1 of the participants who had given up the job search at the time of our research interview telephoned me at a later date saying that our interview session for this study had motivated her to continue searching for full-time work. This demonstrates the value of counselling or having the opportunity to talk to somebody about distressing situations such as redundancy. It is also in keeping with the findings of Kets de Vries et al., (1997) who found that an offer of professional help from the company is beneficial for the employee, both practically and psychologically.

Despite years of experience and up-to-date computer skills, many of the women were concerned about not being skilled or qualified enough to compete successfully in the current labour market. Some women felt confused when asked if they had any tertiary qualifications during job interviews as most of the women had left school over 20 years ago to become secretaries or receptionists and a university education was not required for these jobs. However, most of the women did have recent qualifications which were specifically job-related such as certificates in Microsoft Word and Excel rather than tertiary qualifications. Having marketable skills and work experience did not seem to make much difference for the women in the study, contrary to the advice given by some of the recruitment consultants that being skilled was the most important thing for a mature job-seeker. In fact, some of the women were asked to stay longer at their companies so that they could train the younger women replacing them. This suggests that these mature women were more skilled in their work than their younger replacements, and makes their "redundancies" questionable.

Fierce competition for clerical work in Auckland made it more difficult for the women to compete against younger applicants, with between 80 and 100 applicants per job being quoted as the norm. This means that employers in Auckland can afford to be very selective, and makes it easy for recruitment agencies to satisfy their clients' preferences for younger employees.

After months of applying for jobs without success, 11 out of 12 women believed that their age and physical appearance were barriers in the job market. Several women had been told directly by employers or recruitment consultants that they were too old when they applied for jobs. In positions such as receptionist or secretary, it seems that the older woman's capacity to compete successfully against younger applicants is diminished. There were instances of recruitment consultants being interested in the women over the phone, but this interest immediately disappeared when the consultants met them in person and noted that they were middle-aged. This sort of thing seems less likely to occur in other occupations, for example nursing, but for mature clerical workers, there does seem to be the "double jeopardy" of ageism and sexism working against them. The consultants in this study described their clients requesting young and attractive females for front-line clerical positions. These findings support the study by Wallace (1999) who found that employers often want secretarial and clerical workers to be aged in their twenties, and preferably attractive. The interviews with the consultants confirm the women's views that many employers prefer younger women for clerical roles.

As preferences for younger staff were often stated by younger managers, there seems to be some evidence that younger managers contribute most to ageism and sexism in the Auckland job market. Observations by some of the women and the consultants support the contention that younger managers are more likely to want young attractive females for their receptionist and customer service positions. This supports Worsley's (1996) study which found that employees in the UK were being promoted to management positions at a younger age and this trend was contributing to ageism in the job market (1996). Further studies found that younger managers are likely to want to employ people the same age as themselves or younger (Wallace, 1999; Steinberg et al., 1998) leaving a pool of skilled and experienced middle-aged workers unemployed.

Long tenure in the same company now seems more likely to be perceived as a liability rather than a positive feature. Observations made by the women participants and consultants indicate a preference for younger employees because they are more likely to move on sooner, in contrast with older employees who are more likely to stay longer. This is surprising as it would seem more logical for employers to want to retain trained staff, but findings from this study indicate otherwise. It seems likely that the anti-discrimination legislation abolishing retirement age in the New Zealand workforce may have been counter-productive in this area. What was created to protect the older employee may have had the effect of aggravating their situation. There is evidence to suggest that older workers are more likely to be targets of redundancy (Murray, 2002) and according to some of the women and consultants in this study, younger employees are less likely to want to stay in a company for more than 5 years. It was also noted that candidates with a history of long tenure in a job were "difficult to place". This supports Encel's study indicating that loyalty and experience now count for very little in the workforce (1998). The financial uncertainty of the business world combined with the abolition of the retirement age, may have caused employers to feel apprehensive about employing mature workers who are likely to stay with the company for as long as they possibly can. Performance appraisals are now commonly used and are often linked to pay rises, so employees who stay too long may end up being too expensive for the employer to retain.

The negative stereotype of older workers being less technically skilled and having slower cognitive abilities was evident in the quotes from some of the consultants in this study. Being perceived as less technically skilled because of age is a real handicap, especially in an area such as clerical work where computers now play such a dominant role.

The large number of rejected job applications and unsuccessful interviews led to a progressive diminishing of confidence in many of the women. Many began seeing themselves in the light of the negative stereotype. This supports research by Farr & Ringseis (2002) who found that seeing oneself as "old" can affect self-identity and self esteem because of age-related stereotypes. When asked what advice they would give other women in a similar situation, most of the women advised starting the job search as soon as they knew they were being made redundant. Attending interviews while still employed was perceived as having some psychological advantage compared to being unemployed.

Unemployment brought an erosion of confidence which many women felt could be detected by the people interviewing them, contributing to their lack of success in the job market.

Being made redundant resulted in most of the women now earning less money than they had in their previous jobs. Of the 6 receptionists made redundant, only 1 had managed to find a new receptionist position (she was told at the interview that she was too old but was given the job anyway). Most of the others had been offered different types of clerical work or had given up on ever finding clerical work, 3 unwillingly accepting home-care (cleaning) work instead. This is a concern, because women in the older age bracket are more likely to be targets for redundancy in the future, resulting in a downward spiral of their standard of living. For most of the women there was no alternative role as wife or mother. These women had been in the workforce for many years, and identified strongly with their jobs and being "workers". Also, most were single income earners with mortgages to pay, making the financial aspect of employment very important to them.

The findings of this study regarding standards of living support those of Gilberto (1997) who found that older women who manage to find jobs after being made redundant often accept work with less pay, fewer benefits and less job security. One can conclude that a clerical worker who loses her job late in her career has a high risk of current and future economic insecurity.

Another disturbing finding was the women's new and more cynical attitude towards work in general. This demonstrates a violation of the "psychological contract", as the women who had been totally committed to their company experienced a sense of betrayal when they were made redundant. How they were treated during the redundancy period seemed to be influential in their decision to remain emotionally detached from any new company. This is of some concern as a more casual attitude towards work in general is likely to reinforce the negative stereotype already operating against older workers. Some of these women now claim that they are operating against their own ethical standards as a defence mechanism in order to avoid being "betrayed" again. This represents a loss to the workforce in general and is an example of how negative experiences can de-motivate formerly committed workers.

## **Recruitment Agencies**

The second aim of the study was to find out how recruitment agencies help or hinder mature clerical workers. They were found to be helpful in that they were able to offer temporary work to several of the women. This was helpful while they were unemployed and searching for a permanent job. It is an interesting finding as the qualities required for temporary work were described as flexibility, good computer skills, lots of energy and being adaptable enough to continually learn new systems. This description directly opposes the characteristics represented by the negative stereotype of older workers. Another interesting point is that with temporary work, ageism does not seem to come into play as it does with permanent work. This was demonstrated in this study, supporting research by Segrave, (2001). Temporary work may be a mixed blessing however, as it has been shown to be associated with recurrent unemployment by Korpi & Levin (2001).

Recruitment agencies were less helpful in finding the women permanent work. Many of the women approached the agencies for permanent jobs they had seen advertised in newspapers, but were only offered temporary work. Many of the women found the consultants to be ageist and discouraging, and in some cases even hostile. Conflicting values were found amongst the consultants interviewed, particularly concerning issues of age. While claiming not to be interested in a candidate's age, there seemed to be a conscious effort to estimate this by asking about the candidate's schooling history.

Fierce competition for jobs makes it easy for employers and recruitment consultants to be very selective in their choice of employee, and "team fit" was found to be used as a euphemism allowing age discrimination. Team fit seems to have become an acceptable requirement, enabling consultants to bar older job-seekers from applying for positions without seeming overtly ageist. Team fit also appears to be an objective requirement, something dictated by the company's existing team, rather than implicating the employer or the recruitment consultant in ageist preferences.

Recruitment agencies also hindered mature clerical workers by allowing themselves to be "conditioned" by their clients, endeavouring to provide whatever their clients requested. As most consultants are driven by commission structures, they are likely to prefer 'easy to place' younger candidates, more in keeping with their clients' requests. If the job market was not so highly competitive, it is likely that consultants would try to persuade their clients to be

more flexible and consider older candidates. But while there are so many applicants for each job advertised, there is probably no incentive for this.

A frequent observation made by myself and the women participants was that most of the staff at recruitment agencies were stylish young women. Older women approach these places in the hope of finding new work and end up feeling out of place because of their age. The consultants' comments regarding their own ages in comparison to being "mature" supports the study by Pearlman (1993) who found that younger women are often rejecting of or distancing from older women. This is commonly thought to be because older women represent what younger women fear eventually becoming in our youth orientated culture.

The consultants placed heavy emphasis on physical presentation, especially when placing receptionists and other front-line clerical workers. This was found to be a contributing factor in reducing opportunities for mature workers who may be perceived as no longer having the "feminine physical requirements" for the job.

### **Conclusion**

It seems that age discrimination in the Auckland job market is often driven by younger managers specifically requesting recruitment consultants to find staff with the characteristics associated with younger employees. This, combined with fierce competition for jobs, the negative stereotype of the older worker and the counter-productive effects of abolishing the retirement age in the New Zealand workforce, has made the older woman's search for clerical work, especially in reception and secretarial roles, a distressing and often humiliating experience. As demonstrated in this thesis, the interviews with the consultants confirm the women's impressions of the Auckland job market.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

Although there were numerous advantages in using a qualitative rather than quantitative research design for the current study, the reduced generalisation of the findings due to the small size of the samples (12 women and 5 recruitment consultants) is a disadvantage of this approach. Generalisation to large populations should be cautious.

As the researcher I am aware that my own personal, cultural and ideological assumptions and experience may have helped shape the research from its beginning to conclusion. Regardless of how objective a researcher may try to be, their own experience as a human being may “contaminate” interpretation and analysis. For example, I am aware that at many times during this research I experienced more sympathy for the plight of the redundant women I interviewed than for the dilemmas of the recruitment consultants. In this respect qualitative research is perceived as being limiting.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Choosing a qualitative framework for this study has resulted in a large amount of rich and detailed information provided by a small number of participants. The theory created and grounded in the stories of the participants could promote further investigation into the topic of redundancy and mature women in New Zealand. Some suggestions for further research based on the findings of the current study are offered below.

A study similar to the current study, but interviewing redundant clerical workers aged between 25 and 35, comparing their experiences to a similar, but more mature group would be useful. This would possibly highlight different problems for younger women made redundant from clerical positions. It may also confirm the suspicion that permanent jobs advertised by recruitment agencies are mainly offered to younger women, as in the present study the older women who expressed interest in permanent work were mostly offered only temporary work.

Another possible topic for future research could be investigating **why** recruitment agencies often provide older job-seekers with temporary work but hardly any permanent work. This seems strange given that the negative stereotype of older workers is in direct contrast to the qualities required for temporary work. This could also throw some light on the fact that, unlike permanent work, temporary work does not suffer from the problem of ageism.

It would be useful to ascertain the ages of managers working in the Auckland area, given that both groups of participants noted a recent general trend to younger management. As the baby-boomers are now in middle-age, if managers are younger, then age discrimination could become a serious problem for this large population.

## **Recommendations**

A recent survey of New Zealand recruitment consultants and human resource professionals found that mature people were the most likely population group to experience discrimination in the workforce, even more so than immigrants (Burns, 2000). Ageism is clearly an important issue in New Zealand today.

The findings of this study indicate some need to challenge the negative stereotype regarding older workers. This needs to be specifically targeted at managers and employers. Recruitment consultants are in the business of fulfilling their clients' requests, therefore the initial change in perception needs to come from employers and managers. As many managers are now required to have tertiary qualifications in Business Studies, I would suggest that New Zealand university papers on management devote some time to the topic of ageism in the workforce. Managers in the UK have been recently finding that employing older workers makes good business sense. New Zealand may want to look closely at what is happening there, as in our youth-oriented culture, the possibility of increasing company profits may be the only factor strong enough to counter ageism in the workplace.

Many of the women participants in this study experienced significant negative psychological effects from being made redundant. I would recommend that employers are educated on the impact of redundancy on older workers. Redundancy is often experienced as a major life-changing event, and a requirement to provide emotional and career counselling should become a recognised part of the redundancy process, especially for mature workers.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter discussed some key findings of the current study in terms of the study's two aims. The overall findings demonstrated that most of the women interviewed are now worse off financially and emotionally than they were prior to the redundancies. Recruitment consultants and younger managers, combined with a very competitive job market play major roles in contributing to the difficulties mature clerical workers face when seeking new work.



Limitations of the study were pointed out and suggestions were made for further research. Finally recommendations were provided in view of the study's findings. These included looking at ways in which education regarding mature workers can be provided for managers and employers, and for counselling to become a recognised part of the redundancy process.

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**SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Dear (*Participant's Real Name*)

**Re: The Impact of Redundancy on Mature Female Clerical  
Workers in the Auckland Area**

Thank you very much for taking part in my research on redundancy and female clerical workers in Auckland. I learnt a lot from talking to you and the other women who took part and would like to let you know some of the main findings of my research. Although people didn't all have exactly the same experience of redundancy, it was obviously a really difficult time for everyone who took part in the research.

The main findings of the study are summarised in this letter. These findings were produced by me listening to the tapes of the interviews, typing out the interviews word for word, and then carefully examining the information. From the information four main categories emerged. These are the redundancy itself, unemployment, the job search and reemployment.

The main findings of the study are as follows:

**THE REDUNDANCY**

The part of the study covering the redundancy itself covers three parts. These are the reactions to the redundancy, what things made it more difficult (labelled Exacerbating Factors) and what things made it easier (labelled Alleviating Factors).

**Reactions to the Redundancy**

- On being informed of the redundancy, all participants suffered some emotional response. Emotions experienced included a variety of feelings, such as shock, disbelief, confusion, a sense of betrayal, rejection, anger, relief, humiliation, fear, worry, anxiety, sadness and insecurity. Some women also mentioned that they suffered from other problems such as disturbed sleep and concentration difficulties. As well as an emotional response, some women tried to make sense of the situation by searching for reasons to explain why this was happening to the company, or wondering why they specifically were made redundant. Some women had anticipated being made redundant but still felt emotionally affected when it happened.

**Exacerbating Factors**

- The redundancy situation was made worse by five different factors. The first of these was being given confusing or unclear notice regarding the redundancy, as some managers did not make themselves clear in their attempt to tell the employee that she was being made redundant. This lack of clarity resulted in the employee feeling confused and uncertain.



Another factor was insensitivity. Some women felt patronised or humiliated by the way their managers organised the redundancy process, demonstrating a lack of consideration for their feelings. Thirdly, when the person being made redundant was not offered any professional or practical help by the company, for example counselling or legal representation. Fourthly, when a person was singled out for redundancy and nobody else in the company was being made redundant at the same time. Being the only person made redundant was often a lonely and isolating experience.

The final factor that seemed to make the redundancy worse involved people being required to stay on at the company because of extra workloads and training instead of using their notice period to actively search for a new job. Many women felt that they had more confidence attending interviews when they were still employed, than when they were unemployed.

### **Alleviating Factors**

- There were five factors that helped in the redundancy situation. The first was being made redundant along with other employees. Secondly, having outside professional advice such as career counselling helped. This enabled some of the women to create a new CV and acquire information about attending interviews and job search techniques.

A third factor was being given a redundancy payout, as this reduced some of the initial financial worry. Emotional support from family, friends and colleagues at this time was also described as being helpful and appreciated. The final helpful factor involved being given some recognition by the company when leaving, for example a farewell present, special function or speech.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT**

This section of the study covers three main areas. These are the psychological (emotional) impacts, and the financial and social impacts of being unemployed. The main findings are described under each of these headings.

### **Psychological Impact (Emotional)**

- Feelings of depression were mentioned by many of the participants. As well as feeling sad, some women described themselves as no longer being able to gain pleasure from hobbies or activities they had once enjoyed. There was also a sense of hopelessness and despair as the period of unemployment continued. Anxiety was also frequently mentioned. Some women found that they had to visit their GPs for prescribed medication to help combat these problems.

Loss of confidence and self-esteem were prominent issues for most of the participants. The longer the unemployed period continued, the more their sense of confidence was eroded.

### **Financial Impact**

- Most of the participants expressed concern regarding their financial situation during the period of unemployment. For some women there was the ever increasing possibility of having to sell their home because of mortgage commitments. Others described not being able to plan holidays, attend social events or buy personal items.

### **Social Impact**

- The combination of financial restrictions and loss of confidence impacted on the social life of many participants, resulting in a limited social life. As well as not participating in evening and weekend social activities, there was a sense of social isolation during the day. This was due to not being at work. Most participants described feeling lonely and missing the social interaction that work provided. The absence of a structured day was also mentioned as being a problem resulting in feelings of boredom along with social isolation.

## **THE JOB SEARCH**

The third part of the research covers the search for new work. The five categories associated with the job search are: expectations, concerns regarding reemployment, perceived lack of support, recruitment agencies, and experiences.

### **Expectations**

- All of the participants interviewed were skilled and experienced in clerical type work, many of them with up-to-date marketable computer skills. Because of this, initially, many of the women expected to be able to find a new job fairly easily.

### **Concerns Regarding Reemployment**

- As the unemployment period continued, many of the women developed concerns regarding their future employability. Their primary concern was their age. All participants were over the age of 40 and many felt that this was a major factor working against them in the job market. Fierce competition for jobs was also a concern as often there were 30 to 50 applicants for the one advertised position. Some participants knew of instances where there were many more than this.
- Other concerns involved a lack of formal qualifications. Although most of the women had wide experience, for some it seemed that a "piece of paper" was an important requirement in today's job market. Some felt that being made redundant carried a stigma, even when an entire company had been closed down.
- One of the more common concerns was a loss of confidence. Many participants felt that their loss of confidence and feelings of desperation could be sensed during an interview and worked against them. Four of the participants gave up trying to find new clerical



work as their level of confidence had been so considerably eroded. Finally, long tenure in a company was perceived as a minus rather than indicating loyalty and stability. Some women felt that there was now a feeling that employers are not interested in fostering company loyalty.

### **Perceived Lack of Support**

- Some women felt that their friends and family had not been supportive and had not understood the despair they were experiencing. They often kept the seriousness of the developing situation to themselves while trying to maintain a positive front. The majority of the participants were divorced and did not have a partner to provide emotional or financial support.
- The Work and Income Department (WINZ) was described by many as being unhelpful. Most of the women had no previous association with WINZ and found visiting the department to be a discouraging experience.

### **Recruitment Agencies**

- Many of the participants described their visits to recruitment agencies as being unhelpful except in being offered temporary work assignments. The "temp" work was appreciated by many of the participants. Many participants felt that the recruitment consultants were disinterested in helping them to find permanent positions.

### **Experiences**

- Most women described the main result of their job search as the generation of scores of letters of rejection from numerous job applications and failure to be offered interviews. The average time spent applying for new work was 6.4 months, the range being from 3 months to 12 months. Some women started looking for new work as soon as they knew about their redundancy but others waited until they had left the company. As previously mentioned, several women gave up their search for new clerical work.

## **REEMPLOYMENT**

The three categories involving reemployment describe the new job conditions, the feelings of the participants towards their new jobs and their changed attitudes towards work in general.

### **Conditions**

- The majority of the participants earn less money and have less responsibility in their new jobs. Many describe their new work as being down-graded in comparison to their former positions and as a result of these factors, they now have a lower standard of living.

## Feelings

- The experience of being made redundant combined with knowing how difficult it is to find a new job has left many participants with feelings of insecurity in their new jobs. And although some women are unhappy in their new work, there is a reluctance to leave and look for a different job because they don't want to go through the experience of being a job-seeker again.
- Feelings of relief and gratitude were expressed regarding being offered a new clerical job and to be working again. Those who had taken jobs in cleaning or home-care did not feel a sense of relief or gratitude.

## Attitudes

- Some of the participants described themselves as now having a more cynical attitude towards work in general. There was a reduced level of commitment to the new company with people making sure they took their tea-breaks and did not work later than they had to.

As already mentioned, your experience of redundancy may not relate to all of the factors mentioned in the above findings. These findings represent a general overview from the interviews with all the 12 participants. Please feel free to comment on these findings. I have attached a stamped-addressed envelope for this purpose. In order for your views of the findings to be included in my thesis, I would appreciate it if you would return any comments to me by 19<sup>th</sup> November 2002. Or you could contact me by telephone – 09 4139 869 or email [ddavy@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ddavy@xtra.co.nz) if you prefer.

Thank you once again for your participation in this research.

Yours sincerely

Doreen Davy  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



**SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Dear (*Name of Participant*)

**Re: The Impact of Redundancy on Mature Female Clerical  
Workers in the Auckland Area**

Firstly, I would like to thank you for participating in my research on redundancy and female clerical workers in Auckland.

The main findings that emerged from working with the transcripts of the interviews are summarised in this letter. It is important to recognise that the findings reported are general ones and not all aspects are relevant to every individual recruitment consultant who took part in the study. The main findings of the study are divided into four categories. These are the employer, the applicant, the job and the agency.

The main findings of the study are as follows:

**THE EMPLOYER**

As I did not interview employers directly, the perceptions of employers' attitudes towards mature workers were formed from the information gained from interviewing the 5 recruitment consultants. According to most participants (recruitment consultants), there are a variety of employers operating in the Auckland area with a variety of requirements specific to the type of employment being offered. Some entry positions are more suitable to people with less experience and some positions are more suited to mature people with a lot of experience. In general, most participants thought that many employers did have a preference for younger workers, especially for receptionist work, but that preference was beginning to change and mature workers are now becoming more valued. Some participants observed that managers were becoming younger with many now in the mid-thirties age group, and may unconsciously look for staff of similar or younger ages to themselves.

**THE APPLICANT**

Several participants mentioned that mature women applicants were often better groomed than younger applicants, and were more likely to have qualities such as loyalty, stability, maturity of outlook and to be good role models. However, there did seem to be a perception that mature workers were sometimes not as computer literate as younger people because they had not been raised with computers from an early age. Mature applicants were also perceived to be less ambitious than younger applicants.

## **THE JOB**

Most of the participants thought that the requirements for a receptionist/secretarial type role are qualities such as flexibility, excellent computer skills, good presentation, confidence and an ability to deal with lots of things at once. Team fit was also mentioned as being an important factor as the applicant's personality needs to fit in well with existing staff.

## **THE AGENCY**

There were indications that the role of the recruitment consultant can be difficult at times as they can get "stuck" between trying to help the employer to find the "right" employee and trying to help a good candidate into a job. Although many participants were aware that some employers held negative stereotypical views of mature workers, they felt it was their role as a consultant to try to "educate" the employers in this regard.

As already mentioned, the above findings will not pertain to every individual who took part in this research. Please feel free to comment on these findings. I have attached a stamped, self-addressed envelope for this purpose. In order for your views to be included in my thesis, I would appreciate it if you would return any comments by 19<sup>th</sup> November 2002. You can telephone me on 09 4139-869, or email me at [ddavy@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ddavy@xtra.co.nz) if you prefer.

Thank you once again for your participation in this research.

Yours sincerely

Doreen Davy  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## **APPENDIX C**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

- **Demographics :-** Age, marital status, Children, husband, time divorced
- **Career :-** History, Type of work, Qualifications
- **Occupation :-** Industry, tenure, company size, personal feelings,
- **Redundancy :-** How, when, where announced. Legal advice, lump sum payments, counselling, period of notice, other people too, farewell function, gift, feelings at time, reactions of others
- **Later feelings :-** examples sad, angry, guilty, ashamed, relieved, frightened etc
- **Other effects :-** Financial, family, friends, social life, lifestyle, anything positive?
- **Employment Agencies :-** overall experience, helpful/not, staff, interviews arranged, temp work offered
- **Job Search :-** Newspapers, agencies, cold-calling, expectations, new skills sought, discouragements encountered, concerns,
- **Applications :-** How many, number of interviews, job offers, period unemployed
- **Interviews :-** How many applicants, Interviewer attitudes, age and/or redundancy revealed?
- **New Job :-** Feelings - relief, gratitude, insecurity, performance anxiety, less pay/responsibility, changed attitudes, trust in employer
- **Conclusions :-** Lessons learned, worst aspects, differences now, advice for others

## **APPENDIX D**

### **RECRUITMENT AGENCY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

- Problems experienced with job placement of older women
- What qualities are older women seen as having?
- How do older women present as compared with younger women?
- How do you think employers see older women?
- In this regard, are there any differences between male and female employers?
- What characteristics are employers seeking for a front-line employee?
- Ageism as a problem? Getting better or worse?
- Main role of employment agencies?
- What strengths and weaknesses do you see older women as having?



## Appendix E

**PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of Redundancy on Mature Female Clerical Workers  
in the Auckland Region**

### CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that only a pseudonym will be used regarding any reference to me.

*(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).*

I agree/I do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signed:**

**Name:**

**Date:**



## Appendix F

**PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of Redundancy on Mature Female Clerical Workers in the Auckland Region**

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### **Who is conducting this study**

My name is Doreen Davy and I work as a self-employed Career Counsellor in Auckland. In addition to this work, I am completing my Masters thesis in psychology through Massey University. As I am extensively involved in career counselling, often working with people who have experienced redundancy, I have chosen to focus my research thesis on the impact of redundancy on women aged 40 years and over in the Auckland region.

My research supervisor is Jocelyn Handy, a lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Massey University at Palmerston North.

#### **Who can take part**

As well as being females aged 40 years or over, the participants need to have experienced involuntary job loss through redundancy in the last five years. They also need to have been working in an office/clerical type role such as receptionist or secretary (full-time or at least 20 hours per week) when they were made redundant.

#### **What this study is about**

This study focuses on the experiences of mature women who have been made redundant and how this has influenced their lives. It is hoped that the information gained from this research can assist practitioners working in this area in the further understanding of the impact of redundancy and thus the overall findings may be published in an academic journal.

#### **What you would agree to do**

If you are willing to take part, all you need to do is complete an interview with me. In the interview we will talk about your experience of being made redundant, your experience searching for a new job, and what influence this may have had on you. The interview will be like a conversation and will take us approximately an hour to complete.





**Protecting your confidentiality**

The recorded interview will be transcribed by myself. The tapes (and transcripts) will not have your name on them, you will be identified by a pseudonym. Your tape and transcript will be stored securely and will be destroyed at the end of the research, or the original tape and transcript can be returned to you. If the research is to be published, a copy of the transcript will be kept for 4 years at Massey University, but you may have the original tape and transcript if you wish. It will not be possible to identify you from any reports that are prepared in the study. The information you give me will be used for my research only.

My research supervisor will also have access to the tapes and transcripts, but is bound by the same confidentiality agreement that I am.

**Your rights as a participant in this research**

If you agree to take part in the study, you have the right:

- to ask any questions about the study at any time
- to refuse to answer any particular questions
- to withdraw from the study at any time
- to ask for the tape-recorder to be turned off at any time
- to provide all information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher and research supervisor
- to be given a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded

**How to contact me**

You are welcome to contact me at any time during the study for further information or to clarify any questions you may have about the study.

My contact details are:

**Doreen Davy**

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

My supervisor's contact details are:

**Dr Jocelyn Handy**

Telephone (06) 350 5799 extn 2055 or

Email J.A. Handy@massey.ac.nz.



## Appendix G

**PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of Redundancy on Mature Female Clerical Workers in the Auckland Region.**

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### **Who is conducting this study**

My name is Doreen Davy and I work as a self-employed Career Counsellor in Auckland. In addition to this work, I am completing my Masters thesis in psychology through Massey University. I am particularly interested in redundancy and how it impacts on mature women, especially those working in the clerical areas.

My research supervisor is Jocelyn Handy, a lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Massey University at Palmerston North.

#### **Who can take part**

Any person working in the recruitment/employment industry or women fitting the criteria for primary participants (i.e. age 40+ having experienced job loss through redundancy in the last five years).

#### **What this study is about**

This study focuses on employment and redundancy issues facing mature women.

#### **What you would agree to do**

If you are willing to take part, all you need to do is complete an short interview with me. In the interview we will talk about your perceptions of employer's requirements and your experience in working with mature women who have been made redundant.

#### **Protecting your confidentiality**

I will transcribe all interview tapes. The tapes (and transcripts) will not have your name or your company's name mentioned. Your tape and transcript will be stored securely and will be destroyed at the end of the research, or the original tape and transcript can be returned to you.

If the research is to be published, a copy of the transcript will be kept for 4 years at Massey University. It will not be possible to identify you or your company from any reports that are prepared in the study. The information you give me will be used for my research only



My research supervisor will also have access to the tapes and transcripts, but is bound by the same confidentiality agreement that I am.

**Your rights as a participant in this research**

If you agree to take part in the study, you have the right:

- to ask any questions about the study at any time .
- to refuse to answer any particular questions .
- to withdraw from the study at any time in the next six months .
- to ask for the tape-recorder to be turned off at any time .
- to provide all information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher and research supervisor .
- to be given a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

**How to contact me**

You are welcome to contact me at any time during the study for further information or to clarify any questions you may have about the study.

My contact details are:

**Doreen Davy**

Telephone ( [REDACTED] [REDACTED] )

My supervisor's contact details are:

**Dr Jocelyn Handy**

Telephone (06) 3505799 extn 2055 or Email [J.A.Handy@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.A.Handy@massey.ac.nz).

Newspaper Articles

The first newspaper article "Redundancy survey begins" was printed in The North Shore Times Advertiser on Tuesday June 18th 2002. The second article "Redundant women sought" was printed in the North Harbour News on Friday June 21st 2002.

# Redundancy survey begins

By NIKKI CARMICHAEL

Redundancy is not a word many people like to hear, but a Massey University student wants to hear all about it.

Doreen Davy wants to talk to women aged 45 and over who have been made redundant, for her thesis for a masters degree in psychology.

Mrs Davy says the research is the first of its kind in the country.

The Albany resident will look at the impact redundancy has on mature women clerical workers in the Auckland region.

To take part in her study, people need to have experienced involuntary job loss through redundancy in the past four years.

Women must have worked for at least 20 hours a week in a clerical job, such as receptionist or secretary, when made redundant.

She hopes her research will help people to better understand the impact redundancy has.

Women who want to take part in her study will need to undergo an interview about their experiences.

For more information, call Mrs Davy, phone: 413-9869.

Page 8 NORTH HARBOUR NEWS, Friday June 21, 2002

# Redundant women sought

By NIKKI CARMICHAEL

Redundancy is not a word many people like to hear, but a Massey University student wants to hear all about it.

Doreen Davy wants to talk to women aged 45 and over who have been made redundant, for her thesis for a master's degree in psychology.

Mrs Davy says the research is the first of its kind in the country to focus on mature women and redundancy.

She needs more women who are willing to talk about their experiences.

The Albany resident will look at the impact redundancy has on mature women clerical workers in the Auckland region.

Mrs Davy works as a career counsellor and often works with people who have experienced redundancy.

In order to take part in her study, people need to have experienced involuntary job loss through redundancy in the past four years.

Women need to have worked in an office clerical type job, such as receptionist or secretary, who were employed fulltime or for at least 20 hours per week when made redundant.

She hopes her research will help people to better understand the impact redundancy has on people.

Women who want to take part in her study will need to undergo an interview about their experiences.

For more information, call Mrs Davy phone: 413-9869

## Appendix I

### Women's Experience of Redundancy

**Participants for a study of redundancy are required. This research will be used as part of a thesis for a Masters Degree in Psychology through Massey University, and will be undertaken under full academic supervision.**

#### **Participant Requirements:**

- Female
- Age 40 or older
- You have been made redundant (involuntary job loss) in the last five years
- You have lived in the Auckland area for the last five years
- The work that you were doing when made redundant was of a clerical nature, for example a receptionist, secretary, etc.
- You are willing to be interviewed and to talk about your experiences of redundancy.
- When you were made redundant, you were working full-time or at least 20 hours per week in the one job.

If you fit the above criteria and are interested in finding out more about this study, please contact the researcher

**Doreen Davy**



My supervisor is Dr Jocelyn Handy who is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Palmerston North. Contact details are:

**Jocelyn Handy**

Telephone (06) 350 5799 extn 2055 or

Email J.A. Handy@massey.ac.nz

Participants are assured of full anonymity and confidentiality and may withdraw from the study at any time.



**APPENDIX J**

**TABLE OF CODES**

<b><u>Open Codes</u></b>	<b><u>Axial Codes</u></b>	<b><u>Selective Codes</u></b>
Shock/Disbelief/Confusion Anger/Betrayal/Rejection Relief Humiliation Fear/Anxiety Sadness	Emotional Response	The Redundancy
Sleep Disturbance Somatic Problems Concentration Difficulties	Physical Response	
Anticipation of Redundancy Redundancy in General	Intellectual Response	
Confusing Ambiguous Notice Insensitivity/Patronising No Professional Help Offered Delayed Job Search	Exacerbating Factors	
Collective Redundancy Professional Support Redundancy Pay Emotional Support from family, friends, And colleagues Farewell function/gift/speech	Alleviating Factors	
<hr/>		
Sadness/Depression Anxiety Loss of Confidence Loss of Self-Esteem	Psychological Impact	Unemployment
Mortgage Repayments No Holidays Cutting Back on General Expenditure	Financial Impact	
Limited Social Life Social Isolation and Boredom	Social Impact	

**Open Coding**

No Difficulties Finding  
New Work

Age and Physical Appearance  
Competition For Jobs  
Lack of Qualifications  
Stigma of Redundancy  
Diminishing Confidence  
Long Tenure

Lack of Understanding  
From Friends/Family  
Disappointment with WINZ

Temp work  
Discouraging  
Role Confusion of Agencies  
Conflicting Values  
Negative Stereotype  
Emphasis on Physical Presentation  
Team Fit

Large Number of Rejections  
Fierce Competition for Jobs  
How Interviews Have Changed

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Type of Work  
Standard of Living

Relief and Gratitude  
Job Satisfaction  
Insecurity

Cynicism  
Reduced Level of Commitment

**Axial Coding**

Initial Expectations

Concerns Regarding  
Re-employment

Perceived Lack of Support

Recruitment Agencies

Experiences

New Work

Feelings

Attitudes

**Selective Coding**

The Job Search

Reemployment