

**HOW DO OLDER AND LOW-SKILLED WORKERS
COPE WITH UNEMPLOYMENT?**

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ABSTRACT

Title: How Do Older and Low-Skilled Workers Cope with Unemployment?

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In Hong Kong, little is known on the role of government retraining in helping older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment. The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between Hong Kong's government retraining and psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees, and the effects of demographic factor (age and gender) on coping mechanisms. The results are based on qualitative interviews with 15 Chinese re-employed security guards aged 50+ after participation in the government retraining programme.

The results showed that participants used both problem-focused coping (Hong Kong's government retraining) and emotion-focused coping (social support, escape, relaxation and leisure activities). Such retraining helped participants to meet their economic and psychosocial needs, and develop jobs skills for better well-being. Participants tended to be self-reliant and to rely on financial support from family members to save face.

The results also indicated that men were less likely to use social support than women to share their emotional distress with others, and relied more on relaxation and leisure activities. The lower educated tended to take part in less social leisure activities than the better educated to regulate stress, and preferred relaxation activities at home. Following re-employment, the better educated felt more underemployed than the lower educated, whereas those in former high-status jobs used higher-level self-categorisation than those in former low-status jobs as a way to escape from their low-status security job.

Overall, the findings show that features from the theories of Jahoda (1982), Fryer (1986) and Warr (1987) relate to well-being, and demographic factors (age, gender and education) and cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) affect coping mechanisms. These findings implicate the need to adjust the existing theoretical framework to be appropriate for Hong Kong Chinese society and to offer practical implications for policy and practice in the areas of retraining policy, gendered labour market, unemployment benefits, age-friendly working environments, retraining programmes and career counselling service aiming to enhance well-being and facilitate work re-entry of older workers.

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is considered an extremely stressful life event (Solove *et al.*, 2015) and can have serious impacts on individuals' psychological well-being (Paul and Moser, 2009). In Hong Kong, older and low-skilled workers aged 50+ face the risk of layoffs, early retirement and long-term unemployment (EOC, 2016). Research shows that this older cohort is usually stereotyped as lacking in up-to-date job skills and that there is widespread discrimination against those aged 50+ in the sphere of employment in a knowledge-driven economy (Chiu and Ho, 2006).

The question here concerns how individuals cope with unemployment. Some studies indicate that problem-focused coping to seek re-employment and emotion-focused coping to reduce stress can enhance well-being (Leana and Feldman, 1992). Recently, the positive psychological outcomes of government retraining have become a growing concern (Coutts *et al.*, 2014).

With an ageing population, Hong Kong's government helps unemployed persons aged 50+ to cope with unemployment through retraining programmes launched by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) (SCPP, 2015). The ERB is an independent statutory body set up by the government in 1992 to offer publicly-funded full-time and part-time retraining programmes so as to meet the changing needs of the labour market (ERB, 2016). Persons on those full-time retraining programmes to secure re-employment are still counted as unemployed persons (Census and Statistics

Department, 2015a). However, very little published qualitative research has captured the complexity of this coping process.

Against this background, the purpose of this thesis is to enquire into how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment, using qualitative data collected from ex-trainees aged 50+ after participation in the ERB low-skilled security retraining programme to secure re-employment. Hence, older and low-skilled workers refer to those aged 50+ in low-skilled occupations (SCPP, 2015), while coping with unemployment refers to behavioural and cognitive strategies used to promote psychological well-being (Leana and Feldman, 1992). To encourage research participants to use their own definitions, psychological well-being is broadly defined as positive psychological states (Theodossiou, 1998). Psychological well-being, well-being and mental health are used synonymously throughout this thesis.

After the opening section of this first chapter, the next section presents the background to the research problem in both Western and Hong Kong contexts, where the impacts of unemployment and the position of older and low-skilled workers in the labour market are discussed. Notions of face-saving, self-reliance and male breadwinning in Chinese culture are also included. The remaining sections specify the research problem, discuss the purpose of the research, outline the research questions, describe the significance of the topic under review and present an overview of the research methods used. Finally, the chapter concludes with the thesis outline.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In light of the current global economic slowdown, coupled with the problems associated with having an ageing population, this section discusses the background to the research problem in both Western and Hong Kong contexts.

The Western Context

The literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 help establish existing knowledge and potential gaps in the literature. Nevertheless, it might be useful at this point to discuss briefly the relationship between unemployment and psychological well-being, and the exclusion of older and low-skilled workers in a knowledge-driven economy and their improved situation amid an ageing population in the West, a scenario which may be applicable to Hong Kong.

Unemployment and Psychological Well-being

The recent global financial crisis beginning in 2008 resulted in widespread layoffs and downsizing (Financial Secretary's Office, 2016a). Despite the Eurozone's recovery from the recession starting from 2013, the European Commission forecasted in February 2016 that the Eurozone's unemployment rate would remain high at 10.2% in 2017. This economic upheaval has increased attention to the detrimental effects of unemployment on well-being (Brand, 2015).

There are two main unemployment theories that seek to explain the negative effects of unemployment on well-being (Muller and Waters, 2012). Jahoda's (1982) latent

deprivation model suggests that unemployment leads to the deprivation of five latent benefits (time structure, status and identity, social contact, collective purpose and enforced activity), resulting in decreased psychological well-being. In contrast, Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model states that manifest deprivation (income) is the main cause of psychological distress. Thereupon Strandh (2001) argues that government retraining and unemployment benefits can provide unemployed trainees with latent and manifest benefits for improvements in well-being, compared to being unemployed. Nevertheless, demographic and cultural factors may influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms (Paul and Moser, 2009).

Moreover, researchers have used Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping framework to help explain how individuals cope with unemployment (Gowan *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, this research combines the models of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) framework to explore how participants cope with unemployment. The section below will focus on why older and low-skilled workers are excluded from the labour market in a knowledge-driven economy and are thus in need of some support.

Older and Low-Skilled Workers in a Knowledge-Driven Economy

In the past few decades, there have been significant changes in the patterns of work and employment (Mills and Blossfeld, 2005). These changes are often associated with the consequences of global competition and flexibility in a knowledge-driven economy. A knowledge-driven economy refers to the use of ideas and technology rather than the exploitation of cheap labour (World Bank, 2003), while global

competition and flexibility define the levels of competitiveness in global economic activities (Yuasa, 2001). In this economy, employers seek flexibility to optimise labour costs (Cascio, 1995) and outsource their low-skilled manufacturing operations to low-wage economies to compete in a global market (Taylor *et al.*, 2010).

Consequently, older and low-skilled workers with less education have experienced more job displacement than they have done so in previous times (Schweke and Lawrence, 2002). According to Brand (2015), job displacement refers to involuntary job loss that comes as the result of economic and business activities, and job loss as an event, while unemployment is a state with respect to duration. Many of those displaced manufacturing workers are now permanently separated from their previous jobs (Hansen, 2009) and are slower to seek re-employment (OECD, 2005).

Furthermore, in many instances new technologies have replaced low- to semi-skilled jobs (Autor, 2010). In turn, low-skilled labour flows from goods to services, like food service workers, security guards, janitors and hairdressers (Autor and Dorn, 2013) while less physically taxing low-skilled jobs are now considered more suitable for older and low-skilled workers (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). This skill-biased technological change necessitates a new type of high-skilled worker called a ‘knowledge worker’ who is able to diagnose problems and implement solutions accordingly (Maclean and Ordonez, 2007). This changing nature of labour demand in a knowledge-driven economy results in a deteriorating position of low-skilled workers in the labour market (Machin, 2001).

Despite positive images of this older cohort, like honesty, experience and reliance, negative images appear to predominate, such as being less productive and technologically savvy than their better-educated younger counterparts (Anderson and Richardson, 2013). Employers tend to believe that older and low-skilled workers aged 50+ are incapable of developing new skills (Wrenn and Maurer, 2004). Hence, workers aged 50+ are more likely to be displaced than their younger counterparts (Koeber and Wright, 2001) and college-educated workers are less likely to be displaced than workers with low education (Zhivan *et al.*, 2012). As a whole, old age and obsolete production skills make it difficult for older workers to seek employment (Root and Park, 2009). However, the phenomenon of global outsourcing has spread job displacement to higher-skilled occupations as well (Taylor *et al.*, 2010).

In this knowledge-driven economy, many governments implement remedial interventions to help unemployed individuals to find new jobs (Evans-Klock *et al.*, 1999). Through retraining, older displaced workers with their previous knowledge and experiences can upgrade their skills for new occupations (Bernard, 2005). Thus, this disadvantaged group can benefit from skills-upgrading retraining programmes for re-employment (Gvaramadze, 2010).

Manpower Supply amid an Ageing Population

Many developed countries encounter problems associated with an ageing population in light of declining fertility and mortality (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015). Here, older workers are likely to become the dominant feature of manpower supply in the labour market

(OECD, 1998). To maintain manpower supply, and sustain social security and pension systems, many governments help economically inactive older people back into work so as to keep them working longer (Riach and Loretto, 2009).

Nevertheless, in past decades, employment and social practices in many countries had actually discouraged older workers from staying in employment (OECD, 2006). Beginning in the 1990s, early retirement was encouraged. When companies downsized, many facilitated the early retirement of older workers who were often considered expensive (imbalance between wages and productivity) and with limited employability (low ability for jobs) (Cedefop, 2010). Accordingly, a large proportion of older men became economically inactive (Golding, 2011).

To cope with population ageing, OECD (2006) called on policymakers to eliminate early retirement schemes and support longer employment spans. Some policymakers have started to extend the retirement age (Parry and Tyson, 2011). For instance, in the UK, the state pension age is 65 for men and 62.5 for women in 2014 (OECD, 2015a). Women's state pension age is gradually increasing to 65 by November 2018 and the state pension age will further increase to 66 by October 2020 and to 67 between 2026 and 2028 for both genders.

Hong Kong Research Context

The scenario described above of older and low-skilled workers in the West is also applicable to Hong Kong. This sub-section starts with a discussion on the low labour force participation rate of this older cohort and recent labour market policy changes in light of the challenges faced by having an ageing population in Hong

Kong. Thereafter, this section discusses Chinese cultural values, explaining how face-saving, self-reliance and male breadwinning influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms, compared with other Western countries.

Labour Force Participation of Older and Low-Skilled Workers

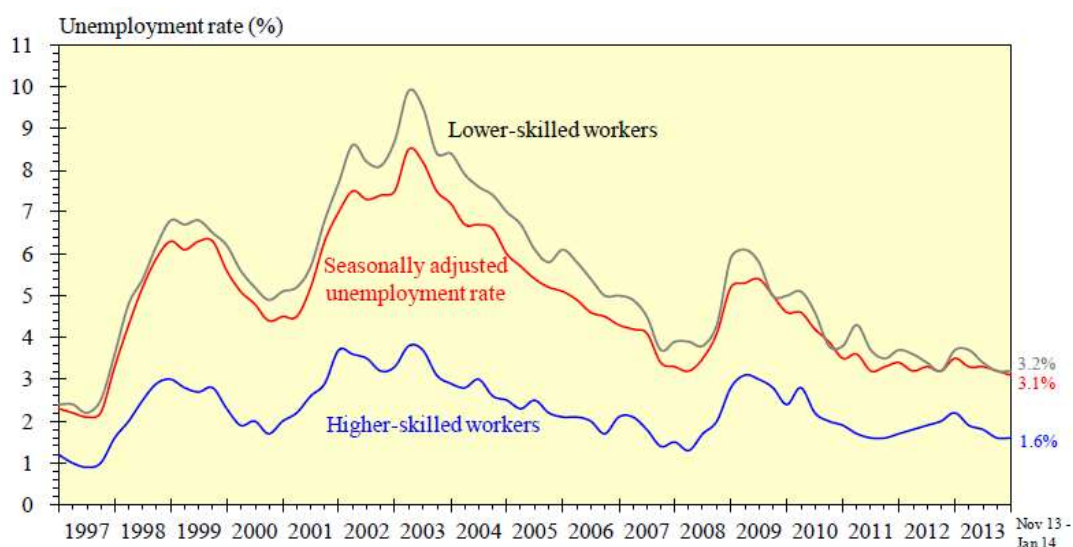
As in many Western countries, Hong Kong's economy has been transformed from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge-driven economy. Since the late 1980s, many employers have relocated their low value-added productions to China for cost reduction (Hsieh and Woo, 2005). In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the manufacturing sector dropped from 24% in 1980 to 18% in 1990, and then further to 7% in 1996, while the service sector increased from around 67% in 1980 to 70% in 1985, and then from 74% in 1990 to 84% in 1996 (Hong Kong Government, 1998). In 2013, the services industries contributed 93% to GDP while manufacturing only contributed 1% to GDP (Hong Kong Government, 2015).

This economic restructuring reflects a shift in the skill requirements in the labour market. Older and low-skilled workers with fewer skills and less education are now more easily displaceable than their better-educated younger counterparts because their skills are not in demand in the labour market (Lee and Wong, 2004). Those displaced workers are defined as persons aged 17+ who lose their jobs involuntarily owing to the relocation of operations to China; or slack work in the company; or dismissal (Census and Statistics Department, 2003). The ERB has appointed training bodies since 1992 to provide retraining programmes with the primary aim of assisting unemployed individuals in finding new jobs (ERB, 2016).

Furthermore, Hong Kong has undergone economic recessions since the late 1990s including: (a) the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, (b) the burst of the "IT bubbles" in 2001, (c) the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 and (d) the Global Financial Crisis in 2008-2009 (Financial Secretary's Office, 2015). As a result, unemployment rates surged to historical high levels at 8.5% in June 2003 (Commission of Poverty Summit, 2015) and unemployment has been extended to include many higher-skilled workers (Chan and Chan, 2013).

Nevertheless, the unemployment rate of higher-skilled workers is significantly lower than that of lower-skilled workers (Figure 1.1). As of writing this thesis, the unemployment rate has increased by 0.1% from the preceding quarter to 3.4% in the first quarter of 2016, while Hong Kong's economic growth has slowed further because of the unsteady external economic environment (Financial Secretary's Office, 2016b). Thus, the outlook on employment has remained cautious.

Figure 1.1 Unemployment Rate (1997-2013)



Source: Hong Kong Government (2014: 5).

Against this economic background, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of older people has decreased markedly (SCPP, 2015). In 2013, the LFPR decreased from 76.8% for those aged 50-54 to 63.7% for those aged 55-59 and further to just 39.4% for those aged 60-64. Meanwhile, for the same year, nearly 40% of economically inactive persons aged 50-64 are reported as being retired (SCPP, 2015).

It is argued that a decline in the LFPR of older workers may be exacerbated due to age discrimination in employment (Chiu and Ngan, 1999). Cheung *et al.* (2011:127) found that older workers were often stereotyped as "having difficulty taking up new jobs", "being slow in learning" and "not enjoying teaching younger workers".

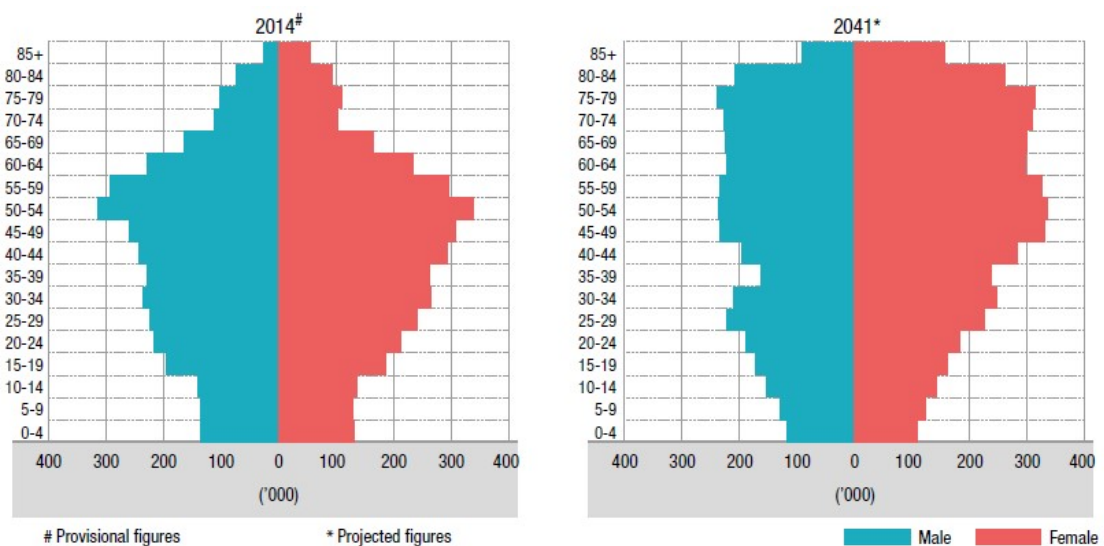
However, there are no age discrimination laws in Hong Kong (EOC, 2016). The Labour Department only launched the 'Practical Guidelines for Employers on Eliminating Age Discrimination in Employment' to encourage employers to follow as recently as 2006. Nevertheless, employees who are victims of discrimination may lodge a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Commission, which is an independent statutory body designed to promote equality and eliminate discrimination. In many ways, the labour market has become more favourable to older workers due to recent labour market policy changes.

Labour Market Policy Changes for Older and Low-Skilled Workers

The population of Hong Kong is ageing as is the case in other Western developed countries. The proportion of older people continues to increase, whilst the

younger cohort is declining (Figure 1.2). The Hong Kong Government in 2015 increased the retirement age of civil service new recruits from 60 to 65 (SCPP, 2015). Though Hong Kong has no mandatory retirement age, the average retirement age is 60 in 2014, which likely reflects the previous age limit set by the government for civil servants (EOC, 2014). Additionally, the government has facilitated the re-employment of older persons aged 50+ through various ERB retraining programmes (SCPP, 2015). Today, older workers aged 50+ have a greater number of retraining opportunities for new jobs than ever before.

Figure 1.2 Inverted Population Pyramid in Hong Kong (2014 and 2041)



Source: SCPP (2015: 2).

Moreover, many workers have relied on the Mandatory Provident Fund since 2000 as a pension scheme, to which they need to contribute up to 5% of their wages, which employers then match (MPFSA, 2015). When inflation and high management fees are taken into consideration, it is unlikely to provide enough for a stable retirement package for older workers (*South China Morning Post*, 2013). Thus, some early retirees consider returning to work if suitable employment

becomes available (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). Beyond poverty, aspects such as self-reliance, face-saving and male breadwinning in Chinese culture can also serve to motivate early retirees to work.

Chinese Cultural Values

Chinese culture puts an emphasis on obligation (Chiu and Wong, 2005). The successes of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore can be attributed to a common Confucian culture (Leys, 1997). Confucianism defines proper behaviour within Chinese society (Yan and Sorenson, 2006). Hong Kong Chinese tend to be self-reliant through employment that is subsumed under Confucian work-related cultural values (thrift, persistence, shame and face) (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987).

In particular, the Chinese have developed a sensitivity to face (Gilbert and Tsao, 2000). In this context, face means pride, reputation and respectability (Kwan and Ofori, 2001). Face-saving refers to one's self-respect in regard to their status and roles in society (Yang, 2002), whereas losing face refers to individuals who fail to perform their expected roles in society (Hue, 2008). In Hong Kong, being unemployed is considered an unsuccessful social performance (Chiu and Ho, 2006), leading one to lose face (Yang, 2002).

Moreover, this pattern of self-reliance is further reinforced by the traditional collectivist ideology of Confucianism. The basic unit of Chinese society is the family and not the individual (Yan and Sorenson, 2006). Chinese people can only build self-esteem if they work to support themselves and their families (Chung,

2010). When unemployed, Chinese people tend to seek financial assistance from family members (Pang *et al.*, 2005).

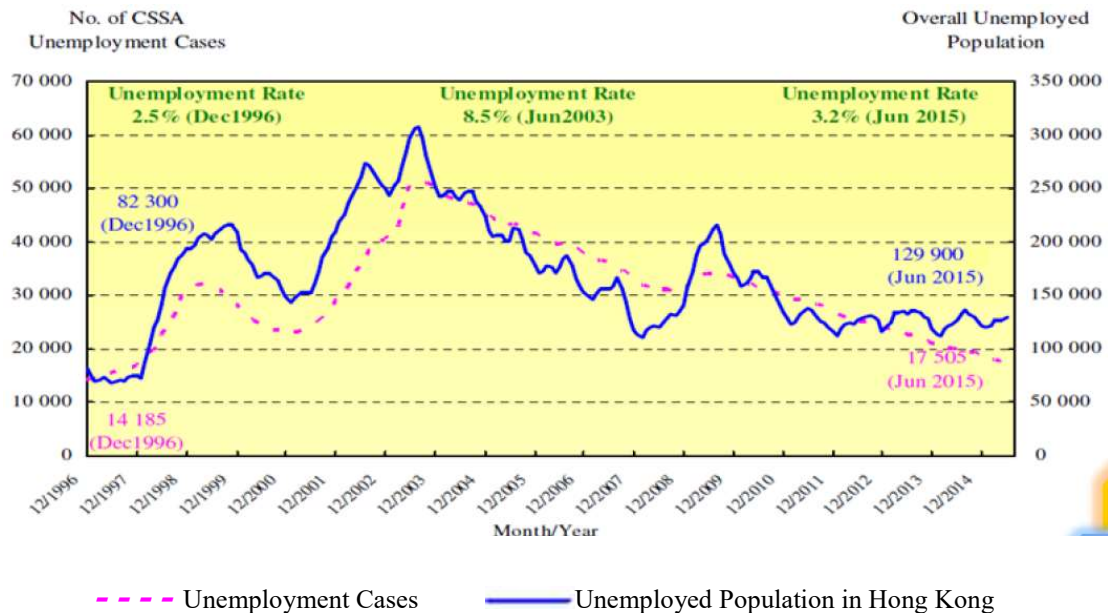
As such, Hong Kong's government is keen to place emphasis on the traditional Confucian faith in self-reliance to solve the problems of unemployment and poverty with minimal state provision (Chiu and Wong, 2005). This implies that participation in the labour market secures individuals' welfare, and private family welfare is more morally appropriate than social welfare assistance. Hence, seeking social welfare assistance is a symbol of guilt and shame among Hong Kong Chinese.

Recently, the government has proclaimed that employment is still the best route out of poverty, and that self-reliance is still a core value of Hong Kong people (Commission of Poverty Summit, 2015). This can be demonstrated by the trends seen in the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) caseload, which parallel the overall unemployment rate (Figure 1.3). Similarly, the current retraining policy to facilitate re-employment of older workers aims to lower their use of social welfare assistance.

When compared to Western societies, the development of unemployment benefits in Hong Kong lags behind (Chan and Chan, 2013). Unemployment benefits can help unemployed persons mitigate poverty and improve levels of health (OECD, 2015b). Consequently, unemployed individuals can rely on social welfare assistance to help them cope with unemployment (Paul and Moser, 2009). In contrast, seeking social welfare assistance tends to be stigmatising in Chinese collectivistic societies (Chiu and Wong, 2005). Correspondingly, unemployment may have more deleterious effects in Chinese collectivistic societies than it does in Western societies due to a

different cultural interpretation of welfare payments.

Figure 1.3 Trends of CSSA Caseload and the Overall Unemployment Rate (1996-2014)



Source: Commission of Poverty Summit (2015: 24).

Considering the notion of male breadwinning in Chinese culture, men are responsible for paid work and women are responsible for housework (Yip and Ng, 2002). Traditionally, Chinese men have always been assigned the role as breadwinner in the family, whereas women assume their homemaker role. Therefore, women are largely responsible for domestic duties, while men are less likely to share housework (Women's Commission, 2011). As for unemployed, men display lower well-being than women (Lai and Chan, 2002). This phenomenon could be explained because of gender roles within couples.

As Strandh *et al.*, (2013) explain, women are discouraged to participate in the labour market in a traditional male breadwinner model. In this context, women

generally earn less and have fewer career opportunities than men, while unemployment has stronger negative impacts on mental health among men than women because men lose their only or major source of household income.

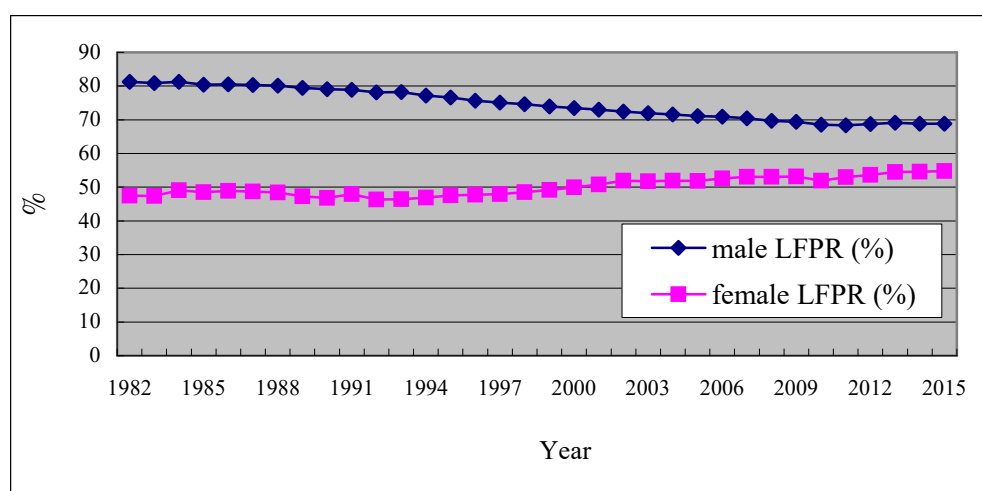
However, this gender difference has gradually changed in most Western countries and has moved towards a dual breadwinner model where institutions provide family supports to influence patterns of gender divisions of labour such as parental leave programmes to ease work-family conflicts (Neilson and Stanfors, 2014). In this context, women can enjoy similar employment rates and careers as men in the labour market (Strandh *et al.*, 2013). Hence, there is a small gender difference in the relationship between unemployment and well-being. Moreover, advancing gender equality can enhance productivity and make institutions more representative (World Bank, 2011).

Alternatively, Hong Kong fits a traditional male breadwinner model. Despite women's increasing participation in the labour market, male employees still constitutes a larger proportion of the labour force (Figure 1.4). In particular, the proportion of men in the labour market is much higher than that of women in older age groups (i.e. 50-64) (Table 1.1). These figures reflect that men are traditional breadwinners in older age categories. Furthermore, the median hourly wages of men with a primary education and below and with a post-secondary education are higher than that of women by about 29% and 33%, respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2015b).

In all, a gender-biased or gendered labour market exists in Hong Kong where women are in a less advantageous position than men in terms of labour force

participation rate and employment earnings. Compared with most Western countries, Hong Kong Chinese society still harbours perceptions about traditional male breadwinning that hinder women from developing their full potential in the workforce (Women's Commission, 2016).

Figure 1.4 Labour Force Participation Rate by Sex (1982-2015)



Source: Census and Statistics Department (2016).

Table 1.1 Labour Force Participation Rates by Age Group and Sex (2015)

Age Group	Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	
	Male	Female
15 - 19	13.9	12.8
20 - 24	64.9	65.3
25 - 29	93.9	83.2
30 - 34	96.5	76.4
35 - 39	96.6	69.1
40 - 44	95.5	68.5
45 - 49	94.6	71.3
50 - 54	91.3	63.1
55 - 59	82.8	49.3
60 - 64	57.5	27.6
65 and above	14.7	4.9
Overall:	69.2	50.7

Source: Labour and Welfare Bureau (2016: 14).

Turning to the issue of face, Yang (2002) argues that the impact of unemployment is multiplied for unemployed men in that they lose face if they cannot fulfil their role as breadwinner. Should this be the case, finding a job helps the individual save face. Pang *et al.* (2005) also contend that many displaced female workers feel resentment while they involuntarily retreat back into their traditional family role due to limited job opportunities in a gendered labour market. Given this special Chinese context, Hong Kong is an interesting case for studying unemployment and coping mechanisms of older and low-skilled workers.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Based on the background to the research problem, problems exist with regard to age and gender in a Hong Kong Chinese context. The older workers aged 50+ face risks of layoffs and age discrimination in employment (EOC, 2016). Unemployment is more psychologically damaging to men than women in a breadwinner model (Lai and Chan, 2002), whereas unemployed women feel distressed to assume the traditional role of homemaker while faced with no alternative in a gendered labour market (Pang *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly, age and gender may influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms (Paul and Moser, 2009). Even so, the relationship between demographic factors (age and gender) and coping is rarely examined in Hong Kong.

In light of an ageing population, the ERB focuses on older workers aged 50+ as one of its key retraining targets (SCPP, 2015). Much of these policy initiatives focus on getting older workers to be retrained for re-employment and earning incomes, while much less attention is paid to coping mechanisms for those aforementioned

psychological effects (Coutts *et al.*, 2014). In fact, there has been very little research on interventions (Wanberg, 2012), let alone a focus on unemployment among older workers in non-Western contexts (Paul and Moser, 2009).

Moreover, the frameworks used in unemployment research tend to be Western-centric while little is known about the experiences and coping mechanisms in different cultures. As discussed earlier, face-saving, self-reliance and male breadwinning in Chinese culture may account for differences in well-being and coping between Hong Kong and most Western countries (Paul and Moser, 2009).

Overall, using a Hong Kong Chinese context has the potential to generate interesting qualitative insights into coping mechanisms of government retraining for those psychological effects on well-being, and the influence of demography and Chinese culture on well-being and coping. In short, the evidence presented here shows that the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers is under researched and warrants investigation in Hong Kong.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment in Hong Kong.

Central Research Question

How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?

Research Sub-Questions

This thesis is split into two parts.

1. *What are the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest coping strategies and psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees?*

In line with previous research (Strandh, 2001), this thesis argues that Hong Kong's government retraining may help participants cope with access to Jahoda's (1982) latent functions of employment and Fryer's (1986) manifest functions of employment for improvements in well-being. Using the models of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986), this thesis explains why government retraining is important and examines what features are related to psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees with a view of providing suggestions for suitable interventions.

2. *How do demographic factors (age and gender) influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers?*

In support of Paul and Moser (2009), this thesis proposes that demographic factors (age and gender) may influence the level of mental health in unemployment and affect the coping of older and low-skilled workers with the aim of identifying the most distressed groups in need of special help.

These two research sub-questions represent a critical path to answer the central research question. The development of these research sub-questions is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. With the research questions stated, the next section describes the significance of this research.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

An examination of how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment contributes to what is an under-researched area in a Hong Kong Chinese context. The findings may provide significant implications for empirical, theoretical and practical domains. In respect of empirical and theoretical implications, this research attempts to contribute to current knowledge on an integrative theoretical framework of stress and coping with unemployment with empirical support.

By fitting Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model and Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping framework, this thesis explores the interactions between Hong Kong's government retraining, its latent and manifest benefits, and the well-being of unemployed older and low-skilled trainees. Furthermore, qualitative data collected from ex-trainees of the ERB security retraining programme present an excellent empirical ground for testing these theories of unemployment and coping. Subsequently, this empirical research can show the relative contribution of each model to the prediction of psychological well-being and the potentially heightened contribution of combining both models with empirical support.

With regard to the practical implications for policy and practice, this thesis

contributes to the knowledge base on the role of Hong Kong's government retraining in improving the psychological well-being and facilitating the re-employment of older workers. Research on the psychological effects of government retraining has been mostly quantitatively in nature, and the narratives and voices of trainees most affected by government retraining are missing.

A good understanding of what features contribute to increased well-being is needed to design and implement effective interventions to assist unemployed individuals. Therefore, these findings may assist policymakers and practitioners with an additional lens through which to facilitate their coping efforts to compensate for the loss of latent and manifest benefits for better well-being. By demonstrating the latent and manifest benefits of government retraining, older workers may be more willing to re-enter the labour market in alignment with current labour market policy in an ageing population.

Furthermore, trainees in such government retraining are neither employed nor unemployed but occupy an intermediate labour market status (labour market limbo) within the retraining processes towards re-employment (Coutts, 2009). In the West, retraining does not necessarily result in re-employment (Andersen, 2008). In contrast, the ERB provides unemployed trainees with market-driven and employment-oriented retraining courses to guarantee them new jobs following retraining in Hong Kong (ERB, 2016). This thesis contributes to the knowledge base on the role of retraining settings in facilitating re-employment of older workers for good well-being.

Additionally, the effects of unemployment may vary by culture and demography

(Paul and Moser, 2009). Using a Hong Kong Chinese context, this thesis assesses the associated effects of demographic and cultural factors on coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled workers. These findings may suggest interventions for this specific group to deal with psychological distress affected by societal norms and cultural values. Altogether, these findings may also help researchers to build theories and frameworks that are appropriate for Hong Kong.

In all, much of the research on unemployment has been undertaken in the West. Given this non-Western context, this thesis wishes to contribute to, and have implications for, the study of unemployment and coping. A detailed discussion on the contributions and implications of this thesis is included in the concluding chapter. The next section briefly explains the research methods used in carrying out the study.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODS

Using a qualitative approach is useful for understanding complex issues and identifying the social or cultural norms of society (Hennink *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, a qualitative approach is used in answering the research questions. Consequently, the researcher can have a better understanding of the complex interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest functions of coping and well-being; and how demographic factors (age and gender) influence coping mechanisms of participants from their culturally grounded perspective.

Hence, purposive sampling is adopted to identify participants who are most likely to provide data that are relevant to the research questions (Polit *et al.*, 2001). As

perceptions and experiences of government retraining are crucial information to address the research questions, a group of ex-trainees of the ERB's full-time security retraining programme to secure re-employment is targeted. Prior approval was obtained from the gatekeeper (property manager) in the public sector to recruit re-employed low-skilled security guards aged 50+ after participation in this retraining programme.

Upon receipt of ethical approval from the University of Leicester on 30 March 2015, a recruitment exercise of participants was launched. The semi-structured interviews were conducted from April to June 2015. Finally, 15 Chinese re-employed security guards (8 females and 7 males, with ages ranging from 50 to 63 years) voluntarily participated in this research and helped achieve data saturation at which point no more new themes emerged (Guest *et al.*, 2006). The research methods are addressed in more detail in Chapter 4.

THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis has six chapters. This first chapter has established the foundation for this thesis by introducing background information, and the research problem and questions. The significance of the research and an overview of research methods have been described. Chapter 1 also provides an overview of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature to examine the theoretical and research issues related to unemployment and coping. The role of government retraining and the effects of satisfactory re-employment are included. Following a critical

review of the theoretical and empirical literature, a theoretical framework is proposed and two research sub-questions are formulated to guide this research.

Chapter 3 details the government retraining settings in Hong Kong, which are adopted as the empirical context for this thesis. This chapter reviews the government retraining policy in the pre- and post-1997 periods, together with a manpower projection up to 2020. The functions of the ERB, retraining courses for unemployed individuals, and the security service industry in Hong Kong are all discussed.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methods utilised in this research and the justifications for using qualitative methodology are explained. It discusses how the research is conducted and how the data is collected and analysed. Pilot interviews and trustworthiness procedures are described. Finally, some ethical considerations are addressed.

Chapter 5 presents the results and analysis in answering all research questions with supporting quotes from interviews, relevant literature and theory. Based on the findings, the proposed theoretical framework in Chapter 2 is revised to show the key contributions the thesis makes to existing knowledge.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 6, presents an overview of the research project, a summary of the findings, and their contributions and implications. Finally, remarks on the limitations of the thesis and future research directions are addressed.

CHAPTER 2

UNEMPLOYMENT AND COPING

INTRODUCTION

This thesis centres on the research question: *How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?* Its primary objective is to investigate whether Hong Kong's government retraining can aid the process of coping with unemployment, using government retraining settings in Hong Kong as the empirical context. Accordingly, there are two literature review chapters in this thesis that help establish existing knowledge and identify potential gaps. This chapter carries out an in-depth review of the literature on unemployment and coping, while the following chapter reviews the government retraining settings in Hong Kong.

This chapter opens with a consideration of the effects of unemployment and then analyses the theories of unemployment of Jahoda (1982), Warr (1987) and Fryer (1986) that help explain the effects of unemployment. The next area of focus is Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping framework that informs how individuals cope with unemployment, especially with regard to cognitive appraisal, coping and outcomes. The role of government retraining in improving mental health and the effects of satisfactory re-employment on well-being are also highlighted. Finally, this chapter concludes with a proposed theoretical framework and two research sub-questions to guide this research.

NEGATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is considered as a stressful life event for most people (Holmes and Rahe, 1967; Paykel *et al.*, 1971; Grant *et al.*, 1976; Paul and Moser, 2009; Solove *et al.*, 2015). Research in the West has repeatedly indicated lowered psychological well-being of unemployed individuals (Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld, 1938; Feather and O'Brien, 1986; McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2005; Paul and Moser, 2009).

According to Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938), lowered psychological well-being includes loss of morale, values, personal prestige, self-confidence and economic security. When compared with employed individuals, unemployed people suffer poorer mental health (Kessler *et al.*, 1988) and lower self-esteem (Goldsmith *et al.*, 1996). In addition, unemployed people in a state of prolonged unemployment report increased levels of stress (Jackson and Warr, 1984; Warr and Jackson, 1984). Depressive symptoms include increased depression, anxiety, stress, anger, suicide attempts, alcohol abuse and social isolation, together with reduced self-esteem, life satisfaction, sense of mastery and social identity (Hanisch, 1999).

However, there is no precise definition for the term 'psychological well-being' in the literature. According to Banks *et al.* (1980:187), psychological well-being refers to individuals' feelings of "personal effectiveness, success and satisfaction". Incidentally, Theodossiou (1998) argues that psychological well-being may range from positive to negative psychological states. To allow research participants to use their own definitions, psychological well-being is broadly defined as positive psychological states in this thesis (Theodossiou, 1998). This raises the question of why unemployment can be detrimental to well-being.

PSYCHOLOGICAL UNEMPLOYMENT MODELS

Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model, Warr's (1987) vitamin model and Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model propose different explanations of the deteriorating psychological effects of unemployment (Coutts *et al.*, 2014). They may also serve different frameworks for understanding the kind of coping mechanisms that increase the well-being of research participants in government retraining.

Latent Deprivation Model

The negative psychological consequences of unemployment were first studied during the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the early 1930s, Jahoda *et al.* (1972 [1933]) conducted research on unemployment in the Austrian village of Marienthal. Owing to the collapse of this village's single textile factory, most families relied on unemployment benefits to survive. The findings show that unemployment is associated with deprivation of social interactions, financial hardship and deterioration in well-being, and called the public's attention to the deleterious effects of unemployment.

Following this seminal piece of research in the 1930s, Jahoda (1982) developed the latent deprivation model. On Jahoda's (1982:59) assumption, employment provides *"the imposition of a time structure, the enlargement of the scope of social experience into areas less emotionally charged than family life, participation in a collective purpose or effort, the assignment by virtue of employment of status and identity, and required regular activity"*.

Jahoda (1982) argues that the environment of employment fulfils people's economic and psychosocial needs. Paid work will not only provide workers with manifest benefits (income), but also access to five latent benefits (time structure, collective purpose, social contact, status and identity, and enforced activity). Importantly, deprivation of these latent functions of employment will result in decreased well-being; as individuals are assumed to be passive and distressed, once unemployed.

These five latent benefits have showed a strong social contact dimension in employment (Batinic *et al.*, 2010). A time structure is related to a daily routine on the waking day imposed by employment. Jahoda (1982) considers a time structure as the most important latent benefit for employed individuals. As Jahoda (1982:22) put it, "*... when there is nothing that has to be done; boredom and waste of time become the rule*". This reflects that when a time structure is removed in unemployment, boredom becomes a major source of distress for individuals. Jahoda (1982) also argues that though other social institutions (family and leisure) may provide these latent benefits to some extent, there are no social institutions that can provide the manifest functions of earning a living.

As opposed to Jahoda's (1982) assertions, some studies suggest that employment is not the only social institution that provides access to the latent functions. Creed *et al.* (2001) argue that government retraining provides the latent functions of employment such as time structure. Similarly, Hong Kong's government retraining may help participants organise their time structure as they have to start early for retraining each morning while the retraining activities are structured into a routine.

Moreover, Kilpatrick and Trew (1985) revealed that unemployed individuals who kept active and developed satisfying activities out of home were more likely to experience improved well-being than those who did not, whilst Starrin and Larson (1987) reported that unemployed people who replaced unemployment with other meaningful activities were more likely to enjoy their lives than those who did not. Winefield *et al.* (1992) also suggest that purposeful activities (solitary and gregarious) mediate the detrimental effects of unemployment. Along these lines, this chapter argues that engagement in meaningful social leisure activities may help participants improve well-being. This issue will be explained further in the section on 'Stress and Coping Framework'.

Regarding collective purpose in Jahoda's (1982) model, employment connects workers to the purposes of society or common goals that transcend their own. Accordingly, employed individuals can work with others towards meaningful life goals and collective purposes that cannot be attained by individuals alone. As such, employment allows workers to have the feelings of being needed by other people and useful to society as valued members. The withdrawal of this psychosocial need is related to lowered well-being. Alternatively, participants may consider themselves as being useful to society when attending government retraining for re-employment.

To enhance the aforesaid psychosocial need of collective purpose, social contact is important for workers in Jahoda's (1982) model. Workers need to contact colleagues and other people regularly, and share their experiences so as to extend their social network outside the nuclear family. The lack of this social contact in unemployment will be detrimental to individuals' well-being. Dieckhoff and Gash

(2015) support the notion that unemployed individuals have lower levels of social participation than those employed. Nevertheless, participants may make social contacts with trainers and fellow trainees in retraining centres.

For the concept of status and identity, Jahoda (1982) considers one's status and identity as often defined by one's job. The social status of an individual is derived from society's value system for construing one's identity. Individuals see themselves in the same way as the others see them. In the context of unemployment, workers are distressed to lose their work-related status and identity.

Subsequently, unemployed individuals may bear the welfare stigma outside the normal order of society. Many people view those on unemployment benefits as lazy and unwilling to work (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2014). In Hong Kong, welfare assistance recipients are often similarly labelled as a burden to society because Chinese people put emphasis on self-reliance through employment (Chung, 2010). This heavy self-reliance may help explain why participants would rather attend government retraining for re-employment than receive social welfare assistance.

Furthermore, unemployed individuals often perceive themselves as having a lower social status compared with those in other occupational categories (Wahl *et al.*, 2013). However, workers' attitudes towards unemployment seem to have changed in the prevailing unstable economic climate. Omori (1997) found that unemployed people in areas of high unemployment are less stigmatised than those unemployed in lower unemployment areas.

Similarly, McFayden (1995) argues that unemployed individuals who use some

other label of self-categorisation such as housewife or retired worker can cope with stigma and low self-esteem. Cassidy (2001) also reported that people who categorised themselves as 'unemployed' suffered poor mental health. Conversely, when participants in government retraining become trainees, their negative labels may be replaced with more positive ones to enhance self-esteem.

In addition, Jahoda (1982) assumes that professionals of higher socio-economic status may find it harder to cope with unemployment, while manual job workers of lower socio-economic status may consider their position better than having no status at all. Latack *et al.* (1995) argue that there is a harder-they-fall effect on professional workers. In other words, those who perceive that they are underemployed, in that their form of employment is beneath their educational attainments, suffer increased distress (Burris, 1983). To maintain self-worth, unemployed workers frequently retain their old working identity (Joelson and Wahlquist, 1987). Raito and Lahelma (2015) reported that unemployed journalists who still identified themselves as professionals had better mental health than their unemployed counterparts who did not share this lingering identity trait.

In contrast, Johnson and Jackson (2012) found that career transition support and financial compensation offered by employers might protect high-status laid-off managers from poor well-being. Mandemakers and Monden (2013) also revealed that higher-educated men experienced less distress than lower-educated men because of their better re-employment chances. These findings seem to contradict the assumptions put forward by Jahoda (1982) and Latack *et al.* (1995) that people of higher-status are more seriously hit by unemployment than lower-status individuals. This issue of socio-economic status carries weight in this research, as

some participants come from high-status backgrounds, those of whom after taking low-status security jobs tended to become underemployed. This issue of underemployment will be explained in the section on 'Effects of Satisfactory Re-employment'.

In respect to the final latent function of employment, Jahoda (1982) points out that employment also enforces some kind of regular and intentional activities for workers. Being active in regular activities in employment is better for individuals' well-being than being passive; even the notion of being active is derived from the need to earn a living. In this light, government retraining may enforce activities for participants in retraining environments.

Moreover, Jahoda (1982) believes that the latent functions of employment keep people motivated to work and thus psychologically healthy. As Jahoda (1981:188) argues, *"latent 'objective' consequences of employment in complex industrialised societies which help me to understand the motivation to work that goes beyond earning a living and to understand why employment is psychologically supportive even when conditions are bad..."*. In other words, employment is assumed to be universally beneficial to individuals' well-being and that even a bad job is better than no job.

However, Jahoda's (1982) belief about the preferability of poor employment over unemployment is refuted by research evidence that unsatisfactory re-employment can be just as psychologically damaging as unemployment (Leana and Feldman, 1995; Wanberg, 1995; Kinicki *et al.*, 2000). Thus, this chapter argues that Hong Kong's government retraining should help participants find satisfactory jobs for

enhancing well-being. This point will be explored later in the section on 'Effects of Satisfactory Re-employment'.

On the whole, Jahoda's (1982) theoretical insights have inspired a series of studies related to this field. Several studies reported that unemployed individuals who were less structured and purposeful in their use of time experienced worse well-being than those who were employed (Feather and Bond, 1983; Wanberg *et al.*, 1997). In contrast, it was suggested that increased time structure enhances the well-being of re-employed individuals (Wanberg *et al.*, 1997). Creed and Macintyre (2001) also showed that status was the most important contributor to well-being, followed by time structure and collective purpose.

Moreover, Batinic *et al.* (2010) demonstrated that those working in higher-status occupations had better access to the latent benefits with higher levels of well-being than those in lower-status occupations. Similarly, Paul and Batinic (2010) revealed that employed people had better access to the latent benefits of employment, including time structure, collective purpose, social contact and enforced activity than unemployed individuals and persons out of the labour force (retirees, homemakers and students). Selenko *et al.* (2011) also reported that deprivation of the latent benefits led to poor well-being.

Importantly, Creed *et al.* (1996) showed that government retraining which provided unemployed trainees with the opportunity to interact with trainers and trainees, behave with a collective purpose, and engage in activities structured by rules improves well-being towards the completion of the course and over time. These findings reflect that Hong Kong's government retraining may facilitate participants'

coping with access to latent benefits to improve well-being.

Overall, Jahoda (1982) contends that job loss deprives individuals of five latent benefits of employment: time structure, identity and status, social contact, collective purpose and enforced activity that correspond with basic human needs. However, the research evidence demonstrates that unemployed trainees have access to the latent benefits of employment while attending government retraining, thereby improving well-being (Creed *et al.*, 1996; Creed *et al.*, 2001).

In view of these findings, Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model is applicable to this research. By using Jahoda's (1982) model, this research can demonstrate empirically whether Hong Kong's government retraining can have consequences for coping behaviours to help participants access the latent benefits of employment for better well-being. Subsequently, the researcher can understand how government retraining aids the process of coping with unemployment and why government training has a positive effect on well-being. The findings of this research may be useful for the design of interventions to overcome some of the detrimental aspects of unemployment and enhance the well-being of unemployed individuals.

However, Fryer (1986) argues that deprivation of manifest functions of employment (economic needs) is more significant than deprivation of latent functions of employment (psychosocial needs) when it comes to explaining the poor well-being of unemployed people. This lengthy debate will be followed up in the sub-section on 'Agency Restriction Model'. In fact, Jahoda (1982) disregards the well-being of unemployed individuals in different environments, as suggested in Warr's (1987) vitamin model.

Vitamin Model

Warr (1987) focuses on the quality of environments by arguing that employment provides a wide range of environmental features (vitamins) and that the quality of environmental features affects the well-being of employed and unemployed individuals in various contexts. In this vitamin model, there are nine environmental features: (1) opportunity for control, (2) opportunity for skill use, (3) externally generated goals, (4) variety, (5) environmental clarity, (6) availability of money, (7) physical security, (8) opportunity for interpersonal contact and (9) valued social position.

Warr (1987) assumes that sufficient access to these nine environmental features will result in higher levels of well-being. Conversely, their absence, in different measures, will impair well-being. For example, unemployment deprives individuals of environmental features associated with employment such as opportunity of skill use, opportunity for interpersonal contact and money that may negatively impact on unemployed individuals' well-being.

Within Warr's (1987) model, environmental features are further categorised into two groups: AD and CE. Like vitamins A and D, environmental features AD are harmful in excess ('additional decrement'). Six features fall into this group: (1) opportunity for control, (2) opportunity for skill use, (3) externally generated goals, (4) variety, (5) environmental clarity and (8) opportunity for interpersonal contact. Similar to vitamins C and E, an increase beyond a certain level adds no further benefits to well-being ('constant effect'). Three environmental features are proposed to have a 'constant effect' on well-being: (6) availability of money, (7) physical

security and (9) valued social position.

However, most studies tend to examine either one or a few environmental features simultaneously and much more empirical evidence is required to evaluate these nine environmental features in tandem (Sousa-Ribeiro *et al.*, 2014). For instance, Jackson (1999) compared three types of employment status (employed, unemployed and students) regarding their perceived access to selected environmental features and showed that unemployed individuals had less access to opportunities for skill use, task variety and social support than employed individuals and students who had the same access to these vitamins. Furthermore, unemployed individuals reported lower availability of money than employed workers. These findings support Warr's (1987) explanations of different levels of well-being of unemployed individuals in different environments.

Nevertheless, Warr *et al.* (2004) presented a test of all environmental vitamins in an older sample of employed, unemployed and retired individuals aged between 50 and 74. They found that unemployed individuals had less access to all environmental vitamins than the other two groups, with the exception of opportunity for control and externally generated goals, whereas retired and employed individuals had higher levels of well-being that were mediated by perceived environmental characteristics.

Jahoda's (1982) model and Warr's (1987) model can both be described as situation-centered as they both emphasise the importance of environments that affect individuals' well-being. Looking into these models more closely, some of Warr's (1987) environmental features (valued social position and opportunity for

interpersonal contact) overlap with Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits of employment (status and identity, and social contact), while Jahoda's (1982) other three latent functions seem to be within Warr's (1987) externally generated goals. In addition, these two theories focus on unemployment in terms of latent functions or vitamins of employment. Deprivation of these latent functions or vitamins can account for poor well-being as experienced by unemployed individuals.

In contrast to Jahoda's (1982) notion about the preferability of poor employment over unemployment, Warr's (1987) model can account for the possible positive effects of leaving stressful employment and the detrimental effects of unsatisfactory employment. Warr (1987) emphasises the extent, like a vitamin dosage, to which environmental features are beneficial to well-being. Therefore, Warr's (1987) model may make it possible to explain in theory that having a bad job is worse for well-being than being unemployed. Warr (1987:22) describes his model as "situation-centered" and "enabling" since *"people are assumed to be able to shape the character of their environment and to influence its impact upon them"*. This implicates that when an unsatisfactory work environment contains less vitamins than unemployment, individuals' movement to relatively healthy unemployment may result in better well-being.

In addition, Jahoda (1982) pays less attention to four aspects of the environment in Warr's (1987) model, namely 'opportunity for skill use', 'variety', 'physical security' and 'environmental clarity' that may affect people's well-being. Warr (1987) defines opportunity for skill use as the degree to which people can exercise and develop competence and skills. In government retraining, participants may be happy to develop new job skills for re-employment. Variety refers to

environments that provide people with varied and novel experiences. Correspondingly, a variety of retraining activities in government retraining may stimulate participants' interest in learning. Physical security concerns the adequacy of the environment such as good working conditions and absence of danger. Participants' physical security is likely to be provided by comfortable retraining settings, and a pleasant working environment following re-employment.

Importantly, Warr (1987) defines environmental clarity as the degree to which people perceive their environment to be unambiguous. The dimensions to be considered include expectations about availability of feedback, predictability of the future and job security, and clear statements of role requirements. In government retraining, participants' environment differs. Compared with unemployment, high environmental clarity about participants' role as trainees, positive feedback from trainers and potential job guarantee following retraining may have beneficial effects on their well-being.

Moreover, Warr (1987) incorporates 'opportunity for control' and the 'availability of money' into his model that are also absent in Jahoda's (1982) theory. These environmental features provide the opportunity to test agency and the manifest issues in unemployment research. However, these environmental features also match those suggested by Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model. This issue will be taken up in the next sub-section.

Regarding the most striking difference between the models of Warr (1987) and Jahoda (1982), the vitamin model is able to offer an explanation of the different levels of well-being of unemployed individuals in different environments. This

seems to be better than the dichotomous analysis of employment and unemployment used in Jahoda's (1982) model. However, a comprehensive empirical test of Warr's (1987) model is still needed (Sousa-Ribeiro *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the generality of Warr's (1987) model lacks an in-depth investigation into participants' lived experiences, frustrations and motivation for employment compared with Jahoda's (1982) model.

Overall, Jahoda's (1982) model has been chosen over Warr's (1987) model in this research as the former can shed more light on participants' experiences in unemployment and coping mechanisms. Furthermore, empirical studies using Warr's (1987) model are still rare in the literature, compared with that of Jahoda's model. As previously indicated, some of Warr's (1987) most important environmental features also overlap with Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits of employment.

Nevertheless, Jahoda's (1982) model omits some environmental features that are found in Warr's (1987) model: 'opportunity for skill use', 'variety', 'environmental clarity' and 'physical security'. As discussed earlier, participants may access these complementary environmental vitamins that predict well-being. In other words, the present study may validate this possibility of explanations. The third model considered here is Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model.

Agency Restriction Model

Fryer (1986) assumes that unemployed individuals are active and independent, whereas Jahoda's (1982) model, by contrast, assumes them to be passive and

dependent. This agency restriction theory is an enabling person-centric explanation of what individuals bring with them to a situation. Fryer (1986) considers people as active agents proactively striving for self-determination and attempting to cope with events in line with their past experiences and expectations of the future. However, economic deprivation restricts unemployed individuals' ability to exercise agency, making it impossible to plan for the future, thereby causing distress.

To illustrate the agency restriction model, Fryer and Payne (1984) presented their in-depth investigation of 11 proactive unemployed individuals in the UK. Though the participants experienced economic deprivation, they were proactive to engage in voluntary community activities. These purposeful activities, resembling the latent functions of employment, enabled them to find alternative outlets to cope with unemployment. Based on these findings, Fryer and Payne (1984) suggest that unemployed individuals can behave as active agents, striving to make sense of events so as to pursue chosen goals.

In addition, Fryer and McKenna (1987) compared two small groups of unemployed men. One group was temporarily laid off with an agreed date for returning to employment, while the other was permanently redundant after a factory closure. In contrast to the predictions of Jahoda's (1982) model, both groups were not equally deprived of the latent benefits, and not equally distressed. Fryer and McKenna (1987) reported that temporarily laid-off workers were capable of planning and obtaining the latent benefits outside of the employment environment with positive well-being. They appeared to be more optimistic about the future, and would eventually seek re-employment in contrast to permanently redundant workers.

Similarly, the research participants seem to act as active agents who wish to control their own lives by attending government retraining towards their chosen goals of re-employment.

These findings show that financial restrictions on unemployed individuals' ability to plan ahead make up the central argument in Fryer's (1986) model. Fryer (1992a:114) asserts that unemployment is "*impoverishing, restricting, baffling, discouraging, and disabling*". As such, the agency of unemployed individuals is restricted and frustrated by poverty. Fryer (1998:223) summarises that unemployment "*generally results in psychologically corrosive experienced poverty*" that "*cuts the unemployed person off from any future, making looking forward and planning very difficult*". These two factors show that poverty can restrict unemployed individuals' agency, thus causing them difficulties in planning for the future and impairing their well-being. Hence, the withdrawal of manifest functions of employment is associated with a decrease in the well-being of people.

There is ample empirical evidence to support Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model. Whelan (1992) demonstrated the detrimental impact of poverty not only on individuals but also on their family members. Creed and Watson (2003) also examined the effects between the latent and manifest employment benefits, and well-being among three age groups: 'young' (aged 18-24.9), 'middle-aged' (aged 25-34.9) and 'mature-aged' unemployed (aged 35-55). This study supported the notion that financial strain was a more significant predictor of well-being than the latent benefits in the young and middle-aged groups. Similarly, Ervasti and Venetoklis (2010) reported that economic deprivation was a crucial factor for the well-being of unemployed individuals.

In particular, financial strain is an important predictor of the well-being of low-wage earners (Hassall *et al.*, 2004). Lai and Chan (2002) revealed that financial hardship was related to the decline in well-being of less-educated unemployed Hong Kong Chinese. These findings reflect that research participants who mainly come from the lower social strata may suffer financial hardship during unemployment. Even so, Strandh (2001) found that income replacement unemployment benefits could mediate the well-being impact of unemployment. Correspondingly, the research participants are entitled to retraining benefits that may resemble Fryer's (1986) manifest functions of employment to improve well-being.

Yet empirical examples to demonstrate Fryer's (1986) understanding of agency are rare in the literature. Nevertheless, Strandh (2001:62) showed that unemployed trainees involved in 'workplace participation' had exercised agency so as to have the highest proportion of exits to employment and regular education than other groups. This measure of 'workplace participation' provided unemployed trainees with work experience and training in the regular labour market. In turn, they created the measure themselves by finding an employer on the regular labour market. This finding suggests that improved agency may lead to increased well-being in support of Fryer's (1986) assumption that people who are proactive and exercise agency towards their chosen goals can maintain good mental health.

As mentioned already, Fryer's (1986) model is pertinent to this research and states that when unemployed, participants are proactive to attend government retraining towards their goals of re-employment and may enjoy retraining benefits to improve well-being. Thus, this model offers a prospective explanation of the effects of

unemployment, agency and retraining benefits on participants' well-being.

There is a lively debate over whether latent deprivation or economic deprivation is more crucial to well-being. Fryer (1986) criticises Jahoda's (1982) heavy reliance on environmental features, whereas Jahoda (1986) disapproves Fryer (1986) for ignoring environmental constraints. Taken together, Ezzy (1993) notes that people are both active and passive agents; the challenge is to incorporate the interplay between active agents and social structures. Fryer (1992a) also concurs that in order to adequately theorise the interaction between social institutions and agency, it is imperative to integrate psychological studies into broader sociological and economic approaches.

To address these theoretical limits and contradictory empirical findings of different analytical frameworks, this research combines Jahoda's (1982) deprivation theory and Fryer's (1986) agency restriction theory in order to have a clearer understanding of the relationship between Hong Kong's government retraining and the well-being of unemployed older and low-skilled trainees. In fact, a number of studies have adopted the theories of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) to identify components that may explain the well-being of unemployed individuals (Nordenmark and Strandh, 1999; Creed and Macintyre, 2001; Strandh, 2001; Waters and Muller, 2003; Muller *et al.*, 2005; Creed and Muller, 2006; Muller and Waters, 2012).

For instance, Nordenmark and Strandh (1999) showed the importance of including the economic and psychosocial needs for employment in analyses of the differentiated mental health outcomes of unemployment. Particularly, Strandh (2001) suggests that government retraining and unemployment benefits can help

unemployed trainees access the latent and manifest benefits for better well-being. Along these lines, this chapter argues that Hong Kong's government retraining may facilitate participants' access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment for improvements in well-being, compared with remaining unemployed. This point will be further discussed in the section on the 'Role of Government Retraining'.

Overall, taking into account the pros and cons of these theories of unemployment, the models of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) are chosen over Warr's (1987) model to examine why Hong Kong's government retraining has an effect on the well-being of this specific older cohort of participants in Hong Kong. The evidence presented here shows that the most important environmental features of Warr's (1987) model match those specified by Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986).

Importantly, empirical support for the models of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) is more substantial than that for Warr's (1987) in explaining the effects of the latent and manifest benefits on the well-being of unemployed trainees. For example, prior research shows that the theories of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) are useful to explain the impact of government retraining and unemployment benefits on mental health (Strandh, 2001).

Incidentally, environmental features of 'opportunity for skill use', 'variety', 'environmental clarity' and 'physical security' in Warr's (1987) model are absent in the theories of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986). This raises the question of whether these three models covering slightly different ground can, taken together, provide a better explanation for the coping of this specific group in Hong Kong, which this research seeks to answer.

STRESS AND COPING FRAMEWORK

For now, the question of how this research combines the theoretical perspectives on unemployment with the theoretical approaches to coping arises. Unemployment is a highly stressful life event because unemployment and the related problems lead to stress (Solove *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, much of research draws on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping framework to understand how people cope with unemployment (Leana and Feldman, 1990, 1992, 1995; Leana *et al.*, 1998; Gowan *et al.*, 1999). This framework provides an important theoretical basis for understanding unemployed individuals' subjective perceptions of unemployment and their ways of coping to reduce stress.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984:141) define coping "*as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person*". In this dynamic coping process, individuals appraise their available personal resources with external demands. If personal resources cannot meet the external demands, stress appraisal occurs and coping is activated to soften the effects of a stressful event. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) propose two types of coping: problem-focused coping aimed at eliminating the cause of stress itself, and emotion-focused coping that focuses on alleviating the emotional distress. If the stressor is resolved, the coping process ceases and stress decreases.

Stress refers to a relationship between individuals and the environment that is appraised by individuals as taxing or exceeding their personal resources and as endangering their well-being (Folkman *et al.*, 1986). Among the global

psychological indicators of stress, depression is particularly pertinent to social and economic studies (Pearlin *et al.*, 1981). In addition, personal resources such as money, skills, education, and supportive family and friends are important for people to deal with stress (Lazarus, 1999).

Thereupon, this research can extend the study of unemployment by integrating Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits and Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits within the context of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) framework. By combining the two theoretical perspectives on unemployment with the theoretical approaches to coping, the researcher can explain how participants' appraisal of deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits as stressful activates coping mechanisms to soften the undesirable effects of unemployment. Subsequently, this thesis can contribute to the unemployment literature by critically analysing the role of Hong Kong's government retraining and the effects of demographic factors on the coping of participants.

Turning to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) dynamic coping process, cognitive appraisal, coping and outcomes are vital components in this research. However, demographic factors (age and gender) affect this coping process (Paul and Moser, 2009).

Cognitive Appraisal

Cognitive appraisal is a process through which individuals assess the situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that this cognitive appraisal of the situation has two components: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. In the primary

appraisal, if individuals perceive the event as a harm/loss, threat, or challenge to well-being, they will feel distressed. The secondary appraisal is about individuals' consideration of what they should do about the perceived stressor by means of coping with it.

Following Jahoda's (1982) and Fryer's (1986) models, participants may, in their primary appraisal, perceive unemployment as a stressor because they are deprived of the latent and manifest benefits of employment and therefore feel distressed. As Lai and Chan (2002) argue, this state of deprivation will motivate unemployed individuals to proceed with their secondary appraisal to employ problem-focused coping strategies to satisfy their vital needs to improve well-being.

Some research also suggests that those with more economic and psychosocial needs for re-employment will have better well-being than those with less need to re-enter the job market (Nordenmark and Strandh, 1999). However, coping effectiveness is still open to debate over notions of adaptiveness versus maladaptiveness. Adaptiveness refers to the effectiveness of coping in improving outcomes such as health and social functioning (Lazarus, 1993).

Coping and Outcomes

Lazarus (1993) argues that people use a variety of coping strategies more or less adaptively depending on the situation. For example, problem-focused coping is more adaptive before an examination, whilst emotion-focused coping is more adaptive after an examination, when something can no longer be done to change the outcome (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). Nevertheless, some emotion-focused

coping strategies appear to be inherently maladaptive in managing deteriorating emotions such as consuming alcohol or drugs (Ball and Orford, 2002). Though individuals may temporarily forget the problem, they will be ultimately worse off. This implies that there are no universally good or bad coping strategies for participants to cope with unemployment.

In the context of unemployment, there are two types of coping: problem-focused/control coping and emotion-focused/symptom-focused/escape coping (Hanisch, 1999), the latter of which are similar elements in different names. For example, Leana and Feldman (1990, 1992) identify three problem-focused coping strategies (job seeking, retraining and relocating) and three emotion-focused coping strategies (social support, financial assistance and community programmes).

Each problem-focused coping strategy aims at helping unemployed individuals obtain re-employment (Leana and Feldman, 1990, 1992; Schaufeli and Vanyperen, 1993; Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Solove *et al.*, 2015). In contrast, each emotion-focused coping strategy aims to alleviate unemployment distress and is not associated with a change of individuals' employment status (Leana and Feldman, 1990, 1992; Gowan *et al.*, 1999; Kinicki *et al.*, 2000; Solove *et al.*, 2015).

Looking into this issue more closely, some problem-focused coping strategies may have multiple effects for unemployed individuals. For example, though government retraining may originally aim at facilitating re-employment, there is a secondary benefit of government retraining that provides the latent functions of coping, such as access to time structure (Creed *et al.*, 2001; Strandh, 2001). This point will be discussed in detail in the section on the 'Role of Government Retraining'.

However, previous studies suggest that unemployed individuals who use problem-focused coping strategies without success such as job search may feel more distressed (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978; Wanberg, 1997; Lai and Chan, 2002; McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2005). Leana and Feldman (1992) found that the use of job search might cause feelings of distress because of the inevitable rejection by potential employers, and that the increased utilisation of emotion-focused coping strategies might help lessen the distress. This finding is consistent with the results of Folkman and Lazarus (1980, 1985), who put forward that people who adopted both problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies improved their well-being. Therefore, participants should use both problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies for better well-being during unemployment.

Similarly, Yang (2002) suggests using both problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies to save face among South Korean unemployed men. There are two problem-focused coping strategies (searching for a new job or having a temporary job) and six emotion-focused coping strategies (conceptualising job loss as not being their fault, expressing optimistic beliefs of hope, withholding information about job loss, pretending to be okay, avoiding friends and getting help from other unemployed individuals). Male participants in this research may use these coping strategies to save face because a male breadwinner model tends to exist in both South Korea and Hong Kong.

Moreover, Latack (1986) proposes three types of emotion-focused coping strategies to deal with stress: (a) control-oriented strategies in proactive mode, (b) escape strategies in avoidance mode and (c) symptom management in handling stress symptoms. Latack (1986) argues that control-oriented strategies in the form of

social support may enhance confidence, and promote proactive thoughts and take-control actions in stressful situations, as opposed to escape strategies which aim at avoiding being in stressful situations such as drinking alcohol, smoking and taking drugs that may worsen the overall situation. For symptom management strategies, they consist of many relaxation and leisure activities to reduce loneliness and anxiety, like watching TV, pursuing hobbies and physical exercise that are commonly pursued together with friends, family, or co-workers.

Using Latack's (1986) scale of emotion-focused coping, Giuntoli *et al.* (2011) found that most men tended to use maladaptive escape strategies such as smoking and drinking or symptom management measures, like going outdoors or playing sports, while women were more likely to use control-oriented strategies such as seeking social support from friends to ease distressing feelings. In particular, men aged 50+ were most likely to be unwilling to talk about their emotional problems.

These findings show that men seem to be more psychologically vulnerable to unemployment than women. As Paul and Moser (2009) explain, men are severely threatened by unemployment because men are the traditional breadwinner in the family unit, a notion that is linked to employment in Western societies, whereas women have more socially-accepted alternative roles of homemakers and caregivers that may serve as substitutes to work. In comparison with Western societies, it is interesting to find out what types of emotion-focused coping will be used by participants in Hong Kong during unemployment.

As previously mentioned, meaningful use of spare time can mediate the negative effects of unemployment (Kilpatrick and Trew, 1985; Starrin and Larson, 1987;

Winefield *et al.*, 1992). Waters and Moore (2002) showed that meaningful social leisure activities could reduce latent deprivation and increase well-being. Havitz *et al.* (2004) also concur that positive leisure activities mediate the effects of unemployment for most unemployed individuals.

Though it is argued that meaningful leisure activities can enhance well-being, financial strain may restrict participants' ability to engage in such activities (Hoare and Machin, 2009). Furthermore, some poorly educated participants may also lack the knowledge about alternatives for paid work, like leisure activities or retraining programmes to improve well-being (Schaufeli, 1992). Thus, understanding what participants would do with their free time is important to understand who needs special help to cope with unemployment.

Moreover, unemployment is not a uniform experience. Demographic factors influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect people's coping experiences (Paul and Moser, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 1, age and gender issues matter in Hong Kong and, as such, they are utilised as key demographic factors in this research accordingly.

In regards to age, older and low-skilled workers are more vulnerable to unemployment due to their unfavourable position in the labour market. With rapid technological advancements and economic restructuring, they suffer the risk of job displacement, limited job options and long-term unemployment (Stier and Endeweld, 2015). Empirical data show that they are slow to seek re-employment, and tend to experience significant earning losses and psychological problems (Schweke and Lawrence, 2002).

Furthermore, employers usually prefer more educated younger workers in a knowledge-based economy and, hence, many discriminate against older and low-skilled workers in employment, despite some members of the latter groups possessing positive attributes, like reliability, productivity and flexibility (Loretto and White, 2006). Hong Kong is no exception in this regard. Chiu and Ho (2006) reported that in the face of age discrimination and fewer job opportunities in the labour market, many unemployed Hong Kong Chinese men aged 50+ suffered distress. These findings reflect the idea that participants are unlikely to derive much benefit from Hong Kong's increase in high-skilled job opportunities in a knowledge-driven economy.

Consequently, reduced employment expectations may affect the willingness of older and low-skilled workers to use problem-focused coping strategies to seek jobs (Fielden and Davidson, 1999). Research indicates that old age is a significant predictor of emotion-focused coping (Leana *et al.*, 1998). In light of a shrinking working-age population, the ERB aims at assisting unemployed workers aged 50+ to cope with unemployment through publicly-funded retraining programmes (SCPP, 2015). This change in labour market policy may encourage participants to employ problem-focused coping strategies by attending government retraining for re-employment.

With respect to gender, unemployed men suffer greater distress than women, which is associated with their breadwinner identity and financial commitments (Paul and Moser, 2009). Generally, employment is still the core value of men in society to earn a living for their families, whilst women have alternative household roles. Therefore, unemployment seems to be less distressing for women than it is men (De

Witte, 1999) while stigmatisation may be stronger against men than women in this regard (Kulik, 2000).

Research has shown that men prefer problem-focused solutions, like job search for re-employment in connection with their breadwinner identity, whilst women use more emotion-focused activities such as seeking social support from friends to share their emotional problems (Leana and Feldman, 1991). These findings support traditional gender stereotypes that men are more active when faced with stressful events and tend to engage problem-focused coping to mitigate the stressor, whereas women are more passive towards their environments and tend to use emotion-focused coping to ease the distress.

In contrast, some studies report that men and women experience similar unemployment and re-employment processes (Zikic *et al.*, 2008; Stier and Endeweld, 2015). Strandh *et al.* (2013) revealed that in Sweden, men and women were equally affected by unemployment in a dual breadwinner model, whilst in Ireland men were more vulnerable to unemployment than women in a male breadwinner model. This evidence suggests that the need for employment is similar among women and men in Sweden, whereas men have a greater need for employment than women in Ireland.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, men are largely responsible for paid work and women for domestic duties in Chinese society (Yip and Ng, 2002). In this male breadwinner context, employment culturally serves to actualise men's masculine identity. Like in Ireland, Lai and Chan (2002) found that higher psychological disturbance was noted among unemployed Chinese men than among women in

Hong Kong. Moreover, Pang *et al.* (2005) revealed that displaced women felt distressed when they had to involuntarily retreat back into their traditional domestic role because of fewer career opportunities than for men in Hong Kong's gendered labour market. Therefore, the relationships between unemployment, gender and well-being are worth studying in Hong Kong Chinese society.

Overall, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) framework offers a theoretical basis on understanding how appraisal of deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits as stressful affects participants' choices of coping such as problem-focused coping for finding new jobs through retraining and emotion-focused coping for regulating detrimental emotions during unemployment. However, demographic factors (age and gender) influence levels of mental health in unemployment and affect participants' choices of coping. As discussed earlier on the secondary benefit of government retraining that provides the latent functions of coping, the role of government retraining is discussed in the following section.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT RETRAINING

Unemployment creates the risk of poverty and decreases the well-being of individuals. It seems that there is a financial obligation for the government to help unemployed individuals through unemployment benefits (Andersen, 2001). Alternatively, Wanberg (2012) suggests that interventions should speed up unemployed individuals' re-employment.

Beyond re-employment, research shows that government retraining enhances unemployed trainees' sense of mastery (self-esteem, self-efficacy and internal locus

of control), provides them with inoculation against setbacks and predicts re-employment status (Vinokur and Schul, 1997). Moreover, OECD (2013) proposes that retraining programmes and job-search assistance should be provided to the most affected group of displaced workers through public employment service.

Nevertheless, there is significant debate about the kinds of responsibilities and rights that unemployed individuals, society and government should have in this mechanism. In countries that subscribe to a neo-liberal model such as the UK and the USA, they focus on competitive advantage in an economic context with moderate social spending in a social context (Green, 2006). As such, the education and retraining system is based on a user pay system. In other words, unemployed individuals should commit themselves to skills upgrading for re-employment towards the ideology of individualism (Gouthro, 2002). In this regard, Brown *et al.* (2008) criticise the individuals' sole responsibility for education and retraining in the absence of state support.

Furthermore, employers and industries are more likely to invest in retraining for high-skilled workers rather than low-skilled workers in a knowledge-driven economy (Hughes *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, low-skilled workers have lower access to retraining opportunities for skills upgrading than their high-skilled counterparts. This raises the problem of educational inequality. For instance, as participants are at the lower end of the social and educational spectrum in Hong Kong, it is argued that they deserve more the opportunity to receive retraining and re-employment for better well-being.

Apparently, government retraining originally aims at combating poverty and

offsetting the undesirable impacts of economic recessions, rather than ameliorating unemployed individuals' adverse well-being. Hence, these indirect effects of government retraining on well-being have received limited attention in the literature (Andersen, 2008). Examples of exceptions include Creed *et al.* (1996), Creed *et al.* (2001), Strandh, (2001), Andersen (2008) and Sage (2015) who indicate that government retraining has a positive effect on the well-being of unemployed individuals.

In particular, Strandh (2001) combines the theories of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) by arguing that government retraining helps unemployed individuals cope with access to time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status and identity, and regular activity, while unemployment benefits assist them in accessing economic resources thereby improving well-being. These findings suggest that government retraining and unemployment benefits may respectively serve the latent and manifest functions of coping with unemployment.

To extend Strandh's (2001) work, Andersen (2008) demonstrated that both current and previous participation in government training increased well-being, although the effect of previous participation decreased over time because of continued unemployment. Sage (2015) also examined the data of British Household Panel and its successor Understanding Society, and showed that government retraining participation was associated with improved well-being. However, Coutts *et al.* (2014) argue that the specific coping mechanisms that produce positive psychological effects have not yet been fully explored.

Turning to the government retraining settings in Hong Kong, the ERB was set up in

1992 to help those displaced workers acquire job skills and find new jobs (Education and Manpower Branch, 1996). After a consultancy review in 1996, the ERB focused on providing retraining for unemployed persons aged 30+ with Secondary 3 education or below in 1997 (ERB, 2007-2008). In response to the economic, social and political changes, the ERB will relax the eligibility criteria to cover local workers aged 15+ with sub-degree education or below with effect from 1 December 2007 (ERB, 2007-2008).

Today, the ERB offers market-driven and employment-oriented retraining courses with the aim of providing unemployed individuals with employability skills to ensure their re-employment (ERB, 2016). It has therefore been suggested that participants may satisfactorily secure re-employment to become security guards after retraining. Moreover, a retraining allowance offered by the ERB may attract participants to government retraining. Issues on government retraining settings in Hong Kong will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Along these lines, this thesis argues that beyond the re-employment outcome, Hong Kong's government retraining may help participants cope with access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment for improvements in well-being, compared to being unemployed. However, Jahoda (1982:94) contends that the potential to recreate the latent features associated with employment would require "*personal initiative that is rare among all strata of the population*". Hence, one of the interests in this research is to investigate whether participants have such "personal initiative" to access the relevant latent functions while attending government retraining.

Although there is a growing body of literature addressing the effect of government training on the well-being of unemployed trainees, most of the knowledge is based on quantitative studies (Strandh, 2001; Andersen, 2008; Sage, 2015). As coping with unemployment is a subjective process, Waters (2000) has called for qualitative research on people's experiences of unemployment to unravel intricacies and create new insights. Therefore, this research adopts qualitative methodology to explore how participants make meaning of their unemployment and government retraining experiences for re-employment, and how demographic factors (age and gender) affect coping mechanisms from their culturally grounded perspective.

Overall, the evidence presented here shows that Hong Kong's government retraining may have a dual effect in terms of improving participants' jobs skills to secure re-employment and coping skills to access latent and manifest benefits for better mental health usually associated with employment. As the literature review unravels, the scope of this thesis has consistently indicated the negative psychological impacts of unemployment. Re-employment seems to be the logical solution to improve well-being. However, this does not give the full picture. In fact, satisfactory re-employment matters to unemployed individuals.

EFFECTS OF SATISFACTORY RE-EMPLOYMENT

Referring to Jahoda's (1982) assumption that employment is considered as universally beneficial to individuals' well-being and having a bad job is preferable to unemployment, is it really the case that even unsatisfactory re-employment is better than no job? To extend Fryer's (1986) argument on the manifest functions of employment, Cole (2007) argues that Jahoda *et al.*'s (1972 [1933]) proposition

about the value of paid work as a social norm for individuals in terms of the latent benefits is to suppress the material importance of income and to stigmatise unemployment.

Though Cole (2008) agrees with Jahoda *et al.*'s (1972 [1933]) latent functions of employment, he does not consider employment as the only means to achieve these latent features, and contends that too much emphasis on employment hinders our understanding of human needs. Accordingly, Cole (2008) suggests that as not all paid jobs are beneficial to well-being, and proposes that a policy on guaranteed income be implemented should there be instability in the labour market. This provides individuals with the choice to enter paid work or not without impoverishing them. Consequently, individuals can utilise available resources to participate in social networks and enjoy greater autonomy over their lifespan that may resemble the latent benefits of employment for life satisfaction.

Generally, the unemployment literature suggests that re-employment may be able to reverse the deteriorating psychological effects of unemployment (Warr and Jackson, 1985; McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2005). Kessler *et al.* (1989) propose that the deleterious psychological effects of unemployment could be minimised should there be job opportunities for unemployed individuals. Moreover, Hoare and Machin (2010) reported that re-employed people were not just financially better off, and that they also enjoyed better time structure, social contact and improvements in well-being. At this point, researchers seem to support Jahoda's (1982) theory that paid work is good for individuals' well-being.

In fact, there is a long debate over Jahoda's (1982) proposition that even a bad job is

better than no job. As mentioned earlier, individuals' responses to unemployment and re-employment are heterogeneous. Leaving stressful jobs are somehow the positive outcomes of unemployment (Warr and Jackson, 1984). Thus, the outcomes of unsatisfactory re-employment may be detrimental and only satisfactory re-employment can improve individuals' well-being (Wanberg, 1995). These findings contradict Jahoda's (1982) beliefs that even a bad job is better than no job.

It has been argued that some unemployed individuals accept unsatisfactory replacement jobs, and in so doing give up a sense of personal control and experience worse well-being than those who remain unemployed (Liem, 1992). Research indicates that individuals with either unemployment or unsatisfactory re-employment suffer similar forms of depression and reduced life satisfaction (Leana and Feldman, 1995). Substantiating this claim, Kinicki *et al.* (2000) highlighted that unsatisfactorily re-employed and unemployed individuals experienced the undesirable effects of unemployment, whereas satisfactorily re-employed workers enjoyed reduced financial strain and enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Along these lines, the studies on underemployment support the idea that that unsatisfactory re-employment poses negative effects on the well-being of re-employed individuals. Underemployment, as defined by Kaufman (1982), represents re-employment as either a part-time job or a job outside individuals' expertise and/or interest. Feldman *et al.* (2002) pointed out that underemployed managers experienced less pay, lower employment status and an under utilisation of their skills, compared to their previous jobs. Friedland and Price (2003) also indicated that underemployed individuals suffered from higher levels of distress

than their adequately employed counterparts. Therefore, like unemployed individuals, underemployed individuals will continuously seek jobs until satisfactory re-employment is achieved (Latack *et al.*, 1995; Kinicki *et al.*, 2000).

As argued so far, the quality of re-employment has been playing a key role in determining the well-being of re-employed people. Winefield *et al.* (1990) adopted ratings of job satisfaction to identify satisfied and dissatisfied employed youth and the results showed that satisfied employed individuals enjoyed better well-being than employed people who were dissatisfied. Similarly, Mallinckrodt (1990) and Gowan (2012) used this approach to measure satisfactory re-employment and the quality of re-employment in their studies of satisfaction generated by a new job.

In fact, individuals can evaluate whether re-employment is satisfactory or not by comparing the current situation to their own expectations and values. As Daniels *et al.* (2000) point out re-employed people can define satisfactory re-employment as full-time, permanent and interesting work, depending on the extent to which challenges concerning skill-related, financial, personal, and family aspects can be overcome. Evidence indicates that re-employed people who do not subjectively view themselves as underemployed have obtained satisfactory re-employment and thereby they become more committed to their new organisations and less likely to think of quitting for another job (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2009).

Altogether, these findings of unsatisfactory re-employment seem to refute Jahoda's (1982) assumption that even a bad job is preferable to unemployment. It is certain that only satisfactory re-employment is better than no job. Thus, the distinction

between successful re-employment and satisfactory re-employment carries weight in this research.

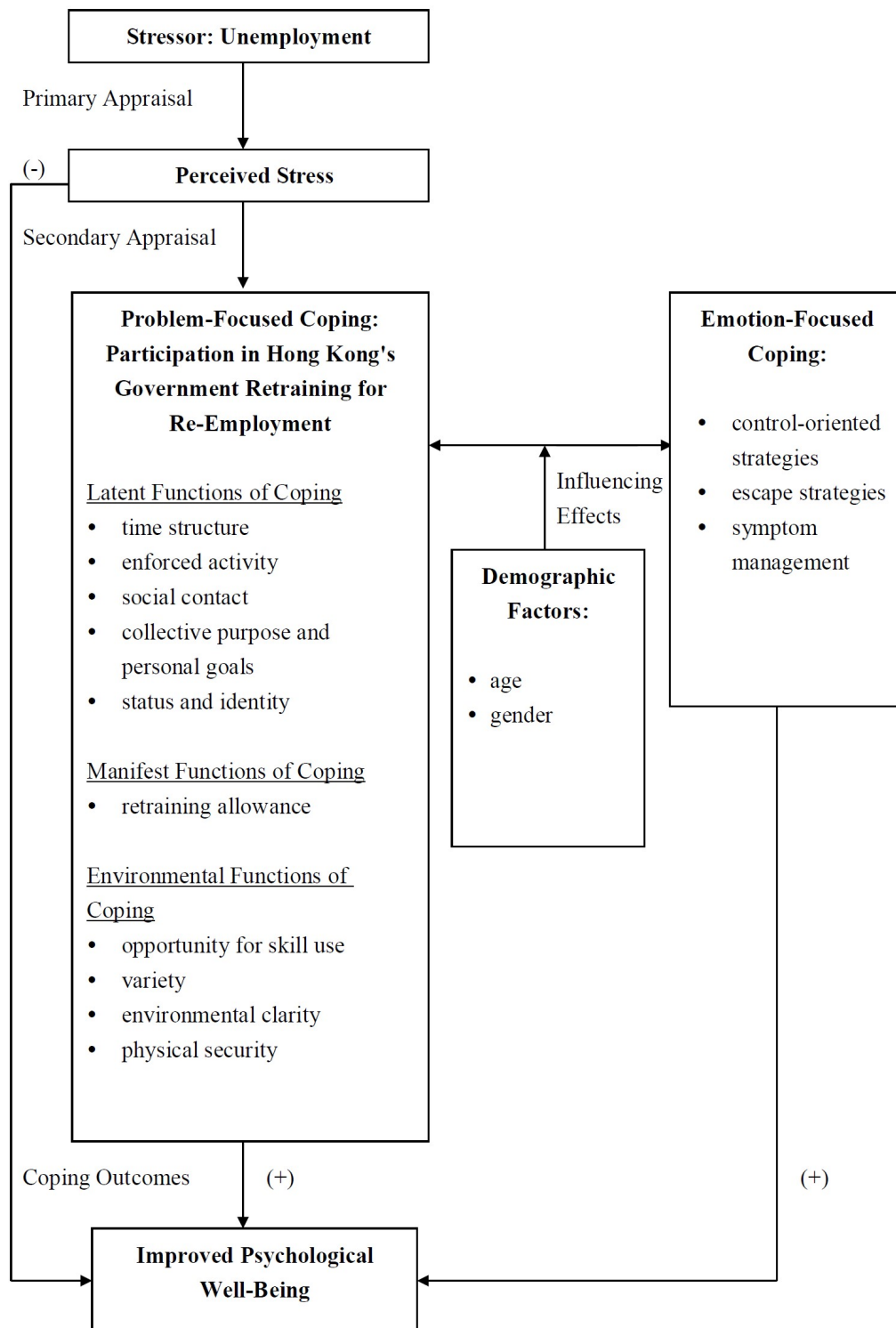
To illustrate the point above, successful re-employment represents re-employment as a full-time job (Lai and Chan, 2002), whereas satisfactory re-employment refers to a good job associated with job satisfaction, commitment and retention in the new job (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2009). As noted earlier, some participants who once had higher socio-economic status tend to be underemployed and suffer significant cuts in their occupational hierarchy and earnings after becoming security guards. Therefore, this thesis argues that Hong Kong's government retraining should help participants seek satisfactory re-employment to improve well-being rather than merely successful re-employment.

Overall, the frameworks adopted in unemployment research tend to be relatively Western-centric and very little is known about the experiences and coping mechanisms in the Chinese cultural context of Hong Kong. Following a synthesis of the theoretical and empirical literature on unemployment and coping, the conclusion section proposes a theoretical framework and puts forward two research sub-questions that this thesis seeks to answer.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Building on previous theoretical and empirical work, a theoretical framework is proposed in Figure 2.1 to advance our knowledge of the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in Hong Kong Chinese society.

Figure 2.1 Proposed Theoretical Framework



Overview of the Theoretical Framework

In this theoretical framework, Jahoda's (1982) deprivation theory and Fryer's (1986)

agency restriction theory are combined within Lazaras and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping framework. Before elaborating on the relationships between the components, justifications for the adoption of deprivation theory and agency restriction theory are recapped.

As previously discussed, it seems apparent from the evidence that most environmental features of Warr's (1987) model resemble Jahoda's (1982) latent functions. For instance, valued social position and opportunity for interpersonal contact in Warr's (1987) model overlap with the status and identity, and social contact components in Jahoda's (1982) model. In view of the control and manifest functions in Warr's (1987) model, they are also similar to agency as found in Fryer's (1986) model. Importantly, previous empirical research on the theories of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) by Strandh (2001) can provide an adequate explanation of the relationship between government retraining, unemployment benefits and well-being among unemployed trainees.

Nevertheless, Jahoda's (1982) model does not account for the manifest effects of unemployment on people's well-being, whereas Fryer's (1986) model, in contrast, disregards the latent effects of unemployment on well-being. Moreover, environmental features of 'opportunity for skill use', 'variety', 'environmental clarity' and 'physical security' in Warr's (1987) model are absent in the models of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986). To overcome the theoretical and empirical limits of these three models, their features are therefore incorporated within the Lazaras and Folkman's (1984) framework in order to understand the kind of coping mechanisms that improve psychological well-being of participants in government retraining.

Drawing on the theories and empirical findings in the existing literature, this chapter presents the relationships between the components (cognitive appraisal, coping and outcomes together with demographic factors) in the proposed framework and identifies research gaps that warrant investigations in this thesis.

Cognitive Appraisal

As Figure 2.1 suggests, when participants encounter unemployment, they tend to perceive unemployment as a stressor. Drawing upon Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) framework, stressors lead to stress when they are appraised as taxing. Therefore, cognitive appraisal is crucial in this coping process in the form of primary and secondary appraisal, leading to the development of coping strategies.

In the primary appraisal, participants are likely to assess unemployment as a stressor with perceived stress as they have been deprived of the latent and manifest benefits of employment (Jahoda, 1982; Fryer, 1986). Creed and Macintyre (2001) demonstrated that deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits of employment accounted for the deleterious impacts on well-being of unemployed individuals. Hence, the negative effects of unemployment on psychological well-being are expected in the framework.

In the secondary appraisal, this framework assumes that perceived deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits would influence participants' coping activities in order to satisfy their vital needs and enhance well-being (Lai and Chan, 2002). Nordenmark and Strandh (1999) showed that those with more economic and psychosocial needs for employment demonstrated better well-being than those with

less need upon re-entering the labour market.

As illustrated in the framework, participants would adopt both problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies to handle their stress during unemployment. Research shows that problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies are complementary in the coping process that result in positive coping outcomes such as improved psychological well-being (Leana and Feldman, 1992; Leana *et al.*, 1998).

Coping and Outcomes

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) propose two categories of coping: problem-focused coping to address the cause of stress itself, and emotion-focused coping to deal with the negative feelings of a stressful event. In the unemployment literature, Leana *et al.* (1998) identify three types of problem-focused coping strategies: retraining, job searching and relocating to another region with better job opportunities, and three types of emotion-focused coping strategies: social support, financial assistance and community activism.

Addressing the research interest in government retraining as identified in Chapter 1, problem-focused coping of this framework focuses on Hong Kong's government retraining that aids the coping of participants. Therefore, this framework does not include Leana *et al.*'s (1998) other two forms of problem-focused coping strategies: job searching and relocating.

Furthermore, evidence reveals that government retraining and unemployment

benefits can facilitate unemployed trainees' coping skills of accessing the latent and manifest functions of employment for better well-being (Strandh, 2001). Hence, this framework includes Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits: time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status and identity, and enforced activity, and Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits that are operationalised as a form of retraining allowance. Arguably, government retraining may also help participants access Warr's (1987) environmental benefits (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security) for better well-being. Therefore, these environmental benefits are also added in the framework.

Along these lines, the positive effects of Hong Kong's government retraining on psychological well-being are expected in the framework. However, not much is known on the kind of coping mechanisms that may produce these positive psychological effects (Coutts *et al.*, 2014). Thereupon, further investigation is warranted in this thesis to close this research gap.

Aside from problem-focused coping through Hong Kong's government retraining, this framework suggests that participants may use various emotion-focused coping strategies to reduce stress based on previous findings (Leana and Feldman, 1992; Leana *et al.*, 1998). Hence, the positive effects of emotion-focused coping strategies are expected in the framework.

As mentioned earlier, Giuntoli *et al.*'s (2011) empirical findings of age and gender differences in emotion-focused coping are relevant to this research. Hence, this framework includes Latack's (1986) three types of emotion-focused coping strategies adopted by Giuntoli *et al.* (2011): control-oriented strategies, escape

strategies and symptom management. Alternatively, Leana *et al.*'s (1998) three types of emotion-focused coping strategies are excluded because their study omits the factor of gender due to the limitation of the sample.

According to Giuntoli *et al.*'s (2011) findings, women used more control-oriented strategies to seek social support than men, while men tended to resort more to escape or symptom management strategies than women in order to maintain good well-being. Interestingly, older men aged 50+ opined that men did not talk about their emotional problems. In this regard, demographic factors may be of help to explain the differentiated coping strategies of both genders.

Demographic Factors (Age and Gender)

Individuals' responses to unemployment are heterogeneous. Age and gender are suggested as factors that influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms (Paul and Moser, 2009). These two demographic factors are only two of potentially many factors influencing the issues this research is considering.

Drawing on the age and gender problems as identified in Chapter 1, this research is particularly interested in exploring how age and gender differences influence coping mechanisms of participants with a view to understanding which particular groups need special help. Consequently, this research employs age and gender as the key demographic factors that influence changes in mental health in unemployment and affect coping mechanisms in the framework.

Regarding age differences, research suggests that older and low-skilled workers usually encounter unemployment challenges after experiencing age discrimination in employment and the problem of obsolete job skills in a knowledge-based economy (Chiu and Ho, 2006). In Western countries, empirical evidence indicates that older workers who find it relatively more difficult to seek new jobs tend to use more emotion-focused strategies than problem-focused coping strategies to reduce distress (Leana *et al.*, 1998). However, similar research has not been conducted systematically in Hong Kong and thus deserves attention in this thesis.

With respect to gender differences, men's breadwinner status is frequently linked to employment, whilst women can have alternative social roles such as those of homemakers and caregivers (Paul and Moser, 2009). Empirical data reveal that unemployed men suffer more than unemployed women in Hong Kong (Lai and Chan, 2002). Correspondingly, research in the West indicates that unemployed men are more likely to use problem-focused strategies to seek new jobs related to their breadwinner identity, whilst unemployed women tend to use more emotion-focused strategies to regulate detrimental emotions (Leana and Feldman, 1991). In contrast, Strandh *et al.* (2013) found that men and women were equally affected by unemployment in Sweden. Nevertheless, this argument over gender differences remains open to debate and is worth studying in this research.

So far, we know little about how Hong Kong's government retraining aids the process of coping with unemployment and how demographic factors (age and gender) affect the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in Hong Kong Chinese society. Hence, this thesis attempts to close these research gaps. The overall framework used in this research is described as follows.

In the primary appraisal, participants are assumed to perceive stress because they are deprived of the latent and manifest benefits during employment (Jahoda, 1982; Fryer, 1986). In the secondary appraisal, they are motivated to use coping strategies to meet their economic and psychosocial needs for re-employment to enhance well-being (Nordenmark and Strandh, 1999).

In Hong Kong, the ERB offers employment-oriented retraining courses and retraining benefits to create incentives for unemployed persons to re-enter the labour market (ERB, 2016). Therefore, the presence of government retraining serves to motivate participants to adopt problem-focused coping strategies by participating in government retraining to improve vocational skills to secure re-employment.

Accordingly, besides the economic benefits of re-employment, Hong Kong's government retraining may have consequences for coping behaviours to help participants access the latent (time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status and identity, and enforced activity) and manifest (retraining allowance) benefits for improved well-being (Strandh, 2001) as well as complementary environmental benefits (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security) related to good mental health.

In addition, problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies are important to enhance well-being (Leana and Feldman, 1992; Leana *et al.*, 1998). It is expected that participants simultaneously use various emotion-focused coping strategies such as control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management (Latack, 1986). However, demographic factors (age and gender) may influence the level of

mental health in unemployment and affect the coping of participants (Paul and Moser, 2009). Taken together, these empirical results may reveal coping mechanisms of this specific group in the Chinese cultural context in Hong Kong.

Arising from the discussion in the theoretical framework, two research sub-questions are formulated to explain the specific objectives of this study in answering the central research question posed in Chapter 1: *How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?*

Research Sub-Questions

Not much is known about how Hong Kong's government retraining helps participants cope with unemployment. As a contribution towards closing this research gap, the first objective of this research is to explore the role of Hong Kong's government retraining in facilitating participants' coping to access the latent and manifest benefits for better well-being in line with previous research (Strandh, 2001). Subsequently, this thesis will investigate the explanatory power of the theories of Jahoda (1982) and Fryer (1986) for predicting the well-being of participants in government retraining. Within this dimension, the first research sub-question is formulated as follows:

1. *What are the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest coping strategies and psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees?*

Furthermore, different demographic factors may influence the psychological impact

of unemployment and affect participants' choices of coping strategies (Paul and Moser, 2009). However, little research has been done on this in the context of Hong Kong. In support of Paul and Moser (2009), the second objective of this research is to explain how demographic factors influence changes in psychological well-being in unemployment and affect coping mechanisms so as to address the research gap. Building on Chapter 1, age and gender are used as the key demographic factors in this research. Given the above-mentioned, the second research sub-question in this thesis is:

2. How do demographic factors (age and gender) influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers?

Overall, this research sets out to explore how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment. However, this literature review chapter has revealed that though studies of unemployment and coping are abundant in the West, research on unemployment and coping among Hong Kong Chinese is scant. Following a synthesis of the theoretical and empirical literature, a theoretical framework is proposed and two research sub-questions are formulated to fill these research gaps to answer the central research question. This research seeks to unravel the possible links between the most pertinent theoretical perspectives on stress and coping with unemployment, and raises concerns about policy and practice that affect the daily lives of Hong Kong Chinese.

From a theoretical perspective, less is known about the complex coping mechanisms responsible for well-being in Hong Kong's government retraining

settings. This research incorporates Jahoda's (1982) deprivation theory, Fryer's (1986) agency restriction theory and Warr's (1987) vitamin theory within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping framework. By integrating these frameworks, the study can examine under what conditions government retraining leads to positive well-being with empirical support. With such knowledge, we can know exactly why government retraining has an effect on well-being and the exact implications of each theory employed.

Moreover, little is known about how demographic factors (age and gender) influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms in Hong Kong. Therefore, demographic differences (age and gender) have been incorporated in the framework to explore these relationships. Taken together, the findings of this research may help researchers build theories and frameworks to explain how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment in Hong Kong Chinese society.

From a practical perspective, this research highlights the importance of taking deprivation theory, agency restriction theory and vitamin theory into account to examine the well-being of participants. These important findings provide a clearer understanding of how to better address the needs that contribute to the well-being of this specific group, and may be useful for the design of interventions that mitigate negative effects of unemployment and facilitate re-employment of an ageing population in Hong Kong. Furthermore, analyses for demographic factors (age and gender) may help to identify the most distressed groups of participants in need of particular help and attention.

The next chapter reviews Hong Kong's government retraining settings. This chapter discusses the government retraining policy in the pre- and post-1997 periods. It then previews a manpower projection up to 2020, and explores the functions of the ERB and retraining courses for unemployed individuals, particularly with regard to the security retraining programme. A brief introduction of the security service industry in Hong Kong is also included.

CHAPTER 3

GOVERNMENT RETRAINING IN HONG KONG

INTRODUCTION

Amid an ageing population in Hong Kong, the government helps older workers aged 50+ to cope with unemployment through a variety of ERB retraining programmes (SCPP, 2015). However, little is known on the role of Hong Kong's government training in aiding the process of coping with unemployment. Following the literature review in Chapter 2, the research sub-question is as follows:

What are the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest coping strategies and psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees?

Hence, the main objective of this thesis is to explore how Hong Kong's government retraining helps unemployed older and low-skilled trainees to cope with access to the latent and manifest benefits for better well-being. To answer this research question, in-depth qualitative data are collected from a group of re-employed security guards aged 50+ after completion of the ERB's full-time security retraining programme. These responses will give insights into how various Hong Kong older and low-skilled workers in government retraining cope with unemployment.

This chapter aims to review the government retraining settings in Hong Kong, which are used as the empirical context in this research. It starts with a discussion on the government retraining policy in the pre- and post-1997 periods. It then looks

into manpower projection up to 2020, and describes the functions of ERB and placement-tied retraining courses for unemployed individuals, particularly with respect to the security retraining programme. The growing security service industry in Hong Kong is also discussed.

DEVELOPMENT OF GOVERNMENT RETRAINING POLICY

In Hong Kong, there was no specific retraining policy on older and low-skilled workers until recent labour market policy changed to integrate those aged 50+ into the labour market to counteract the shrinking of the workforce and boost economic growth (SCPP, 2015). At present, most ERB retraining courses are suitable for older workers to find new jobs.

As Lue and Park (2013) point out, three major contextual factors such as economic, employment and political conditions have impacted on the policy development in East Asia with Hong Kong no exception. Due to the changes in social, economic and political contexts, the post-1997 period has witnessed the rapid development of government retraining policy. Therefore, the development of this policy is discussed in the pre- and post-1997 periods.

Pre-1997 Period

Hong Kong's government has adopted a laissez-faire economic policy on a free market approach (Li, 2006). The role of government is to provide investors with favourable business environments in a competitive global market, characterised by a simple tax system, a stable exchange rate and sound fiscal balance. Thus,

government interventions in labour market policies and welfare protection are kept at a minimal except for investments in education and infrastructure.

To gain national competitiveness, Hong Kong has continued its transformation into a knowledge-driven economy (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2015). Economic restructuring has taken place in Hong Kong since the 1980s. Many local manufacturers relocated their low-skilled productions to cheaper places such as China and concentrated on high value-added activities (Census and Statistics Department, 1993).

Subsequently, older and low-skilled workers are disadvantaged in the labour market due to a mismatch between skills and job requirements (Lee and Wong, 2004). Between 1980 and 2014, the percentage of Hong Kong workers employed in manufacturing fell from 45.9% to 2.8%, whereas services sector employment increased from 42.1% to 88.5% (Tao and Wong, 2002; Hong Kong Government, 2015). This change in employment mix reflects a change in the skill requirements in the labour market.

Amid structural unemployment, the government introduced a retraining policy and established the ERB in 1992 to help those displaced workers acquire skills and find new jobs (Education and Manpower Branch, 1996). Following a consultancy review in 1996, the ERB focused on providing retraining for unemployed people aged 30+ with Secondary 3 education or below in 1997 (ERB, 2007-2008). This target group is at the lower end of the social and education spectrum and easily displaced in economic restructuring. More importantly, this disadvantaged group cannot afford to finance their retraining for re-employment.

In the early stages, the ERB retraining courses were mainly part-time short courses in classroom settings (Chan and Chan, 2013). Most courses were free of charge or had nominal fees. The skills taught included computer skills (accounting for 31% of the courses), job search skills (27%), language skills (25%) and other skills (17%). After completion of full-time courses, trainees received a retraining allowance. A question arises as to how trainees survive during retraining. There is a prevalent culture in Hong Kong that people tend to be self-reliant and receive financial assistance from family members in difficult times (Pang *et al.*, 2005).

Moreover, trainees of the ERB retraining courses were mainly middle-to-older workers with Secondary 3 education or below (Chan and Chan, 2013). The rationale behind such limited retraining schemes is that unemployed workers can find new jobs in a booming labour market. Consistent with the rapid economic growth of Hong Kong from the 1970s to the mid-1990s, economic growth was regarded as the best social and employment policy (Holliday, 2000). Unemployment had not been a major concern of social and economic policy until 1997.

Post-1997 Period

The social, economic and political contexts have changed dramatically in the post-1997 period. Hong Kong's role of an exemplar of non-intervention in a free market approach is challenged. Hong Kong was a British colony for more than 150 years and became China's first Special Administrative Region (SAR) on 1 July 1997 (Chiu and Wong, 2005). The SAR government has placed more emphasis than the colonial government on using Confucianism as a guiding principle in

managing Hong Kong Chinese society. As the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR put it, "... we must also reaffirm and respect the fine traditional Chinese values" (Lau, 2002:4). He was optimistic in exploiting the traditional Confucian faith in self-reliance through employment among Hong Kong Chinese (Tung, 1999).

As discussed in Chapter 1, Confucianism has shaped Chinese culture in Hong Kong. The tradition of Confucian work-related values (thrift, persistence, shame and face) has always been influential within society (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987), affecting people's attitudes to unemployment and welfare benefits. Most Hong Kong people earn their self-esteem by earning a living and supporting their families (Chung, 2010). Thus, they tend to be self-reliant to save face in line with Yang's (2002) argument that unemployed men lose face as they cannot maintain their families' financial stability. This emphasis on self-reliance has resulted in deep-rooted stigmatisation of welfare recipients in society (Tsui *et al.*, 2013). Hence, asking for welfare benefits from the government can lose face.

In the eyes of the government, self-reliance through employment and family responsibility are the solution to unemployment and poverty with minimal state provision (Chiu and Wong, 2005). To further strengthen the stigmatisation of welfare recipients, government officials deliberately highlight that welfare recipients are lazy and unwilling to work (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2010). This publicity is reflected in the local media that welfare recipients are unproductive and irresponsible (Chung, 2010). This strong stigma attached to welfare recipients may help explain why some eligible participants even in financial difficulty are discouraged to apply for social welfare assistance. They mainly rely on self-reliance by attending government retraining for re-employment.

Nevertheless, the optimal assumptions of self-reliance through employment changed after severe economic adversity due largely to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. Hong Kong had suffered stagnation of economic activities (Chan and Chan, 2013). Lower and middle classes were seriously hit by unemployment, wage decline and financial difficulties. The government also encountered problems of budget deficits and an increasing number of welfare recipients. There were surging demands from trade unions and pressure groups for increasing the protection of disadvantaged groups in the labour market.

Moreover, the post-1997 era has witnessed the government's gradual transformation from being bureaucracy-driven to politics-driven (Cheung, 2013). In the pre-1997 colonial period, policymaking by bureaucrats was driven top-down, coupled with a controlled process of various advisory bodies and public consultation. In the late transition period, the colonial government partially democratised the legislature with members elected from the democratic camp (Lee, 2005). With the rapid economic growth since the 1970s, the tensions between the government and the people eased.

However, all changed after the political transition, which took place on 1 July 1997. Scott (2000) argues that the post-1997 political system has become polyarchic with many sources of power, including the chief executive, the legislators and the bureaucracy. The relationships among them are uncoordinated and fractious with each group pursuing their own agendas. At present, the policy process has turned into an uncertain political arena of opinion polls, media spin and interest negotiation. Nevertheless, there is still strong emphasis on self-reliance through work among Hong Kong Chinese (Chan and Chan, 2013).

In light of a rapid increase in the number of welfare recipients during economic recessions, the government has launched a workfare programme named Support for Self-Reliance Scheme to help welfare recipients to regain employment since 1999 (Lee, 2000). This workfare policy combines welfare and work with the aim of getting people off welfare benefits and achieving self-reliance. These welfare benefits are only offered conditional upon welfare recipients' compliance with various work requirements such as job searching, employment assistance and community work provisions (Chan, 2013). The recipients are required to sign a Job Seeker's Understanding to indicate their obligations to find jobs towards self-reliance (SWD, 2015). If they fail to comply with the work requirements, their welfare benefits will be terminated. Incidentally, welfare recipients are usually stigmatised and categorised as parasites by society (Wong and Lou, 2010).

In addition, the government promoted retraining and created job opportunities (Tung, 1999). At the end of 1998-1999, the ERB retrained nearly 70,000 people with re-employment rates at 70%. During the recovery of the economy, information technology assistants, security guards, property attendants, domestic helpers and health care assistants were included in the priority occupation list. In 2003-2004, the government offered over 114,400 retraining places to unemployed workers to re-enter the labour market (Hong Kong Government, 2004).

To tackle the poverty problem, the solution is to provide the younger generation with education and retraining. Examining this more closely, free primary education (Primary 1 to 6) was introduced in 1971 and extended to 3 years of junior secondary education (Secondary 1 to 3) in 1978 (Education Bureau, 1997). As the growth model of Hong Kong's economy changes towards a knowledge-driven

economy, three years of junior secondary education has been further extended to three years of senior secondary education (Secondary 4 to 6) since September 2009 (Education Bureau, 2016). Therefore, older and low-skilled workers aged 50+ generally have not benefited from this free education policy.

Moreover, the ERB has relaxed the eligibility criteria since 1 December 2007 to cover local workers aged 15+ with sub-degree education or below (ERB, 2007-2008). Thereafter, the ERB has repositioned itself since 2008. The ERB not only helps displaced workers to find jobs, but also upgrades retraining courses towards professional accreditation, so that trainees' professional qualifications can receive positive recognition from employers (ERB, 2009-2010). The ERB has also implemented the 'Enhanced Placement Service Model' since October 2010 (ERB, 2010-2011). The appointed training bodies provide trainees with six-month placement follow-up services to help them to secure re-employment.

Nevertheless, previous research (Wong, 1998:404) criticised the ERB for producing "jobs without workers, workers without jobs". In 1995, there were 108,000 unemployed workers in contrast to 50,000 vacancies that could not be filled. This reflects the problem of a mismatch between skills and job requirements in the labour market. Consequently, the ERB has adjusted its strategy from 'training-oriented' to 'market-oriented' and 'employment-led' to meet the specific demands of the job market (ERB, 2016). Apart from the assistance from the ERB, unemployed workers can get support from the Labour Department (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2016). It provides free employment assistance and counselling services to aid unemployed workers in finding suitable jobs through a network of 13 job centres, a telephone employment service hotline and the Interactive

Employment Service website.

Turning to the recent problem of Hong Kong's ageing workforce, the Steering Committee on Population Policy points out that the ERB will encourage older workers aged 50+ to re-enter the labour market through various ERB retraining programmes (SCPP, 2015). The ERB will conduct market research to understand the views of employers concerning the hiring of older workers and older persons' opinions on the idea of working longer. The ERB will also identify suitable jobs for older workers and organise relevant retraining courses for them to re-enter the labour market. This enhanced retraining policy suggests that the government has adopted the philosophy of 'positive non-intervention' to direct its public resources to assist both employees and employers to redress imbalances in the labour market (Ng and Ip, 2011). However, there are limited job opportunities for older and low-skilled workers in a knowledge-based economy (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2015).

MANPOWER PROJECTION TO 2020

This section discusses manpower requirements by occupation group, education level and economic sector along with manpower supply by age group according to the government's latest manpower projection to 2020 (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2015). Altogether, there is a mismatch in manpower requirements and supply.

Manpower Requirements and Supply

Referring to the manpower requirements by occupation group (Table 3.1), there is a

continuing shift towards a knowledge-driven economy in favour of better-educated workers, including managers, administrators, professionals and associate professionals. On the contrary, the requirements for low-skilled clerical support workers; agricultural and fishery workers; drivers, plant and machinery operators and assemblers; and elementary occupations (cleaners, garbage collectors, messengers, security guards and labourers) are projected to decline due to the utilisation of modern technology and employment of multi-skilled workers. Nonetheless, service and sales workers are expected to increase due to the continued development of the service-oriented economy.

Table 3.1 Manpower Requirements by Occupation Group in 2012 and 2022

Occupation group	Actual manpower requirement in 2012		Projected manpower requirement in 2022		Projected change from 2012 to 2022	Projected average annual rate of change (2012 – 2022)
	Number	% share	Number	% share		
Managers and administrators	402 800	11.6	469 800	12.4	+ 67 000	+ 1.6%
Professionals	265 000	7.6	317 400	8.4	+ 52 300	+ 1.8%
Associate professionals	719 900	20.7	850 700	22.4	+ 130 800	+ 1.7%
Clerical support workers	515 300	14.8	502 000	13.2	- 13 400	- 0.3%
Service and sales workers	622 900	17.9	705 500	18.6	+ 82 600	+ 1.3%
Agricultural and fishery workers	4 400	0.1	3 900	0.1	- 500	- 1.2%
Craft and related workers	246 800	7.1	257 300	6.8	+ 10 500	+ 0.4%
Drivers, plant and machinery operators and assemblers	188 000	5.4	185 200	4.9	- 2 800	- 0.1%
Elementary occupations	510 000	14.7	502 500	13.2	- 7 500	- 0.1%
Total	3 475 100	100.0	3 794 200	100.0	+ 319 100	+ 0.9%

Note: Individual figures may not add up to the totals due to rounding.

Source: Labour and Welfare Bureau (2015: viii).

Regarding manpower requirements by education level (Table 3.2), it is projected that the manpower requirements at first degree will increase sharply from 696,600 in 2012 to 965,000 in 2022 for high-skilled jobs. In contrast, the requirements at lower secondary and below will decrease from 955,700 in 2012 to 772,800 in 2022 because (a) demand for workers associated with lower qualifications, such as craft and related workers; drivers, plant and machinery operators and assemblers; and elementary occupations is expected to decline; and (b) employers have higher expectations for better-educated workers.

Table 3.2 Manpower Requirements by Education Level in 2012 and 2022

Education level	Actual manpower requirements in 2012		Projected manpower requirements in 2022		Projected change from 2012 to 2022	Projected average annual rate of change (2012 – 2022)
	Number	% share	Number	% share		
Lower secondary and below	955 700	27.5	772 800	20.4	- 182 900	- 2.1%
Upper secondary	1 314 100	37.8	1 366 200	36.0	+ 52 100	+ 0.4%
Diploma	138 900	4.0	188 200	5.0	+ 49 300	+ 3.1%
Sub-degree	178 900	5.1	238 400	6.3	+ 59 500	+ 2.9%
First degree	696 600	20.0	965 000	25.4	+ 268 400	+ 3.3%
Postgraduate	190 900	5.5	263 600	6.9	+ 72 700	+ 3.3%
All levels	3 475 100	100.0	3 794 200	100.0	+ 319 100	+ 0.9%

Note: Individual figures may not add up to the totals due to rounding.

- (1) Lower secondary and below - below Secondary 5, or equivalent.
- (2) Upper secondary - Secondary 5 to Secondary 7, or equivalent.
- (3) Diploma - Technical and vocational education programmes which usually require the completion of upper secondary education as the minimum entrance qualifications, or equivalent.
- (4) Sub-degree - Higher Certificates, Higher Diplomas, Professional Diplomas, Associate Degrees, Endorsement Certificates, Associateship or equivalent courses.
- (5) First degree - First degrees, or equivalent.
- (6) Postgraduate - Higher degrees (e.g. master's degrees), or equivalent,

Source: Labour and Welfare Bureau (2015: ix and A4 1-2).

With respect to manpower requirements by economic sector (Table 3.3), high value-added financial services (at an average annual growth rate of 2.2%), professional and business services (1.5%), and information and communications (1.4%) are expected to grow from 2012 to 2022. Meanwhile, import, export, wholesale and retail trades, as well as social and personal services are expected to remain the same in 2022. In contrast, the sectors of manufacturing (at an average annual diminishing rate of 0.6%), agriculture, fishing and quarrying (0.7%), and electricity, gas, water and waste management (0.4%) are projected to decline from 2012 to 2022.

Table 3.3 Manpower Requirements by Economic Sector in 2012 and 2022

Economic sector	Actual manpower requirements in 2012		Projected manpower requirements in 2022		Projected change from 2012 to 2022	Projected average annual rate of change (2012 – 2022)
	Number	% share	Number	% share		
Agriculture, fishing and quarrying	5 400	0.2	5 100	0.1	- 400	- 0.7%
Manufacturing	114 200	3.3	107 600	2.8	- 6 700	- 0.6%
Electricity, gas, water and waste management	15 100	0.4	14 500	0.4	- 600	- 0.4%
Construction	300 600	8.6	345 400	9.1	+ 44 800	+ 1.4%
Import, export, wholesale and retail trades	915 600	26.3	960 600	25.3	+ 45 000	+ 0.5%
Accommodation and food services	280 500	8.1	307 500	8.1	+ 27 000	+ 0.9%
Transportation, storage, postal and courier services	324 300	9.3	339 200	8.9	+ 14 900	+ 0.4%
Information and communications	104 200	3.0	119 900	3.2	+ 15 700	+ 1.4%
Financial services	233 000	6.7	290 500	7.7	+ 57 600	+ 2.2%
Real estate	130 200	3.7	143 800	3.8	+ 13 600	+ 1.0%
Professional and business services	364 100	10.5	422 300	11.1	+ 58 200	+ 1.5%
Social and personal services	687 700	19.8	737 700	19.4	+ 50 100	+ 0.7%
Total	3 475 100	100.0	3 794 200	100.0	+ 319 100	+ 0.9%

Note: Individual figures may not add up to the totals due to rounding.

Source: Labour and Welfare Bureau (2015: v).

With a shrinking working-age population in Hong Kong, there will be increases in manpower supply by older workers (Table 3.4). The manpower supply of those aged 55+ is projected to increase from 554,800 in 2012 to 841,400 in 2022, whereas younger workers aged below 55 will shrink from 2.96 million to 2.83 million. In particular, the manpower supply in the age group 15-24 will decrease prominently, due to the low fertility rate of the population. The overall labour force participation rate will drop from 58.8% in 2012 to 58.0% in 2022. This is because many older workers will go into retirement relative to the number of new entrants to the workforce in the future. Thus, the economy will witness an unprecedented slow growth rate in the workforce during the projected period. Hence, there is a mismatch in manpower requirements and supply.

Table 3.4 Manpower Supply by Age Group in 2012 and 2022

Age group (years)	2012 (Actual)			2022 (Projected)			Projected change from 2012 to 2022	Projected average annual rate of change (2012 – 2022)
	Local manpower supply@		LFPR#	Local manpower supply@		LFPR#		
	Number	% share		Number	% share			
15 – 24	309 000	8.8	35.9%	215 400	5.9	35.9%	- 93 600	- 3.5%
25 – 34	831 800	23.6	87.2%	834 800	22.7	88.5%	+ 3 000	**
35 – 44	858 800	24.4	81.6%	887 300	24.1	85.4%	+ 28 600	+ 0.3%
45 – 54	964 400	27.4	77.4%	897 300	24.4	81.5%	- 67 100	- 0.7%
55 – 64	489 600	13.9	51.1%	706 300	19.2	58.2%	+ 216 700	+ 3.7%
65+	65 200	1.9	7.1%	135 100	3.7	9.3%	+ 69 900	+ 7.6%
15–54	2 964 000	84.2	72.1%	2 834 900	77.1	77.0%	- 129 100	- 0.4%
55+	554 800	15.8	29.6%	841 400	22.9	31.6%	+ 286 600	+ 4.3%
Total	3 518 800	100.0	58.8%	3 676 300	100.0	58.0%	+ 157 500	+ 0.4%

[@] Excluding foreign domestic helpers

[#] Labour force participation rate of the population in the respective age groups

** Rate of change within $\pm 0.05\%$

Note: Individual figures may not add up to the totals due to rounding.

Source: Labour and Welfare Bureau (2015:18).

Mismatch in Manpower Requirements and Supply

According to the above projection, there would be an estimated manpower surplus of about 182,900 workers at lower secondary and below in 2022. In contrast, there would be an estimated shortage of manpower supply at upper secondary and above, amounting to 502,000 persons. More significantly, there would be a shortage of manpower supply at first degree, amounting to 268,400 persons. Therefore, workers at lower secondary and below are expected to experience difficulty in getting jobs. Due to narrow job perspectives, older workers with fewer skills and less education are most affected.

In brief, to tackle the problem of mismatch in manpower requirement and supply, the government should develop retraining courses for those at lower secondary and below, as well as older economically inactive persons to meet the needs of the labour market (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2015). The issue arises as to how the ERB helps these disadvantaged groups to cope with unemployment. The next section will begin a review of the functions of the ERB.

EMPLOYEES RETRAINING BOARD

The main functions of ERB include administering the Employees Retraining Fund (ERF) and monitoring appointed training bodies to organise retraining courses through a subsidy from the ERF. The ERB was set up in 1992 as an independent statutory body under the Employees Retraining Ordinance (Chapter 423).

The appointment of ERB members is in accordance with Section 3 of the

Employees Retraining Ordinance. The board shall consist of a chairman, a vice-chairman, four other members who represent employers (no more than four), four other members who represent employees (no more than four), four other members who are connected with vocational training and retraining or manpower planning (no more than four), and three other members who are public officers (no more than four).

Moreover, representatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Labour Department play a monitoring role in the ERB (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2014). The ERB has also set up more than 20 Industry Consultative Networks for different industries to gather information and suggestions in developing future retraining courses to meet the latest needs in the labour market.

Administering the Employees Retraining Fund

Importantly, the ERB needs to administer the ERF for the implementation of government retraining programmes. A start-up fund of \$300-HK million was first provided by the government in 1992 and another capital injection of \$300-HK million in May 1996 (Education and Manpower Branch, 1996). Afterwards, the government provided recurrent funding of \$400-HK million a year to the ERB from 2001-2002 to 2007-2008 (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2013).

In addition to this capital injection, the ERB is funded by the Employees Retraining Levy (Levy) (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2013). A Levy, set by the Employees Retraining Ordinance at \$400-HK per month for each migrant worker, was imposed on employers of migrant workers and foreign domestic helpers in 1996 and 2003,

respectively. At the end of September 2013, there were 2,826 migrant workers and about 310,000 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong.

The rationale behind the Levy is that employers who hire low-skilled migrant workers should pay the retraining costs for local workers (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2013). In times of economic downturn, the government suspended the collection of the levies from 1 August 2008 to 31 July 2013 to relieve the financial burden of employers. During the levy suspension period, the ERB relied on a balance between the ERF and accrued interest to sustain its services and operation. Therefore, the suspension of the Levy did not have any negative impacts on the operation of ERB for trainees.

However, the government announced that it would abolish the Levy imposed on employers of foreign domestic helpers when the suspension of its collection expired on 31 July 2013 to ease employers' financial burden (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2013). In view of the small contribution from the Levy imposed on employers of migrant labour, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved to inject \$15-HK billion through public revenue into the ERB on 24 January 2014 (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2014).

To cover the yearly cash flow, the ERB has placed this injection of seed money with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority for an expected investment return rate of 5% per annum that is linked to the Exchange Fund (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2014). If the investment return is insufficient to meet the retraining needs and services, the ERB may consider using part of the principal of this injection to ensure that the provision of retraining courses and services are not to be affected. It

seems that the ERB prefers a higher return rate of 5% per annum from the Exchange Fund to an extremely low interest rate in a savings account. This huge injection of seed money into the ERB implies that the government is more determined to focus on providing publicly-funded retraining programmes to enhance local workers' skills and employability in the coming years.

Monitoring Appointed Training Bodies

Furthermore, the ERB needs to monitor its appointed training bodies to conduct retraining courses. In assessing applications from organisations interested in becoming appointed training bodies, the ERB should consider their mission, service targets, governance, financial conditions, training facilities, quality of instructors and employer networks (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2014).

The ERB may also invite organisations that are specialised in certain vocational retraining programmes to become training bodies. As qualified training providers, they are required to comply with regulations issued by the relevant authorities. For example, training bodies intending to provide security training courses need to apply for course recognition in compliance with the requirements prescribed in the Quality Assurance System for Recognition Scheme endorsed by the Security and Guarding Services Industry Authority (SGSIA, 2016).

In developing retraining programmes, the ERB has been working closely with training bodies, employers' associations and trade unions (ERB, 1999-2000). For retraining courses with greater market demand, standardised retraining manuals are developed and commonly used among training bodies. In this standardisation

process, training bodies deliver the same retraining courses and the ERB then measures the effectiveness of the retraining courses via performance indicators.

For the performance indicators in 2012-2013, the attendance rate reached 93% in excess of the benchmark performance indicator 80%, while the placement rate was 82% against the benchmark performance indicator 70% for regular courses (ERB, 2012-2013; Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2013). These results indicate that retraining courses generally meet the needs of trainees and the labour market.

With respect to non-standardised retraining courses, training bodies are required to comply with the contents stipulated by the ERB, and regularly update those retraining materials in response to market changes. The ERB will scrutinise those retraining materials on a sampling basis and conduct surprise assessment inspections. If the performance of training bodies is found to be unsatisfactory, the ERB has the right to impose the necessary sanctions against them (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2014).

In compliance with the government's seven-level Qualifications Framework, training bodies have been delivering retraining courses at Qualifications Framework Levels 1 to 4 since 2008 (ERB, 2016). The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications has already accredited more than 530 out of over 870 retraining courses for recognition under Qualifications Framework (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2013). Courses for accreditation are prioritised based on criteria: market demand, latest government policies and whether there are standardised retraining materials for the course. The next section attempts to understand how the government helps local workers to secure employment through

retraining courses.

GOVERNMENT RETRAINING COURSES

The ERB has been commissioned by the government to provide retraining courses to help local workers to re-enter the labour market or sustain their employment since 1992. Today, the ERB has appointed about 100 training bodies with around 400 training centres across the city to deliver about 700 market-driven and employment-oriented courses for nearly 30 industries so as to meet the changing needs of the employment market (ERB, 2016).

For course types, they include full-time placement-tied courses for unemployed individuals, part-time generic skills training courses for workers from all industries, 'Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus' courses for employees, courses for non-engaged young people, courses for persons with disabilities and persons recovered from work injuries, courses for rehabilitated offenders, courses for ethnic minorities and courses for immigrants.

As there is a wide variety of ERB retraining courses, this section focuses on full-time placement-tied courses for unemployed workers, giving special emphasis to those under the course title: "Foundation Certificate in Standard Security and Property Management" that is applicable to the sample.

As Table 3.5 indicates, the unemployed group (51%) forms the target amongst the ERB clientele.

Table 3.5 Breakdown of Retraining Places in 2013-2014

Course Type	Number of Retraining Places	
Placement-tied training courses	65,800	(51%)
Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus courses	30,550	(23%)
Generic skills training courses	27,000	(21%)
Courses for Special Service Targets	6,650	(5%)
Total	130,000	(100%)

Source: Labour and Welfare Bureau (2013: 7).

In terms of industry categories, female-dominated 'domestic services', and gender-balanced 'property management and security' placement-tied courses are most popular among unemployed trainees (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Proportion of Trainees of Placement-Tied Courses

Course Category	No. of Trainees	Proportion %
Domestic Services	9,279	21.4%
Property Management and Security	6,412	14.8%
Beauty Therapy	4,237	9.8%
Catering	4,084	9.4%
Healthcare Services	4,041	9.3%
Hotel	2,528	5.9%
Chinese Healthcare	1,940	4.5%
Business	1,898	4.4%
Environmental Services	1,574	3.6%
Retail	985	2.3%
Others	6,306	14.6%
Total	43,284	100%

Source: ERB (2013-2014: 57).

Moreover, the median age of security guards is 52 and the majority (67.4%) have attained lower secondary education or below (Census and Statistics Department, 2009). In other words, security guards are generally older workers with less education. Taken together, a group of re-employed security guards aged 50+ after completion of the ERB's full-time security retraining programme are targeted as they share the experiences of unemployment and government retraining in light of the research questions. Thus, placement-tied courses for unemployed individuals to secure re-employment are worth further discussion.

Placement-Tied Courses for Unemployed Individuals

Placement-tied courses are provided free of charge to unemployed individuals in full-time course mode to equip them with vocational skills for re-employment. Many trainees (37.2%) are aged 50+ (Table 3.7) and had completed Secondary 1 to 3 education (36.4%) (Table 3.8), implying that these placement-tied courses particularly benefit unemployed older and low-skilled workers.

Table 3.7 Trainees of Placement-Tied Courses by Age

Age	No. of Trainees	Proportion (%)
15 - 19	1,695	3.9%
20 - 29	5,539	12.8%
30 - 39	8,904	20.6%
40 - 49	11,039	25.5%
50+	16,107	37.2%
Total	43,284	100%

Source: ERB (2013-2014: 58).

Table 3.8 Trainees of Placement-Tied Courses by Education Level

Education Level	No. of Trainees	Proportion (%)
No Schooling	7	0%
Not completed primary education	639	1.5%
Completed Primary 6	3,065	7.1%
Secondary 1 to 3	15,755	36.4%
Secondary 4 to 5	15,556	35.9%
Secondary 6 to 7	4,903	11.3%
Tertiary Education	3,359	7.8%
Total	43,284	100%

Source: ERB (2013-2014: 60).

In these placement-tied courses, teaching and learning activities are conducted in the classroom by skilled trainers of training bodies who are specifically trained to deliver retraining courses. Trainers are supportive, validating trainees' emotions and concerns associated with unemployment. Through group discussion and demonstration, trainees' knowledge and ideas are elicited. Trainees can also learn new skills and share their knowledge.

There are also role-playing exercises in the course. As a result, trainees can practise new job skills and provide each other with support in promoting a sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. In personal attributes retraining sessions, trainees can learn about their own merits, so that they can contribute more efficiently to their work and life. Finally, trainees are trained and rehearsed in effective job search skills to overcome barriers to job seeking and to foster a positive attitude towards job search. This enhances trainees' interpersonal skills and employment

opportunities.

After retraining, trainees are provided with placement follow-up services and a retraining allowance. Training bodies offer a 3-6 month placement follow-up service to trainees who have attained an attendance rate of at least 80% in placement-tied courses (ERB, 2016). The placement service includes employment counselling, job matching and referral services. To this end, placement officers of training bodies provide trainees with vacancy information and suitable referrals in accordance with their skills, job expectations, working experience and personal aptitudes.

During the placement follow-up period, placement officers will regularly contact trainees to update their employment status and report to the ERB after completion of their placement follow-up period. Correspondingly, trainees should provide them with such information. Moreover, if employers are interested in recruiting trainees, they can contact placement officers directly for free referral services. Placement officers will then follow up with the job matching process and refer eligible trainees to employers. After attending placement-tied courses, which last for more than a week, those trainees who have fulfilled an attendance rate of 80% or above can apply for a retraining allowance (Table 3.9).

According to the levels of payment, only those of placement-tied "Foundation Certificate" courses are applicable to this sample. The purpose of granting a retraining allowance is to encourage trainees to participate in placement-tied courses and get jobs through the placement follow-up services.

Table 3.9 Retraining Allowance

Courses	Trainees	Retraining Allowance Per Day
"Youth Training Programme" Courses	All eligible trainees	\$30
Placement-tied "Certificate" or "Diploma" Courses	All eligible trainees	\$70
Placement-tied "Foundation Certificate" Courses	All trainees aged 30+ with Secondary 3 education or below	\$153.8
	Other eligible trainees	\$70

Source: ERB (2016).

Furthermore, a retraining allowance for each course is calculated with reference to the number of full-day retraining sessions (8 hours/day) attended. The maximum number of disbursements of a retraining allowance for each trainee is restricted to two times in a one year period and four times in a 3 year period from the commencement date of the first course taken. Disbursement of a retraining allowance to eligible trainees of placement-tied courses will take place within 25 working days upon completion of their retraining.

As stipulated in Table 3.9, participants with Secondary 3 education or below are entitled to retraining benefits of \$153.8-HK per day, whereas those participants with Secondary 4 education and above get \$70-HK per day. The issue arises as to why retraining benefits differ. At the initial stage, the ERB's major service target was displaced manufacturing workers aged 30+ with Secondary 3 education or below and, as a result, they were entitled to a higher retraining allowance of \$153.8-HK per day.

However, there have been even greater variations in age groups and qualifications due to the relaxation of eligibility criteria since 1 December 2007 that include young people aged 15-29 with sub-degree education or below (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2009). The ERB adjusted its criteria on 3 April 2009, announcing that a retraining allowance should be intended for subsidising trainees' expenses for transport and meals when they attend placement-tied courses.

It is generally assumed that those participants with Secondary 4 education and above should have better resources than their lower educated counterparts. Thus, they are entitled to retraining benefits of \$70-HK per day as economic incentives to enrol in placement-tied courses for re-employment. This arrangement of getting a retraining allowance is effective in optimizing of the use of public funds. However, for participants of lower socio-economic status, they may encounter financial hardship while attending government retraining. As discussed so far, it is time to explore how the ERB helps participants to secure re-employment as security guards through the security retraining programme.

Foundation Certificate in Standard Security and Property Management

If unemployed individuals aged 18+ with primary education or above wish to get a security job, they may apply with the ERB to attend a professional certificate placement-tied course named "Foundation Certificate in Standard Security and Property Management" (Appendix I - English Medium; Appendix II - Chinese Medium). For non-Chinese speaking trainees, they need to pass the English entry test while the other criteria remain the same as with that of Chinese speaking trainees. The course objectives aim to enable trainees to understand the roles,

work attitude and job skills of a security guard, and to help them to secure re-employment.

This placement-tied course covers the recognised syllabus under the Quality Assurance System for Recognition Scheme. It consists of 128 hours (approximately 7 weeks) of which 74 hours are provided for the upgrading of skills for trainees as security guards. Teaching and learning activities include classroom teaching, group discussions, demonstrations, practice and site visits.

The course outline includes six categories for non-Chinese trainees (Appendix I - English Medium): (a) introduction to industry (industry overview and concepts of property management), (b) skills retraining (patrol, guard position, site visits, job duties, procedures of visitor control, operations of security system, fire prevention, handling emergency, services for tenants, legal responsibilities and basic computer operations), (c) vocational language (Cantonese), (d) personal attributes (customer service skills, emotion management, and understanding working culture and skills), (e) job search skills (job seeking, interviewing skills, basic labour ordinances and occupational safety knowledge) and (f) course assessment (final written examination).

In the final written examination, there is a multiple choice examination to assess if trainees have attained the knowledge covered in the security service industry, skill trainings and the vocational language of the concerned course, with a minimum pass mark of 50% required. As participants are Chinese, the vocational language for them includes English and Putonghua, while the remaining five categories are the same with that of non-Chinese speaking trainees (Appendix II - Chinese Medium).

Following retraining, participants will be awarded a certificate if they have fulfilled the course requirements, including an attendance of 80% or above, a pass in the overall assessment, and a pass in the written test in the final examination. Nevertheless, under the Security and Guarding Services Ordinance, they are required to apply for Security Personnel Permit (SPP) from the Hong Kong Police Force to work as security guards (Hong Kong Police Force, 2016). As they have already passed the Quality Assurance System for Recognition Scheme course-end examination, they can be regarded as having satisfied one of the requirements in applying for SPP within one year from the issue date of the certificate.

Moreover, 6-month placement follow-up services are offered to participants following retraining. Due to the short period of time dedicated to skills upgrading in this retraining course, the placement follow-up services are important for participants to secure a security job and re-employment. For those participants aged 30+ with Secondary 3 education or below, they will receive retraining benefits of \$153.8-HK per day after retraining. Alternatively, participants with Secondary 4 education or above will receive retraining benefits at \$70-HK per day.

In all, property management and security placement-tied courses are well received by unemployed trainees. Most of them are willing to remain in this new security job following re-employment. To analyse the continuous employment of trainees after retraining, the ERB has introduced retention surveys since 2000. Retention rate was satisfactory in 2000-2001, with over 70% of trainees remaining employed 6 months after retraining (ERB, 2000-2001). This property management and security placement-tied course has always been in the top 10 course categories in terms of retention rate, such as 74% in 2011-2012 (ERB, 2011-2012), 75.6% in

2012-2013 (ERB, 2012-2013) and 76.1% in 2013-2014 (ERB, 2013-2014). This raises the question as to why those security guards can maintain employment in this security services industry in today's unstable economy. The next section looks at the demand side of the security services industry in Hong Kong.

SECURITY SERVICE INDUSTRY

There are eight branches of security work in the security services industry (Security Services Training Board, 2014):

- (1) Security Guarding Services,
- (2) Armoured Transportation Services,
- (3) Security Systems Installation/Maintenance/Repair/Design/Others,
- (4) Security Guarding Services and Armoured Transportation Services,
- (5) Security Guarding Services and Security Systems Installation/Maintenance/Repair/Design/Others,
- (6) Security Guarding Services, Armoured Transportation Services and Security Systems Installation/Maintenance/Repair/Design/Others,
- (7) Owners Corporations, and
- (8) Supplementary Samples.

In the security services industry, the Security Services Training Board of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) was set up by Hong Kong's government in 1998 to be responsible for determining the manpower situation and retraining needs, and recommending to the VTC, the ERB, employers and other interested parties the measures required to meet the demand for trained personnel in the security services

industry.

According to 2013 Manpower Survey Report (Security Services Training Board, 2014), the manpower of the security services industry had seen a steady growth with the number of employees at 110,437 in 2013 compared to 107,652 in 2011, contributing to an increase of 2.6%. At the time of this survey, there were 1,977 vacancies and the security guard level had the highest number of these vacancies with 1,878. For new entrants, they need substantial security retraining.

Due to the government's efforts to increase land supply to address housing needs, 470,000 new residential units are required in the coming ten years (Security Services Training Board, 2014). The government will continue to carry out land use reviews and increase development intensity to boost land supply (Hong Kong Government, 2016). For example, the government will explore the development potential of reclamation outside Victoria Harbour, underground space and artificial islands in the central waters. This indicates that the security services industry will grow in parallel with the growth of housing stock in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, security guards have been under statutory minimum wage (SMW) protection in Hong Kong since 1 May 2011. About 270,000 or 10% of low-paid workers benefited from SMW for the first time with effect from 1 May 2011 (*BBC News*, 2011). The SMW rate has been raised from \$30-HK per hour to \$32.5-HK per hour since 1 May 2015 (Labour Department, 2016). This may help vulnerable older and low-skilled workers with better income. Along these lines, a security job seems to be a good job for older and low-skilled workers, probably due to its job security in a flourishing real estate sector, less age discrimination in the security

services industry and statutory minimum wage protection. These all need further exploration in this research.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the development of government retraining policy in the context of economic, social and political changes in the pre- and post-1997 periods. In the wake of the transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-driven one, the government established the ERB in 1992 to help displaced workers to cope with unemployment. After a review in 1996, the ERB targeted its retraining courses for workers aged 30+ with Secondary 3 education or below in 1997 (Education and Manpower Branch, 1996).

The social, economic and political contexts have changed dramatically since Hong Kong's reintegration with China on 1 July 1997. The SAR government has relied more than the colonial government on Confucian faith in self-reliance through employment and family responsibility among Hong Kong Chinese (Chiu and Wong, 2005). This pattern has been further reinforced by Hong Kong Chinese's sensitivity to face-saving to maintain their social work roles (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987).

However, the government's philosophy of free market is being challenged in the post-1997 period. Since the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, the government has become more focused on the central role of education and retraining in its anti-poverty strategy, and has created more short-term job opportunities during economic recessions.

As a consequence, the ERB has repositioned itself since 2008. Besides helping displaced workers to find jobs, the ERB has extended its service target to include younger and better-educated people aged 15+ and has upgraded retraining courses towards professional accreditation (ERB, 2016). Though Hong Kong launched a 12-year free education policy in September 2009 (Education Bureau, 2016), older and low-skilled workers aged 50+ generally have not benefited from this particular policy.

In all, the Hong Kong labour market will demand more high-skilled workers in a knowledge-driven economy. Nevertheless, the government has increasingly focused on retraining older workers aged 50+ to help them to secure re-employment through various ERB retraining programmes in an ageing population (SCPP, 2015). At first glance, the ERB is able to offer property management and security placement-tied courses to help unemployed older individuals to cope with unemployment through supply and demand mechanisms.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methods used in this research and the justifications for utilising qualitative methodology are explained. It describes how the research is carried out, and how the data is collected and analysed. Pilot interviews, trustworthiness procedures, and some ethical issues are also addressed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS

INTRODUCTION

The central research question addressed in this thesis is: *How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?* This question is addressed by conducting a comprehensive literature review on unemployment and coping, and government retraining in Hong Kong. This central research question can be split into two sub-questions with specific aims to explore how Hong Kong's government retraining facilitates unemployed older and low-skilled trainees' coping to access latent and manifest benefits for better well-being, and how demographic factors (age and gender) affect coping mechanisms.

This chapter outlines the research methods used in carrying out this study to answer the research questions. According to Slevitch (2011), ontology (nature of reality) precedes epistemology (knowledge), which dictates methodology (philosophical positions), which then establishes research methods (techniques for data collection and analysis). Along these lines, this chapter starts with a discussion on the ontology and epistemology contained in this research, and explains the logic for choosing qualitative methodology to implement this study. It then describes how the data was collected and analysed. Pilot interviews, trustworthiness procedures and some ethical considerations are all addressed in this chapter.

ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

This section illustrates the philosophical positions of the ontology and epistemology that underpin this research.

Ontology

There are two types of ontological position: objectivism and constructivism (Bryman, 2008). For objectivism, social reality exists independently beyond human perceptions, whilst constructivism suggests that there are multiple social realities and meanings constructed by individuals through social interactions in a constant revision. In this research, constructivism is selected over objectivism on the following grounds.

This research sets out to study multiple social realities constructed by participants in Hong Kong's government retraining. An interesting question arises as to whether social reality should be considered an objective reality that is external to them, or whether social realities should be considered social constructions developed from their perspective.

Given that participants voluntarily participate in government retraining for re-employment, constructivism can facilitate a better understanding of why they opt for government retraining, how they interact with what is around them and how they cope with unemployment. By employing constructivism, the researcher can then understand their experiences and the contexts within which they live as a means of data analysis and interpretations in answering the research questions.

This research also focuses on participants' unique construction of their own perceptions about coping mechanisms. Thus, there should be multiple interpretations of their experiences due to different demographic factors. Using constructivism, the researcher can explore how different individuals make sense of their social world.

Moreover, this research explains how participants socially and culturally construct definitions when they are transitioning through the stages of unemployment, retraining and re-employment. These definitions may continually be revised as they respond to changing circumstances in their working lives. This leads to the construction of new knowledge and social meanings. Taking a constructivist approach, this research can establish participants' own definitions of latent and manifest coping, and psychological well-being when they describe their transitions.

Taken together, constructivism is selected over objectivism in order to investigate complex social realities that are accomplished by participants through active interactions with other persons in a constant revision over time and across cultures rather than objectively determined beyond their perceptions.

Epistemology

There are two main streams of epistemology: positivism and interpretivism (Bryman, 2008). For positivism, it asserts that objective social reality can be tested numerically in a scientific research approach. In contrast, interpretivism values individuals' creation of their own subjective meanings while they interact with social realities around them. To answer the research questions, interpretivism

is more appropriate than positivism for the following reasons.

The objective of this research is to explore the experiences of government retraining from participants' perspective. Taking an interpretivist approach, the researcher can ask them in-depth questions in order to understand their subjective meanings in their social world during participation in government retraining for re-employment.

Furthermore, this research aims to investigate the relationship between government retraining and well-being of participants, and the effects of demographic factors on coping mechanisms. These human behaviours cannot be transformed into numbers (Nastasi and Schensul, 2005) and tested by objective scientific methods as per a positivist approach (Khan, 2014). Alternatively, using spoken stories in an interpretivist approach, the researcher can be more alive to ask further questions in response to participants' interesting replies.

The researcher also considers reality as socially constructed because participants' experiences occur within social and cultural contexts. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher treasures a variety of interpretations of social realities from different standpoints so as to understand demographic and contextual influences on coping mechanisms.

Importantly, social realities are accessible through words that are understood through interpretations (Sinuff *et al.*, 2007). Employing interpretivism, the researcher can interpret participants' experiences, discover themes and build theories. Furthermore, the participants and the researcher are from Chinese origin and speak the same Chinese language. Hence, participants are able to share their

stories and Chinese cultural values with the researcher towards a better understanding of their experiences of unemployment and government retraining for re-employment.

In short, interpretivism that values participants' subjective meanings in interacting with social realities is more appropriate for this research than positivism as the latter does not easily discover the meanings participants attach to social realities. Altogether, the researcher's philosophical positions on constructionism and interpretivism dictated the decision to apply a qualitative methodology in this research.

JUSTIFICATIONS FOR QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

The foundations of quantitative and qualitative approaches differ in their philosophical positions on ontology and epistemology (Bryman, 2008). A quantitative approach stems from ontological objectivism that social reality exists independently beyond human perceptions. Therefore, its epistemological positivism holds that objective social reality can be tested numerically.

In contrast, a qualitative approach relies on ontological constructivism that there are multiple social realities based on individuals' construction. Hence, its epistemological interpretivism is to acquire better understanding of social realities from individuals' perspective through meaning and interpretations. Along these lines, the researcher's philosophical positions on constructionism and interpretivism all lead to the use of qualitative methodology in this research (Grix, 2002). Justifications for choosing qualitative methodology are explained below.

The interests of the researchers and research questions govern the choice of research methodology (Pernice, 1996). For qualitative research, it begins with the research questions and with the words 'what' or 'how' when opening an emerging design (Doyle *et al.*, 2004). The main interest of the researcher here is to investigate how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment with the aims of exploring how Hong Kong's government retraining facilities participants' coping to access latent and manifest benefits for better well-being and how demographic factors affect coping mechanisms. In answering these research questions, a qualitative approach is chosen to understand the meanings of participants' experiences rather than to test hypotheses in an extensive quantitative study (Creswell, 2003).

Additionally, in order to understand subjective meanings of participants involves in-depth interviews (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Therefore, primary data can be collected through in-depth interviews from a small purposive sample engaged in government retraining, which will best enable the researcher to answer the research questions (Polit *et al.*, 2001). This feature of qualitative study allows participants to voice their subjective experiences of coping with unemployment and lets the researcher better understand the depth of participants' characteristics, knowledge and values.

Comparatively, quantitative inquiries seem no longer to create new knowledge in the studies of unemployment. Jahoda (1992) argues that the reintroduction of unemployed individuals into research inquiries would grant researchers new insights into what is happening to them rather than explanations of generalised tendencies. Fryer (1992b) also concurs that it is the time to reassert qualitative

methods into unemployment research to enquire from the view of participants. Hence, using a qualitative approach in this study can help to discover participants' subjective meanings of their social worlds in order to create new knowledge in Hong Kong Chinese society.

Moreover, rich qualitative data can help understand the complexities of social realities through participants' subjective experiences and perceptions (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). To study the coping of unemployed workers in a social and cultural context is complicated. Nevertheless, rich qualitative data can untangle such a complex situation from participants' perspective. Therefore, this qualitative research may promote new insight and awareness of human experiences with important implications for theory, policy and practice.

In sum, a qualitative methodology is chosen over a quantitative one. The former is good at understanding complex social processes through interpretations, whereas the latter focuses on numerical testing. Using qualitative methodology, this study can collect and analyse rich qualitative data in order to explore the complexities of the phenomenon being studied in this research.

RESEARCH METHODS

This section describes the procedures and techniques used to collect and analyse data in answering the research questions. Recruiting participants, sampling and selection, open-ended questions, research instruments, pilot interviews, conducting interviews, data analysis and trustworthiness procedures are all addressed.

Recruiting Participants

As a former assistant property manager in a public sector organisation, the researcher requested a former colleague, the gatekeeper (property manager) to grant her approval to access the fieldwork site and potential participants (security guards) for this study. Consequent of ethical approval given by the University of Leicester on 30 March 2015, the researcher generated primary data through interviews from April to June 2015.

For recruiting participants, the researcher requested the gatekeeper to arrange a meeting in each estate with all potential participants. The Participant Informed Consent Letter in both English and Chinese (Appendix III and IV) was prepared. Since participants were older Chinese low-skilled security guards with a low level of English proficiency, the Chinese version of the Participant Informed Consent Letter (Appendix IV) was distributed to each of them during the meeting. The researcher explained the purpose of this research and the need to interview security guards to generate data, and highlighted that the interview would be conducted in Chinese language.

After the meeting, potential participants provided the researcher with their names and phone numbers. Some volunteer participants phoned the researcher to arrange an interview. Due to the time constraints of this research project, the researcher also invited the other potential participants individually by phone in order to encourage their participation and speed up the interview process.

Due to the researcher's former role as assistant property manager at the

organisation, this insider status helped her easily connect with the gatekeeper and participants, and build trust quickly (Ganga and Scott, 2006). Hence, they easily accepted the researcher in the recruitment exercise and there was no tension observed between the sampling strategy and voluntary participation. However, there are strengths and weaknesses of having insider status for research purposes. Despite the strengths as mentioned, some ethical issues, like selection bias of participants and leakage of confidential participant information are worth noting in the section on 'Ethical Considerations'.

Sampling and Selection

The goal of this research is to gain an insight into how participants cope with unemployment and not to achieve mass generalisation to represent the whole population. Hence, purposive sampling is used to identify participants who are most likely to provide particular data that are applicable to the research questions (Polit *et al.*, 2001).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the sampling criterion was participants aged 50+ who participate in the ERB's full-time security retraining programme for re-employment. This sampling method allows the researcher to recruit older and low-skilled trainees and attain a reasonably equal gender distribution. Sampling should continue to the point of saturation when no more new information emerges (Guest *et al.*, 2006). Finally, 15 Chinese re-employed security guards voluntarily participated and helped achieve data saturation in this research (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Demographic Profile of Participants

No.	Gender	Age	Highest Degree	Family Type	Previous Occupation	Duration of Unemployment
1	Female	52	University	Single	Manager	2 years
2	Female	50	Secondary	Married	Waitress	1 month
3	Female	56	Lower Secondary	Single	Messenger	1 month
4	Female	56	Secondary	Divorced	Sewing Worker	2-3 months
5	Female	63	Lower Secondary	Widowed	Textile Worker	1 year
6	Female	62	Lower Secondary	Married	Textile Worker	12 years
7	Female	63	Lower Secondary	Widowed	Waitress	5 months
8	Female	53	Lower Secondary	Married	Waitress	2-3 months
9	Male	61	Tertiary	Married	Engineer	3 years
10	Male	56	Primary	Married	Printing Technician	1 month
11	Male	59	Lower Secondary	Married	Printing Team Leader	6 months
12	Male	51	Secondary	Married	Copier Technician	3 months
13	Male	58	Lower Secondary	Married	Manufacturing Worker	1/2 month
14	Male	54	Secondary	Married	Small-Factory Owner	1 month
15	Male	55	Secondary	Married	Small-Factory Owner	2-3 months

This sample was relatively older and less educated than expected because younger unemployed individuals aged 18+ with sub-degree education or below are allowed

to attend the ERB's full-time security retraining programme for re-employment (ERB, 2016). It consisted of 7 men and 8 women with a mean age of 57 years. Education levels of participants included: 1 participant had attained education at primary level (Primary 1 to 6), 7 at lower secondary level (Secondary 1 to 3), 5 at secondary level (Secondary 1 to 5), 1 at tertiary level (diploma) and 1 at university level (first degree). Those without secondary education are expected to experience difficulties in getting jobs in a knowledge-based economy (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2015).

Most participants (10 out of 15) were married. The rest were single, widowed or divorced. 9 married participants all had independent children and were two-career families with low-paying jobs. In these low-income families, men and women with a similar work role in the family may have similar levels of unemployment distress (Ensminger and Celentano, 1990).

The average unemployment duration among the participants was 7 months. Participant No. 6 who was unemployed for 12 years was excluded from this computation. The differences in these figures may reflect job-seeking trends of this sample. Female participant No. 6 can have a fallback role of parenthood (Jahoda, 1982), whereas two higher-educated participants No. 1 and No. 9 who were unemployed for longer periods may consider themselves to have better resources to find suitable re-employment later (Gallo *et al.*, 2006).

Finally, in terms of previous occupations, 11 participants worked in low-skilled manual occupations (waitress, messenger and worker) and 4 in higher-level occupations (manager, engineer and small-factory owner). For older workers, they

are more likely to opt for less well-paid and demanding jobs (Gabriel *et al.*, 2013). Participants in former higher-level occupations suffered an approximate 78% pay cut following re-employment.

Open-Ended Questions

It is important to acknowledge that this research places considerable reliance on retrospective data about unemployment and government retraining experienced by participants. Retrospective recall in this research offers three advantages: convenience of sampling, no need to wait for participants' transitions across labour market status and comparatively low cost.

Even so, using retrospective data raises questions concerning participants' inaccurate recall (Kahn and Pearlin, 2006). For example, participants may be able to speak about their experiences of unemployment and retraining once re-employed, but they may also have forgotten some of the details. Nevertheless, people are better at recalling landmark events that are often highly memorable (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). For many participants, unemployment is considered a highly stressful life event (Solove *et al.*, 2015) and government retraining helps them get a job (ERB, 2016). Therefore, this research contends that unemployment and government retraining would be considered landmark events to improve accuracy of recall.

On balance of the strengths and weaknesses, retrospective data are used in this research in order not to sacrifice rich and valuable information about participants' lived experiences and perceptions. Hence, interviews were conducted using a

semi-structured interview guide to ask participants a series of retrospective open-ended questions about unemployment and participation in government retraining as well as current re-employment, providing them with the opportunity to express their views of psychological well-being, and latent and manifest functions of coping.

Psychological Well-Being

Following the results and analysis of the data in Chapter 5, psychological well-being is operationally defined as low levels of stress along with high levels of happiness, optimism, self-esteem and job satisfaction. On the issue of stress and happiness, participants were asked to think back to when they were unemployed and participated in government retraining, and how they felt. Gowan (2012) employed this indicator of psychological well-being in her unemployment research. Optimism is categorised by asking participants to think back to their participation in government retraining and how they felt optimistic about their re-employment prospects. This indicator of psychological well-being has also been used in previous unemployment research (Harris *et al.*, 2002).

Self-esteem is categorised by asking participants to think back to their participation in government retraining and how government retraining provided them with a sense of confidence and self-esteem. Harris *et al.* (2002) also used this indicator in their unemployment research. Job satisfaction is utilised as an indicator of the quality of participants' current re-employment. Participants were asked: "How satisfied are you with your current job as a security guard?" Gowan (2012) adopted this indicator following job loss. Responses to these retrospective

open-ended questions enable the researcher to understand participants' well-being in different transitions through unemployment, government retraining and re-employment.

Latent Functions of Coping

This category of latent functions has been used before in unemployment research (Creed and Macintyre, 2001). Participants were asked to think back to a daily routine and activities that they needed to follow from the time they got up till they slept at night while attending government retraining, compared to being unemployed (time structure and enforced activity). Participants were then asked to think back to their participation in government retraining and how it affected their relationships with other trainees, trainers, family and friends, compared to being unemployed (social contact).

Moreover, participants were asked to think back to their personal goals during participation in government retraining and how they made a contribution to society (collective purpose and personal goals). Finally, participants were asked to think back to their participation in government retraining and how they were valued and respected by other people, compared to being unemployed (status and identity). Responses to these retrospective open-ended questions enable the researcher to understand how government retraining can facilitate participants' latent coping strategies for better well-being, compared to unemployment.

Manifest Functions of Coping

The manifest functions are operationalised as financial strain in alignment with Creed and Macintyre's (2001) category of manifest functions of employment. Participants were asked to think back to a retraining allowance following government retraining and how they lived on it. Responses to these retrospective open-ended questions enable the researcher to understand how government retraining can facilitate participants' manifest coping strategies to enhance well-being.

Research Instruments for Data Generation

In this research, two research instruments are used for data generation: semi-structured interviews and interview guide.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In qualitative research, the most commonly used research instrument is an in-depth semi-structured interview (Mason, 2006). This research focuses on participants' experiences and perceptions to understand the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest functions of coping and well-being among participants, as well as the effects of demographic factors on coping mechanisms. Hence, in-depth semi-structured interviews used in this research can elicit the worldviews of participants and the researcher.

The term 'semi-structured interview' refers to *"a context in which the interviewer*

has a series of questions" (Bryman, 2008:699). This allows participants to elaborate more on their own terms with flexibility in answering interview questions. These face-to-face interviews were particularly important for this older cohort of participants with poor qualifications. They could immediately clarify interview questions with the researcher and the researcher was able to ask further questions to elicit a deeper insight into the meaning of participants' significant replies.

Kvale's (1996) metaphor approach was also used to help the researcher to understand participants in new ways. Metaphors allowed participants to express their thoughts and provide their own definitions that had specific meanings for them. These metaphors can lead to the construction of new knowledge and social meanings. For example, Sargent *et al.* (2011:318) found that in the face of retirement, positive participants might be more likely to use the metaphor of 'transformation', whereas those participants with negative feelings might use the metaphor of 'loss'.

Interview Guide

Furthermore, Mason (2006) points out that a great deal of planning is required for conducting semi-structured interviews through the design of an interview guide. Bryman (2008:442) proposes some basic elements in the preparation of this guide: (a) interview questions should flow reasonably well, (b) researchers should use language that is relevant to participants, (c) researchers should not ask leading questions, (d) researchers should formulate interview questions that help them to answer the research questions and (e) researchers should record information of participants such as name, age, gender, occupation and so on. Following the

literature review and Bryman's (2008) suggestions, the interview guide was structured into four sections:

Part I: Introduction (general household characteristics),

Part II: Demographic Factors (age, gender and education),

Part III: Unemployment History (previous industry and occupation), and

Part IV: Participation in the Government Retraining Programme for Re-employment (latent and manifest functions of coping and psychological well-being).

As participants were Chinese, the interview guide was prepared in both English and Chinese (Appendix V and VI). This interview guide channelled the questioning flow and provided some degree of flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore emerging themes during the interviews. The interview guide mainly contained open-ended questions to allow participants to have more freedom in recounting in detail the circumstances surrounding their coping processes and well-being during participation in government retraining, compared to being unemployed.

These questions were designed to capture the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, the latent and manifest functions of coping and psychological well-being among participants. Probes were also used to encourage participants to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences, and seek clarification on their responses. Some closed questions associated with demographic factors of participants such as age, gender, education and occupation were included.

Pilot Interviews

Following the compilation of the interview guide, pilot testing was conducted on three occasions to ensure that the research instruments functioned properly before the commencement of the research project (Bryman, 2008). The researcher invited three security guards to take part in pilot interviews. They came from the same working group that this research intended to study, namely re-employed security guards aged 50+ after completion of the ERB's full-time security retraining programme for re-employment.

In this pilot test, interviews were conducted with the same procedure and manner intended for the proper interviews (Hermanowicz, 2002). This allowed the researcher to rehearse the entire interview process, try out all interview questions to ensure that they were all sufficiently clear for the participants and to gain confidence in conducting the research project. For example, the researcher introduced herself, gave participants a copy of Participant Informed Consent Letter (Chinese version) (Appendix IV), and explained the purpose and research ethics in Chinese language. Consent for audio recording was also requested. Having gained a participant's consent, the researcher administered the interview guide in Chinese (Appendix VI).

After the pilot interviews, participants were requested to comment on the participant informed consent letter, consent form, interview questions and the procedure for further improvement. Though there were no major changes in the research tools in the pre-test, participants indicated that participants' status as being unemployed or in government retraining remained unclear in a probe under Part IV

(A) 1. Time Structure and Activities of the interview guidelines: "In your free time during unemployment, were there certain kinds of activities you liked to do?" The question was then amended to: "In your free time during participation in the government retraining programme, were there certain kinds of activities you liked to do?"

Overall, the interview guide (Appendix VI) tried out in the pilot interviews did fulfil the intended purpose of obtaining in-depth qualitative data from participants in answering the research questions. Minor adjustments were made to the interview guide based on clarification sought from participants.

Conducting Interviews

Following this pilot test, the researcher conducted interviews with participants in familiar workplace environments such as private conference rooms where they felt comfortable (Hessler, 1992), which allowed them to talk more freely on the research topic. The researcher administered the interview guide (Chinese version) (Appendix VI) and used Chinese language that was comprehensible to participants throughout the interviews. In each interview, the researcher took a few minutes to introduce herself, provided participants with a copy of the Participant Informed Consent Letter (Chinese version) (Appendix IV) and explained the purpose of the interview in order to ensure that they all clearly understood why they were requested to participate in this research.

Thereafter, the researcher requested participants' permission to use a digital voice recorder to record the conversation for transcription purposes and asked for their

written informed consent (Appendix IV). During the interviews, the researcher listened patiently, and only made requests for clarification of interview responses or elaboration on interesting subject when deemed necessary. Throughout the entire interview process, the researcher remained objective and avoided the use of leading questions. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio taped and then fully transcribed. The process of transcribing interviews helped the researcher to gain more knowledge and understanding of the social phenomenon being studied. Once the data from interviews were fully transcribed, thematic analysis was used (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse and report themes (patterns) emerging out of the literature. There were three phases in the process of analysis: (a) coding of the transcripts, (b) identification of categories, and (c) grouping of common themes in relation to the research questions.

In this analysis process, participants' discussions related to the research objectives were first coded in a list of categories. This list consisted of personal, emotional, social and special events associated with participants' unemployment, retraining and re-employment. Each identified category expressed a distinct set of experiences and perceptions. For example, the category of 'impact of unemployment on everyday life' had a number of sub-categories such as 'loss of time structure', 'financial issues' and 'emotional impact'. Data like 'depressed', 'unhappy', 'bored', 'worried' and 'financial pressures' were coded under 'emotional impact'.

The category of coping strategies consisted of four sub-categories: 'government retraining', 'control-oriented strategies', 'escape strategies' and 'symptom management'. In addition, when personal differences such as age, gender, and education of participants were identified within a category, sub-categories were created to emphasise them.

The final step was to analyse the transcript extracts contained in each category and pull them together under common themes in relation to the research questions. Consequently, these analyses led to the grouping of eight key themes: latent functions of coping, manifest functions of coping, environmental functions of coping, improved psychological well-being, cultural factors, age, gender and education. Altogether, they captured the ways in which older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment. These findings are presented in detail in the next chapter on 'Results and Analysis'.

However, these qualitative data consisting of subjective social meanings constructed by participants may raise the problems of reliability and validity that are more easily identified in quantitative research (Sandelowski, 1986). Rockhill (1982) states that reliability is the goal for quantitative researcher to attain replication to which others can repeat the research results if the same procedures are followed.

Alternatively, Giacomini and Cook (2000) contend that qualitative researchers are not concerned with taking valid measurements of variables as outlined in quantitative design, but rather in accurately representing the subjective experiences of participants to ensure the results of the study are valid. In an attempt to equate

to the quantitative research concepts, qualitative researchers suggest a new set of skills of trustworthiness in qualitative research to strengthen readers' confidence in research findings (Burke, 2007).

Trustworthiness Procedures

Lincoln and Guba (1985) encourage skills to establish trustworthiness in qualitative studies such as credibility and transferability. Credibility is to ensure participants' stories are accurately described with member checking the most crucial skill in this regard. This is to take data and interpretations back to participants, so that they can review the findings and comment on the accuracy. For example, Ardichvili *et al.* (2003) shared summaries of interview findings with participants who made suggestions for better reflections on what they talked about to interviewers.

Following this, the researcher checked with participants over the phone to ensure that interpretations were accurate and reflected their feelings and thoughts after the interviews had been transcribed and analysed. The researcher also informed them whose story was intertwined in a particular research subject and let them have their transcripts if they so wished. This provided them with an opportunity to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the way in which the researcher had interpreted their stories.

Transferability meanwhile is achieved by thick description that is a rich account of the data collected during research. In this way, participants are provided with sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of findings to other settings that they know. In this research, transferability was attained via rich

description of data collected from participants about their perceptions and experiences during their participation in government retraining. Furthermore, transferability was assured by interviewing participants of a same working group with similar experiences and backgrounds. For instance, they were mainly less educated and low-skilled security guards in a public sector organisation. Therefore, detailed information and analysis of this research could provide participants with a database for making judgements about the transferability of findings to other social realities.

In all, trustworthiness is the goal for replication in this qualitative research. Therefore, the skills of credibility and transferability have been properly addressed throughout. This research examines how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment while attending the ERB's full-time security retraining programme to secure re-employment and improve psychological well-being. Therefore, the results of this research can be replicated when examining latent and manifest coping strategies employed by older and low-skilled trainees to improve well-being during participation in the ERB's full-time retraining programme for re-employment.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers have to ensure no harm without any duress on participants, so that their rights, interests, privacy and sensitivities are protected (Bulmer, 2001). However, ethical issues of disparities of power and status exist between researchers and participants. Within this power relationship, informed consent from participants needs to be obtained without any coercion or covert activities (Orb *et al.*, 2000).

Given the social importance of employment in this research, issues of power relation are raised in that participants perceive their status as displaced workers. Therefore, a discussion about the experiences of displacement and participation in government retraining for re-employment may be socially and psychologically taxing for them. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter to be researched and the power relation issues over their status, the researcher needs to address these ethical issues with proper care.

Regarding the ethical issue of the power relationship between participants as security guards and the researcher as a former assistant property manager, this former working relationship may exert pressure to a certain extent on participants' willingness to take part in this research and the potential bias this may have on the data collected. Their displacement status may further exacerbate certain ethical issues. To tackle these issues, the following ethical behaviours were exercised throughout the research.

Issues relating to sensitivity and power relationship can be addressed at the initial stages of data generation. As noted earlier, the researcher's insider status was instrumental in her ability to connect with the gatekeeper and participants, and to thus build trust. In the first instance, the researcher obtained prior approval from the gatekeeper (property manager) to conduct the research within his organisation. Nevertheless, researchers need to reiterate the purpose of the research and ensure gatekeepers are not alienated by the research process (Duke, 2002).

To strengthen the trust and integrity with the gatekeeper and participants, the researcher produced samples of the Participant Informed Consent Letter (Appendix

IV) and interview guide (Appendix VI), explaining the purpose of this research project and the dissemination of research data. This may also reduce the power imbalance between the researcher and participants (BSA, 2002).

However, there are advantages and disadvantages of introducing gatekeepers in research. Considering the advantages, Duke (2002) concurs that many researchers have found that access is much easier if they have personal contact to the fieldwork site and potential participants. This was indeed the case in this research as formal contact with the gatekeeper enabled the researcher to gain formal access to the fieldwork site and potential participants more quickly, and to establish a supportive working relationship with the gatekeeper and participants.

Even so, there are also disadvantages of introducing gatekeepers to the research, which may present a number of possible ethical considerations (Flewitt, 2005). Researchers must understand that gatekeepers may have power over the potential participants they are introducing. For example, the gatekeeper may only nominate those who would talk positively about government retraining. This raises the problem of selection bias of participants. Moreover, potential participants may feel obligated to participate in this research, fearing damage their working relationships with the gatekeeper if they do not.

To handle these challenges, the researcher, as mentioned earlier, requested the gatekeeper to arrange a meeting for the researcher with all potential participants in each estate in order to make clear to them that there would be no negative consequences if they chose not to participate. During the meeting, the researcher gave potential participants a copy of the Participant Informed Consent Letter

(Appendix IV), explaining the purpose of the research. The issues of voluntary participation in research, confidentiality of the data, anonymity of participants and workplace, time required for the interview in a familiar workplace environment (private conference rooms), recording and transcription of the interview were all discussed. The researcher then gave participants the opportunity to choose whether they wished to take part in this research or not.

During the interview stage, the researcher, as previously discussed, used Chinese language that was comprehensible to all Chinese participants. Importantly, the researcher complied with the crucial principle of informed consent, namely that participants had the right to understand and consent to their participation in the research without any undue stress (BSA, 2002). Thus, participants were given the opportunity to fully understand the purpose, nature and how the data were stored, analysed and utilised in detail. They were also reminded that they had the right to participate voluntarily, not to answer any specific questions and to withdraw at any stage for any or no reason without any penalty.

Despite advantages of insider status, some disadvantages need to be addressed, like leakage of confidential participant information. There may be resistance to being open and honest in interviews if participants suspect that the researcher may pass on their information to their colleagues, supervisors, or the gatekeeper. Therefore, they were all assured that their data were confidential and only for the use in this research project, and that they would not be shared with their colleagues or other senior officers.

To avoid unnecessary conflicts or embarrassment, participants would also be

informed for their final approval if their interview transcripts would be used in the thesis. To that effect, the researcher provided them with a copy of the Participants Informed Consent Letter (Appendix IV) and only proceeded with the interview after their consent had been given.

Furthermore, the protection of participants' interest is of utmost importance. Participants are assured of confidentiality and anonymity (BSA, 2002). In this research, participants are working in a public sector organisation, from which the researcher can easily recruit sufficient numbers of participant to take part in this research. However, they can be easily traced back and identified if their working organisation is exposed.

To maintain participants' anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher removed any identifying data such as the name of their working organisation and descriptions of certain individual characteristics. Though the researcher had gained permission from the gatekeeper to conduct the research, all data were reported under pseudonyms. For example, the researcher replaced participants' name with a number and did not name their working organisation throughout the research project.

Regarding the security of data and information, participants' data and analysis were stored securely in encrypted files. No person unconnected to the research had access to the data generated. All audio recording tapes and copies of interview transcripts were kept securely in a locked cabinet and would be destroyed after completion of researcher's doctorate course. For the rich secondary data of government surveys and statistics that formed the background information in this

study, the researcher properly acknowledged the source of data.

Importantly, participants are the most valuable assets in this research. Hence, researchers must always be extremely careful about how they discuss with participants and arrange the settings (Hessler, 1992). Thus, the researcher ensured that interviews were conducted in familiar surroundings for the participants, such as private conference rooms in their workplace where they felt free, safe and comfortable without any risk of being overheard. Permissions were obtained from participants for audio recordings. In this regard, they had the right to decline or pause the recordings as requested, which may have enhanced participants' response and mutual trust.

In all, this independent research project is built on participants' informed consent, and protection of their anonymity and confidentiality. Prior ethical approval was obtained from the University of Leicester before the commencement of the research work. Considering any ethical dilemmas that may arise, the statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002) formed the ethical framework and guidelines for this research. In case of doubt, the researcher would seek advice from her project supervisor.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has justified the philosophical positions of constructionism and interpretivism in this research. Based on the philosophical positions that underpin this research, qualitative methodology is used to acquire better understanding of multiple social realities from participants' perspective through meaning and

interpretations in answering the research questions. Pilot interviews were conducted before the commencement of this research project. The data collected through semi-structured interviews were analysed through thematic analysis. Finally, trustworthiness and ethical issues of this study were addressed throughout the research.

The next chapter presents the results and data analysis in answering all research questions with supporting quotes from interviews, relevant literature and theory. The theoretical framework is revised according to the emerging themes from the literature.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis sets out to explore how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment. To answer this question, there are two research sub-questions to specify the aims of this study. First, this research examines the role of Hong Kong's government retraining in facilitating participants' coping to access manifest and latent benefits for better well-being. Second, it investigates the effects of demographic factors (age and gender) on unemployment and coping mechanisms.

To answer the research questions, the study was conducted on the back of the ERB's full-time security retraining programme targeted at unemployed individuals. Through the interviews, 15 Chinese re-employed security guards (7 men and 8 women with a mean age of 57 years) following retraining shared their retrospective views on unemployment and government retraining as well as perceptions of their current security jobs.

This chapter presents the results and analysis of this research in the context of two research sub-questions. To illustrate the answers to the research questions, quotes from the interviews that link to the literature and theories are provided. The proposed conceptual framework in Figure 2.1 (Chapter 2) helps organise these answers. In the discussion, pseudonyms are used to conceal participants'

names, workplace, retraining centres and all other identifying information in order to protect their identities and confidentiality.

This chapter presents five emerging themes that inform the analysis of research sub-question one: latent functions of coping, manifest functions of coping, environmental functions of coping, improved psychological well-being and cultural factors. It then analyses three emerging themes related to research sub-question two: age, gender and education. The last part of the chapter answers all research questions, and raises some theoretical and policy issues that deserve our attention. A revised conceptual framework in Figure 5.1 demonstrates the key contributions the thesis makes to existing knowledge.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION ONE

The aim of research sub-question one is to explore the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest coping strategies and the psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees in line with previous research (Strandh, 2001). The emergent themes and sub-themes are examined in the order set out in Table 5.1 to show how Hong Kong's government retraining serves the latent and manifest functions of coping to enhance well-being.

Despite the focus of this research being on the latent and manifest functions of coping, the theme of environmental functions of coping emerges. Participants reported access to Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins: opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security for well-being improvement. These results might also suggest that cultural factors, including face-saving and

self-reliance influence the impact of unemployment on well-being and affect coping mechanisms of participants.

Table 5.1 Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes Informing Analysis of Research
Sub-Question One

Themes	Sub-Themes
(A) Latent Functions of Coping	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time Structure and Enforced Activity 2. Social Contact 3. Collective Purpose and Personal Goals 4. Status and Identity
(B) Manifest Functions of Coping	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Retraining Allowance 2. Financial Assistance from Family Members
(C) Improved Psychological Well-Being	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Happiness 2. Optimism for Re-employment 3. Self-Esteem 4. Job Satisfaction

Theme (A) Latent Functions of Coping

Participants were asked to think back to their experiences of unemployment and participation in government retraining. Theme (A) - latent functions of coping - emerged from the thematic analysis. Within this theme, four sub-themes were generated: 1. time structure and enforced activity, 2. social contact, 3. collective purpose and personal goals, and 4. status and identity.

Sub-Theme 1. Time Structure and Enforced Activity

Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model proposes that unemployment deprives

individuals of the latent functions of employment, including time structure, regular activity, social contact, collective purpose, and status and identity, thus increasing psychological distress. Jahoda (1982) suggests that time structure is the most important latent function of employment. As Jahoda (1982:22) states, "*... when there is nothing that has to be done; boredom and waste of time become the rule*". The rationale behind this statement is that employment imposes some time structure and regular meaningful activities to the day. On the contrary, when time structure and regular meaningful activities are removed in unemployment, it can lead to decreased psychological well-being of individuals.

When addressing experiences of unemployment, over half of the participants (3 women and 6 men) referred to having lost time structure and a sense of purpose, and not having had any pressing reason to get up early, as exemplified in the following quotes:

I always slept and seldom woke up early. It's really hard to motivate myself to do anything. That was depressing and boring. (Female with low education).

I didn't know what I should do and where I should go, often idling away my time. There was a great difference between working and being unemployed.

I felt stressed. (Male with low education).

These results highlighted that the adverse psychological effects of unemployment on participants resulted in feelings of depression and stress due to boredom and having no purpose or time structure to their day during unemployment. This would lend support to Jahoda's (1982) assumption that losing time structure and

purposeful activities has a negative psychological impact on unemployed individuals. These results are consistent with previous studies, which found that unemployed individuals experienced reduced structured and purposeful activity that led to distress (Feather and Bond, 1983; Wanberg *et al.*, 1997).

Conversely, most female participants (5 out of 8) were busy during most of the day in handling their housework while unemployed. One female participant illustrated her well-organised time structure and daily activities: "I still got up early to do my housework and found a new job in the Labour Department as soon as possible". This shows the patterns of gender divisions of labour in the family.

In Chinese society, men are the breadwinners and women are homemakers (Yip and Ng, 2002). Therefore, women still shoulder domestic responsibilities while unemployed. This aligns with Jahoda's (1982) idea that women have alternative roles (i.e. household chores) that help compensate for the loss of time structure and routine of unemployment experience. This gender specific pattern will be further discussed in the section on 'Analysis of Research Sub-Question Two - Gender'.

However, 2 short-term unemployed participants reported not experiencing emotional fluctuations during unemployment. As one man who had been unemployed for a month explained: "While I was unemployed, I was able to have an enjoyable vacation". This remark might be viewed positively as these individuals were not unemployed for very long. In other words, this result would suggest that this is a reflection of the short period that this participant was unemployed. Andersen (2002) also suggests that there are advantages for unemployed individuals to structure their day and engage in other activities with

friends. Moreover, Winefield *et al.* (1992) propose that meaningful use of spare time can mediate the negative effects of unemployment. All these findings contradict Jahoda's (1982) assumptions that unemployed people are equally deprived of the latent benefits and equally distressed.

Similarly, when discussing time structure and enforced activity in government retraining, all participants reported that government retraining provided them with a reason to structure their daily routine and allowed them to undertake meaningful retraining activities. For example, one woman changed her attitude to get up for in the morning: "It's given me the discipline to get up early to attend government retraining punctually". Another man added: "I was happy since I could busy myself in meaningful retraining activities all the time".

These results indicate that participants in government retraining re-established a time structure and that they enjoyed retraining activities on the waking day. The following quote typifies a participant's sense of enjoying a well-established time structure and retraining activities:

I got up early at about 6 am in preparation for the journey to the retraining centre. I had a really fun experience in learning new skills for a security job, such as security job skills, computer operation, vocational English and Putonghua, personal attributes, job search and interviewing skills, and techniques in passing the security guard licence examination. (Female with low education)

These results are consistent with Creed *et al.*'s (2001) findings that government retraining offered trainees time structure and enforced retraining activity that improved mental health. Furthermore, most participants (11 out of 15) were happy to learn new job skills for re-employment, despite being new entrants to the security service industry. One man specifically mentioned this point: "The retraining course was new to us. Previously, I was in the trade of engineering. I was very happy to learn new things". This quote shows that government retraining allowed participants the opportunity to gain access to Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins (opportunity for skill use) so as to develop new job skills for re-employment.

In addition, many participants described how they enjoyed a variety of retraining activities. As one man put it: "The programme consists of case studies on handling emergency, fire prevention and operations of water, electricity and gas facilities that are important for our daily security activities". Another man added: "I learnt how to control my temper, communicate politely with the public and provide customer service to tenants". A woman also said: "We paid visits to new work sites and had job interviews with potential employers so as to understand job description and requirements to become a security guard". These results indicated that participants accessed Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins (variety) to gain varied and novel retraining experiences that were associated with greater well-being.

Altogether, these findings suggest that participants in government retraining can re-establish a time structure and enjoy meaningful retraining activities, compared to being unemployed. In other words, government retraining resembles the environment of employment and improves participants' coping skills to access Jahoda's (1982) time structure and enforced activity for better well-being, as with

prior research (Creed *et al.*, 2001). In addition, participants' access to various job-related skills and novel experiences in a retraining context is in line with Warr's (1987) proposition whereby access to the environmental vitamins (opportunity for skill use and variety of tasks) is linked with better mental health. Warr *et al.* (2004) also reported that access to environmental vitamins improved mental health.

Sub-Theme 2. Social Contact

According to Jahoda (1982:26), social contact with colleagues and other people will *"provide more information, more opportunity for judgment and rational appraisal of other human beings with their various foibles, opinions, and ways of life"*. Thus, employment can offer a context in which workers have contact with colleagues and other people regularly, and share experiences so as to extend their social networks. Alternatively, unemployment disrupts social networks and leads to decreased well-being (Jahoda, 1982).

As regards the question about social contact during unemployment, most participants (11 out of 15) stayed at home with their families. One woman was quoted as saying: "While unemployed, I mostly remained home and socialised with my family members". This indicates that unemployed participants are deprived of social contact and suffer negative consequence of unemployment (Dieckhoff and Gash, 2015).

The question arises as to why participants do not manage to access other social outlets during unemployment. Rantakeisu *et al.* (1999) explain that unemployed individuals may change their social activities because of the shaming attitudes of

other people. 8 participants reported that they experienced shameful feelings while unemployed. One man reflected on these sentiments: "I felt that people didn't respect me because I had no job and no income". Another woman recalled: "I couldn't find a new job, and felt isolated and embarrassed to say that I was unemployed". Results showed that participants were isolated and felt shameful while society judged them as unemployed individuals (Creed and Muller, 2006).

On the contrary, in response to the question about social contact during government retraining, all participants highlighted a change in this regard. In particular, participants discussed their active involvement in social contact with fellow trainees and trainers in the retraining centre. One woman mentioned her happy contacts with fellow trainees while attending government retraining: "I felt happy that I made new friends in retraining. Thus, I could share experiences and discuss our families and reasons why we needed to change our jobs as being in this older age group". One man added: "I got on well with the fellow trainees. We exchanged contact phone numbers for mutual support in this field of work".

These findings indicate that although most participants lose their social contact while unemployed, involvement in government retraining can lead to participants feeling socially connected with trainees and sharing experiences. Furthermore, many participants mentioned the trainers' friendly and supportive attitudes. One woman illustrated this point: "The trainers enthusiastically taught us well to seek new employment and treated us as friends. We liked their teaching styles". Another woman highlighted: "I felt happy. The trainers showed concern about us, especially about absent trainees and encouraged them to return to school in order to get a sufficient retraining allowance". These findings show that trainers provide

participants with social support that is lost during unemployment. With such social support, participants are more likely to appraise unemployment as less stressful and to be able to maintain a sense of control and confidence than when unemployed (Latack, 1986).

Along these lines, government retraining can offer a context in which participants have social contact with trainers and trainees so as to extend their social networks and experience a sense of community. The following quotes illustrate these aspects:

We had positive and enjoyable social interactions in the retraining centre. As security work was new to us, we shared our knowledge about this new occupation. The trainer explained the characteristics of this job to us in detail and taught us a lot of skills, particularly the importance of good manners in this service sector. (Male with low education).

I am happy to exchange information using WhatsApp with trainers and trainees for mutual support even after retraining. Through retraining, we have become very good friends. We share our working experiences and attend to problems together. (Male with low education).

Taken together, these findings suggest that participants through retraining can rebuild their social lives with fellow trainees and trainers and enjoy a sense of community. As part of a social network, participants can thus feel supported. The results of this study are in agreement with the findings of Creed *et al.* (1996) where government retraining provided trainees with the opportunity to interact with

trainers and trainees and improved their well-being during the course and over time. In other words, government retraining helps participants to access Jahoda's (1982) latent social contact for better well-being.

Sub-Theme 3. Collective Purpose and Personal Goals

Regarding the concept of collective purpose in Jahoda's (1982) model, employment connects workers to the goals and purposes of society that transcend their own. In this manner, workers need the feeling of being needed by other people and useful to society. Thus, the withdrawal of this latent benefit during unemployment results in psychological distress.

While discussing collective purpose and personal goals during unemployment, participants who had high-status occupations were more psychologically vulnerable than those who had low-status occupations (Jahoda, 1982). For instance, a former small-factory owner expressed an aimless sort of life: "I was lost in my day-dreaming during unemployment. Re-employment in the same career is now impossible for me". Another former engineer also described his feelings of being unproductive: "Despite my efforts, I couldn't find a job and sat around all day at home. I felt pressurised and lost my direction in my life".

These interview data show that for those who previously had had high-status jobs, failing to find re-employment resulted in many feeling abandoned by society. In contrast, most participants who previously held low-status occupations expressed only slight stress in this regard because government retraining guaranteed them a job thereafter. A former messenger elaborated this point: "In view of my poor

education, I attended the ERB security programme and immediately got a security job". In this sense, government retraining is important as it retrains unemployed older individuals for new jobs in order to reduce the negative impacts of unemployment on well-being (Sousa-Ribeiro *et al.*, 2014).

As discussed earlier, retraining environments provide participants with the opportunity to gain access to time structure, retraining activities and social contact with fellow trainees and trainers in the sense of belonging and acceptance. Along these lines, retraining may also result in a renewed sense of collective purpose through working with other unemployed trainees to achieve a common goal such as gaining job skills and re-employment.

With regard to the question about collective purpose and personal goals during participation in government retraining, participants made their re-employment a top priority. Frequently-mentioned quotes from participants included: "re-employment is urgently needed" (15), "contributions to society" (8), "no reliance on social welfare assistance" (7), and "being useful to society" (4). The following quotes provide examples of participants' personal goals and collective purposes during their participation in government retraining:

We were eager to find jobs. The collective purpose of all trainees was the same: that we would become useful to society following re-employment. (Female with high education).

I wanted to attain my personal goal of getting a security job and to not rely on social welfare assistance from the government. (Female with low education).

I can contribute to society. As a security guard, I can help tenants sleep well at night while I am on guard at the building to protect them. (Male with low education).

These findings suggest that participants can feel worthwhile so as to focus on their new aim in life: re-employment. They attain personal goals of self-reliance through employment and show reluctance to receive social welfare assistance. In turn, their collective purpose is to make social contributions to society as valued members following re-employment. Similarly, Creed *et al.* (1996) documented that trainees were given the opportunity to participate in collective processes in order to improve mental health.

As a whole, these results demonstrated that the dominant personal goals of all participants were to find work and fulfil their collective purpose as valued members of society. In support of Creed *et al.* (1996), these findings suggest that government retraining can assist participants in accessing Jahoda's (1982) personal goals and collective purpose to increase well-being.

Sub-Theme 4. Status and Identity

For the concept of status and identity, Jahoda (1982) considers the notion that one's status and identity are often defined by one's job. In unemployment, workers are distressed from losing their work-related status and identity. Creed and Macintyre (2001) found that social status was the most important contributor to well-being, followed by time structure and collective purpose.

When discussing status and identity during unemployment, most participants (8 out of 15) felt that they had lost their status and identity. One man reflected on these negative emotions: "I took on a non-worker identity and people looked at me differently, causing me to feel a lower sense of status". One woman also described: "People looked down on me. My self-esteem dropped through the floor". These findings highlight that people and society attach great emphasis on employment. Consequently, participants perceived themselves to have low social status due to being unemployed (Paul and Batinic, 2010; Wahl *et al.*, 2013).

To address such threats to their status and identity, McFadyen (1995) suggests that unemployed people use some other socially-accepted categorisation such as housewife or retired worker rather than categorise themselves as 'unemployed'. Accordingly, none of the participants categorised themselves as 'unemployed'. Responding to the question about status and identity in government retraining, all participants proudly categorised themselves as 'trainee'. The following are illustrative:

People valued me with a new trainee identity because they assumed that I would be well trained for a security job. (Female with low education).

I felt people respected me when I was a trainee. They expected that I would have a new job soon. (Male with low education).

These results show that participants' self-perceptions during retraining were indeed more positive than when unemployed. Participants expressed that people judged them positively in view of their new identity of trainee for a security job. Hence,

these findings suggest that participants in government retraining can develop a new social identity of trainee that leads to feelings of having a higher status, which enhances self-esteem (Cassidy, 2001).

As a whole, government retraining facilitates participants' access to Jahoda's (1982) status and identity. Furthermore, participants perceive their retraining environment to be clear in that they will have a new job following retraining. This perception may exacerbate their feelings of certainty about future employment prospects and thus the fulfilment of Warr's (1987) environmental vitamin (environmental clarity) to improve well-being.

After retraining, all participants were re-employed as security guards. Nevertheless, the occupation of security guard is low on the occupational hierarchy in Hong Kong (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2015). 6 participants resisted the negative identity imposed by a low-prestige security occupation. They rather categorised themselves in a newly-forming sense of self-worth and identity to enhance self-esteem (Cassidy, 2001).

In response to the question about status and identity following re-employment, 2 participants in former low-status occupations categorised themselves as 'helpers'. A former sewing worker elaborated on this: "Though this security job needs me to pay attention to suspicious persons wandering around the estate area, most of them are, in fact, old estate tenants who may lose their way and need my help". A former manufacturing worker added to this: "Whenever I can help tenants, I get job satisfaction and feel happy". This finding suggests that these participants can establish a stronger work identity being 'helpers' rather than 'security guards' to

improve self-image.

Comparatively, 4 participants who previously held high-status occupations used some other higher-level self-categorisation to enhance self-esteem. A former small-factory owner confidently categorised security guards as 'professionals': "We are professionals, as security guards are licenced. To do security work, we all needed to pass a security guard licence examination in the retraining centre in order to get a security personnel permit". This indicates that after losing his previous high-level status and identity, this participant attempts to categorise himself as a professional to create a better identity than the one generally associated with his current low-status security job.

Interestingly, another former small-factory owner identified himself as a 'protector' instead of 'watchdog': "The working status of security work is very low because some people call security guards 'watchdogs'. I am finally relieved when I understand that this security job can help and protect people. If tenants feel sick or the water or electricity system breaks down at home, they may first ask security guards for help to protect them from the risks as we can be easily seen nearby".

In fact, there is no precise definition of the term 'watchdog' in the West, but in Chinese language it idiomatically refers to 'a barking dog that never bites' (Free Online Dictionary, 2015). In Chinese culture, there is a negative connotation with the term 'watchdog'. As the main duty of a security guard is to maintain visitor control at a building's entrance, he can thus appear to do nothing and just sit at his post, like a dog. Many people tease security guards about their menial duties. This implies that these teasers consider security guards as unimportant and useless, when

called upon. These degrading stereotypes may upset security guards, but they must remain calm. The interview data suggest that this former small-factory owner views himself as a protector to promote his positive image and glorify the characteristics of this security job.

Moreover, a former engineer proudly presented himself as a professional certificate holder in the security service industry: "Many people admire me that I have fulfilled the course requirements and that I am now a fully qualified security guard with a certificate". The Foundation Certificate in Standard Security and Property Management placement-tied course is a professional certificate course (ERB, 2016). By attaining a certificate after retraining, trainees can be exempted from basic retraining on being employed. In this way, this participant considers it a great achievement for him to obtain a certificate so as to attain a positive social identity and status.

Finally, one former manager did not consider herself as being just a security guard, but rather defined herself through her volunteer work: "My unique abilities have been recognised by other people who show respect for me as their English teacher". This finding highlights the importance in having other interests outside of work. This participant may have a fallback social role such as volunteering, which can lead to feelings of status and identity (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011).

In all, these findings suggest that after taking a low-status security job, some participants (6 out of 15) recategorised themselves in order to enhance self-esteem (Cassidy, 2001). For those who previously had low-status jobs, they categorised themselves as lower-level helpers. Comparatively, those who previously had

high-status jobs used some other higher-level self-categorisation such as professional, protector, professional certificate holder and English teacher to compensate for the loss of their previous high-level working status and identity.

However, such reinterpretation of the position of security guard as higher-level professional, protector and professional certificate holder or through voluntary work such as an English teacher could be interpreted as the application of escape techniques to avoid acknowledging their low-status security job in order to improve well-being. These findings support Latack's (1986) escape strategies that aim at avoiding being in distressed situations to improve well-being.

Evidence suggests that escaping from the unpleasant reality of having a low-status security job may help those participants in former high-status jobs to adapt themselves to their current life situations, which contributes to good well-being. Hence, these escaping coping techniques are considered as adaptive coping strategies to regulate negative emotions and should be distinguished from other maladaptive escape strategies, like drinking alcohol, smoking and taking drugs (Lazarus, 1993). Altogether, those in former high-status occupations used higher-level self-categorisation than those in former low-status occupations as a way to escape from their low-status security job.

The question arises as to why status and identity are important to participants. In this aspect, face-saving in Chinese culture may be of help in explaining the results. As noted earlier, participants tended to be self-reliant through employment, had a strong tendency to contribute to society as valued members and showed reluctance to receive social welfare assistance. This self-reliance pattern is consistent with

the findings of Chung (2010) in that most low-income Chinese were preoccupied with the idea of self-reliance through employment and that they considered welfare recipients to be already stigmatised in society as lazy and a burden to society. The question remains as to why welfare payments are more stigmatised in Chinese collectivistic societies than in the West.

In the West, unemployment benefits can help individuals cope with unemployment (OECD, 2015b). This means that welfare payments are a socially accepted part of redistributive societies. However, the sense of collectivism in Chinese societies refers to loyalty and obligation to the family (Yan and Sorenson, 2006). People will only gain their self-respect when they can earn to support their families rather than rely on welfare payments (Chung, 2010). Therefore, seeking social welfare assistance is more likely to be stigmatising in Chinese collectivistic societies than in the West because of a different cultural interpretation of welfare payments. In Chinese society, a pattern of self-reliance through employment is seen as a way to address the social issue of unemployment (Chiu and Wong, 2005).

Taken together, these coping strategies used by participants could be interpreted as face-saving strategies. This is supported by Yang's (2002) study of face-saving in South Korea, which found that unemployed men lost face because of their inability to fulfil their role as breadwinner in a male breadwinner context. In this context, unemployed men were vulnerable to unemployment because their responsibilities became social obligations to maintain the financial stability of the family. Hence, the most functional way to save face is to find a job.

Correspondingly, the concepts of face-saving and self-reliance uncovered in this

research appear to influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect participants' coping strategies. In particular, for unemployed men, a decrease of income and financial hardship on family finance may multiply the negative consequences of unemployment on them due to their financial responsibility for the family in Chinese culture (Chiu and Ho, 2006). Therefore, unemployed men tend to regain their social role of breadwinner by finding a new job (Yang, 2002). These results might suggest that participants tend to be self-reliant and use problem-focused coping to attend government retraining for re-employment in order to perform their work-related social role to save face in Hong Kong Chinese society.

Overall, these findings suggest that government retraining can improve participants' coping skills to access Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits (time structure, enforced activity, social contact, collective purpose and personal goals, and status and identity) and Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security) for better mental health. In other words, government retraining can serve the latent and environmental functions of coping to improve well-being. These findings might also suggest that cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) play an important role on coping mechanisms for Hong Kong Chinese. The next sub-section turns to discuss Theme (B) Manifest Functions of Coping.

Theme (B) Manifest Functions of Coping

Participants were asked to think back to their retraining allowance. Theme (B) - manifest functions of coping - emerges from the thematic analysis. Within this theme, two sub-themes are generated: 1. retraining allowance, and 2. financial

assistance from family members.

Sub-Theme 1. Retraining Allowance

Fryer (1986) argues that the financial strain associated with unemployment accounts for poor mental health. When discussing financial strain during unemployment, about half of the participants (7 out of 15) highlighted their financial hardship during unemployment. One man reflected these sentiments: "I lost my job due to the relocation of my company to China and had feelings of depression due to the sudden loss of my job and working status. How could I earn a living?" Consistent with Fryer's (1986) argument, this finding highlights financial deprivation to account for the decline in well-being of unemployed participants.

In this direction, this research takes a look at the aspect of retraining allowances in government retraining. As most participants (11 out of 15) were low-level blue-collar workers, this may give specific insights into the manifest functions of employment (financial needs) in promoting mental health. This is in comparison with high-status laid-off managers, who should have better employment transition support and financial compensation offered by employers (Johnson and Jackson, 2012). Hassall *et al.* (2004) also explain that financial strain is a very important predictor of the well-being of low-wage earners.

Though encountering financial strain, participants mentioned that they could live on meagre "severance pay" (2) and "savings" (6) during temporary unemployment. One man illustrated this point: "I had no problems during unemployment because I could live on my severance pay. Nevertheless, long-term unemployment would

induce financial difficulties". These results show that participants' economic independence was not seriously threatened by short-term unemployment; however, they were motivated to find a job as soon as possible otherwise they would have to live off their savings.

In response to the question how participants lived on a retraining allowance, they all said that they were delighted to receive this retraining allowance to meet their meals and travelling expenses. Two quotes exemplify:

I was happy to receive about \$1,000-HK retraining allowance after retraining to solve my financial problems, although it was only sufficient for meals and travelling expenses. (Male with low education).

I was very happy to receive this retraining allowance after retraining. Consequently, I had money to use and did not hesitate to think what kind of food I should buy. (Female with low education).

These results showed that retraining benefits could soften household financial needs and the negative impacts of unemployment on participants. As for low-income families, this retraining allowance was particularly important. This finding is consistent with the research by Strandh (2001), who found that access to income replacement unemployment benefits mediated the negative impacts of unemployment.

Sub-Theme 2. Financial Support from Family Members

However, most participants (7 out of 15) had trouble living on these retraining benefits and needed to rely on financial assistance from family members, as indicated in the following quotes:

The retraining allowance was insufficient for a living. Thus, I lived with my family, and didn't need to pay rent and household bills. (Female with high education).

I received about \$1,000-HK retraining allowance. This was sufficient only for my meals and transportation costs. I needed financial support from family members that released me from financial hardship. (Female with low education).

After retraining, I received about \$1,800-HK retraining allowance but it was insufficient for a living. As a result, my wife needed to work and I stayed home to take care of my young daughter. (Male with low education).

These results reflect a prevalent culture in Hong Kong that participants turn towards family members for financial support in times of difficulty (Pang *et al.*, 2005). It seems natural for them to rely on other family members' financial support and to refuse to seek social welfare assistance so as to save face even in financial hardship (Tsui *et al.*, 2013). However, financial strain causes the decline of well-being (Ervasti and Venetoklis, 2010).

Overall, these findings lend credence to Fryer's (1986) argument that poverty, rather than deprivation of the latent benefits, is also an important factor associated with decreased well-being of unemployed individuals. Moreover, evidence suggests that government retraining can serve the manifest functions of coping to help participants to gain access to Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits in the form of a retraining allowance for better well-being.

Nevertheless, these findings might also suggest that most poor participants could not live on the basic retraining allowance and relied on financial support from family members rather than to seek social welfare assistance in order to save face (Tsui *et al.*, 2013). This reflects that those low-income families are exposed to the risk of poverty and decreased well-being. This issue deserves our attention and will be addressed in the section on 'Answering the Research Sub-Question One'. For now, the next section turns to discuss Theme (C) Improved Psychological Well-Being in greater detail.

Theme (C) Improved Psychological Well-Being

Participants were asked to think back to the effects of government retraining on their well-being. Theme (C) - improved well-being - emerges from the thematic analysis. Within this theme, four sub-themes are generated to represent the coping outcomes: 1. happiness, 2. optimism for re-employment, 3. self-esteem, and 4. job satisfaction. Here, the models of Jahoda (1982), Fryer (1986) and Warr (1987) help explain the positive effects of government retraining on well-being.

Sub-Theme 1. Happiness

The adverse impact of unemployment on mental health is well documented in the literature (Paul and Moser, 2009). When discussing feelings during unemployment, most participants (13 out of 15) experienced the deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits, exacerbating psychological distress. Their depressive symptoms included feelings of being "depressed" (5), "unhappy" (5), "bored" (2), "worried" (1) and having "financial pressures" (7).

For instance, one man explicitly said: "I felt depressed, got up late, remained home and idled away the time". This statement raises an important issue. The deprivation of time structure, activity and purposefulness tend to come together, contributing to the total experience of unemployment and the decline in well-being (Jahoda, 1982). One woman also expressed: "I lost my job after a restaurant closure and felt very worried under the pressure of poverty". This indicates that unemployed people experience financial deprivation and distress (Fryer, 1986). Along these lines, latent and manifest benefits are important predictors of well-being.

Nevertheless, all participants expressed their happiness while attending government retraining in relation to feelings of pleasure (Warr, 2007). Participants' access to Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits of employment, as indicated earlier, predicts a positive effect of government training on mental health. For instance, participants were happy because they could establish new social contacts with trainers and trainees, whereas some participants felt happy because government retraining gave them a structure to their lives. Thus, these examples indicate that government

retraining can help participants to cope with access to the latent functions of employment that are associated with good well-being.

The evidence, as mentioned earlier, also shows that participants' access to Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits of employment can predict a positive effect of government training on well-being. For instance, all participants were happy to receive a retraining allowance, especially for those of low-income groups. This example also demonstrates that government retraining can allow participants the opportunity to access the manifest functions of employment to reduce the negative impacts of unemployment.

In addition, some complementary environmental vitamins proposed by Warr (1987) help predict a positive effect of government training on well-being, thus in total providing a good understanding of the coping of participants. As previously discussed, most participants were happy to learn new job skills for re-employment. This illustrates that government retraining can facilitate participants' access to job skills and novel experiences that is associated with Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins to increase well-being.

Interestingly, about half of the participants (7 out of 15) used the term 'schooling' to refer to their happiness maintained in the classroom. The following are illustrative:

I felt happy and enjoyed all the retraining activities. I felt I was back at school in a happy childhood, studying in a laughing atmosphere. (Male with low education).

I felt very comfortable in this retraining environment, which reminded me of the good times at school. I was optimistic for re-employment after retraining. (Male with low education).

These results show that pleasant learning environments were likely to result in happy feelings by fulfilling Warr's (1987) environmental vitamin (physical security). The question remains as to why participants are optimistic for re-employment after retraining.

Sub-Theme 2. Optimism for Re-employment

According to Scheier *et al.* (2001), optimism is characterised by positive expectations of the future while optimists strive to interpret difficult situations in the best possible way. Lai and Wong (1998) also found that optimistic unemployed women coped better than their less optimistic counterparts. While attending government retraining, all participants cited similar positive notions that they were: "optimistic about re-employment" and "optimistic for future employment prospect".

Hence, optimism in this thesis refers to favourable expectancy about re-employment. This was reflected in a comment made by a man: "In view of my sufficient knowledge and work experience in older age, I was confident to go back to school to retrain for a new job and always shared my knowledge and experience with the trainer. Being optimistic about the prospects of future employment, I sometimes taught the trainer how to reduce negative emotions about unemployment". This remark suggests that participants' rich work experiences and support from trainers in the classroom may enhance their optimism and

self-confidence in seeking re-employment.

As noted earlier, many participants enjoyed their 'schooling' in the classroom. This finding is interesting as the literature on older learners tends to emphasise that older individuals do not like retraining and 'school-like' learning. Jacobson *et al.* (2005) suggest that older and less-educated workers are less inclined to participate in retraining due to shorter working lives. Cross (1981) also informs that age is a concern for older workers because they feel too old to learn and are tired of classrooms.

Nevertheless, Ziegahn (1992) points out that practical application and understanding can motivate less-educated trainees to learn. Sloane-Seale (2008) concurs that older trainees do not want threatening classrooms that can bring about shame and fear, but would prefer to be valued and to build their self-confidence through sharing their knowledge and expertise. Therefore, a more positive image of trainers and classrooms may change such opinions.

Along these lines, supportive trainers play a very important role in the classroom. They treasure the views of participants and provide positive feedback in the form of social support, reinforcing participants' self-confidence and interest in learning new skills for re-employment, which is in agreement with Jahoda's (1982) social contact and Warr's (1987) environmental clarity as previously discussed. This finding is also consistent with previous reports on the beneficial effects of a retraining climate where supportive relationships in the classroom between trainer and trainee are associated with self-confidence in one's ability to find employment (Creed *et al.*, 2001). Thus, the participants will be optimistic to find re-employment in this

supportive retraining environment.

Most importantly, the mission of the ERB is to provide market-driven and employment-oriented retraining programmes for unemployed individuals to secure re-employment (ERB, 2016). In other words, there are positive effects of government retraining on participants due to the certainty that a job will follow retraining. In this clear environment, optimism for re-employment is likely to result in the fulfilment of Warr's (1987) environmental vitamin (environmental clarity). In particular, men are optimistic in regaining their breadwinner status in order to maintain the financial stability of the family, thereby reducing unemployment stress.

In all, the qualitative data highlighted that all participants were optimistic about re-employment after retraining. One man used the term 'one-stop service' to summarise how government retraining helped participants to get a job:

Government retraining provided us with a 'one-stop service' for unemployment to re-employment. The trainer taught us well on security job skills and knowledge. We exerted our efforts to pass the security guard licence examination in the retraining centre. On completion of the course, many security companies came to the retraining centre to recruit applicants. There were a lot of opportunities for us to find new jobs. (Male with low education)

This statement suggests that this 'one-stop service' benefits trainees as they do not suffer from the stressful process of job seeking. As McKee-Ryan *et al.* (2005) argue unemployed individuals may feel distressed if their job search proves fruitless. It may be that job seeking itself is not detrimental to mental health, but

rather the rejections from employers. Thus, this 'one-stop service' retraining setting can allow unemployed individuals to feel optimistic about regaining re-employment and to avoid the stress of having to search for a job and feeling a sense of uncertainty about the future. Moreover, all participants reported that government retraining could enhance their self-esteem.

Sub-Theme 3. Self-Esteem

According to Wanberg (1997), self-esteem refers to individuals' perceptions of their ability to control their unemployment situations and to predict improved psychological well-being. All participants in the retraining course learnt new job skills and discovered talents. One man related to this respect: "Government retraining has provided me with a sense of self-esteem. I have a lot of abilities to do new things, and in particular I felt that I was put in touch with my soft side. I am now able to communicate effectively with people and don't make mistakes easily". This indicates that attendance at a retraining course where the focus is on providing jobs skills may improve participants' self-esteem in order to control their distressed situations and cope with their new security job.

Similarly, most participants (13 out of 15) used their new skills and knowledge to take control over things around them in their daily life. One woman illustrated this point: "I am well equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for a security job. I feel empowered to control what happens around me. For example, I am competent in using my knowledge to take fire preventive measures in my daily life". One man also discovered more conversational topics with friends: "This new kind of knowledge also enriches my conversations when I communicate with others".

This illustrates that participants even experienced an increase in self-confidence in their daily life, reflecting well on the efficacy of the government retraining programme.

Taken together, these results could be explained by Fryer's (1986) control and agency as government retraining can provide participants with job skills to raise their sense of self-esteem to take control over their destiny. These results are also consistent with previous research that trainees may experience improved self-esteem and lessened feelings of helplessness than they exhibited before training, and when compared with non-participants (Creed *et al.*, 1998). Following re-employment, 14 out of 15 participants experienced job satisfaction.

Sub-Theme 4. Job Satisfaction

In answering the question on whether or not participants were satisfied with their current security job, 4 participants felt that unemployment had provided them with a chance to find a good job. As one woman quoted: "I have gained control of my life. Government retraining has given me a new security job with which the working environment is much better than my previous job as a waitress in a restaurant". This result is concurrent with the findings of Warr and Jackson (1984) where unemployment was not bad for all individuals as some improved their psychological health upon the removal of occupational pressures.

This result can also be explained in terms of quality of re-employment. The distinction between successful re-employment and satisfactory re-employment is important in this study. For example, successful re-employment represents

re-employment as a full-time job (Lai and Chan, 2002), whereas satisfactory re-employment refers to a good job associated with job satisfaction, commitment and retention (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2009). The question of whether government retraining can help trainees to find satisfactory re-employment thus arises.

In this older sample, most participants (13 out of 15) encountered barriers to employment with regard to age discrimination, physical weaknesses and low educational attainments. Though many perceive this group as old and powerless, they had taken proactive steps to attend government retraining in the pursuit of their goals towards satisfactory re-employment. Following re-employment, 14 participants experienced job satisfaction and gave the following reasons.

Employment stability is of great concern for participants in this insecure labour market. In Hong Kong, the security industry has experienced steady growth and is expected to continue on that path (Security Services Training Board, 2014). This indicates that there are sufficient security job vacancies for participants. In view of employment stability in this security service industry, participants, even those in former high-status occupations, were willing to work until their retirement age. A former small-factory owner illustrated this point: "I have found that I have no trouble getting a security job. There seems to be a big shortage of security guards. I can work till retirement". This finding illustrates that many participants settle down in this stable job and do not consider quitting.

The issues of age discrimination and good working environments are also important for participants when they seek re-employment, as indicated in comments from a man: "I like my current security work. Because of my old age, I feel comfortable

taking on this security job rather than working on a construction site. As most security guards are older workers I can easily communicate with them and get mutual respect". This discussion explains why this older cohort of participants likes to engage in this particular industry. Age discrimination seems far less prevalent in this occupational field while the job itself appears less physically demanding than, for instance, working on a construction site for men.

Moreover, older security workers appear satisfied with current wages and working conditions because of the implementation of the Statutory Minimum Wage in Hong Kong since 1 May 2011. The revised statutory minimum wage rate of \$32.5-HK per hour came into force on 1 May 2015 (Labour Department, 2016). One man, quoted earlier, also illustrated: "This job can offer me sufficient holidays and the minimum income for a living". In other words, decent wages and working conditions can encourage older workers to work longer.

For married or divorced female participants, their family and children are their priority; work, nonetheless, still remains important for them, as indicated in the following comments. One woman quoted: "Family is very important to me. I enjoy my time together with my children. It is important to maintain a good relationship with them". Another woman added: "I work only 8 hours a day and my office is very near my house. Therefore, I can look after my family, do a lot of housework and have a sound sleep after work". Briefly, these statements indicate that female participants still tend to fulfil their traditional role as homemakers when working. This dual social role may exert pressures on those women who need to fulfil both family and work responsibilities. Hence, working in close proximity to residence may ease the pressure.

Importantly, a security job can offer most participants job satisfaction when they work happily with supportive co-workers, as exemplified in the following quotes:

I like my current security work because I can share my experience with colleagues and attain high levels of job satisfaction when jobs are done well.
(Male with low education).

I would like to have this level of job satisfaction in this stable security job till my retirement age. (Male with low education).

These quotes show that participants who are committed to their new jobs experience job satisfaction and do not want to quit or pursue employment elsewhere in terms of satisfactory re-employment (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2009). These results could be explained in that there are opportunities for participants to use their job skills, and enjoy a variety of job tasks in a pleasant working environment by fulfilling the environmental benefits outlined by Warr (1987).

However, a university-educated former manager considered this full-time security job in terms of successful re-employment: "This is a good choice for me to attend this retraining course in order to find a security job first and then to advance on my career ladder in property management thereafter. I'm prepared to seek a high-level position in property management after half a year".

This remark corresponds with Kinicki *et al.*'s (2000) assertion that coping with unemployment is a process other than just simply regaining re-employment. Moreover, the better educated often feel a greater sense of underemployment and

stress than the lower educated in pursuit of a good job (Friedland and Price, 2003). Thus, this result might suggest that the better educated and lower educated groups differ in their coping outcomes. This issue of educational differences will be explored in the section on 'Analysis of Research Sub-Question Two - Education'.

Overall, these results are aligned with the literature. The evidence from the models of Jahoda (1982), Warr (1987) and Fyrer (1986) work together to explain the positive effects of Hong Kong's government retraining on well-being among participants. These results might also suggest that cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) mediate the effects of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms of participants in Chinese society. Altogether, these findings provide a better understanding of the coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled trainees.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION TWO

The aim of research sub-question two is to explain the effects of demographic factors (age and gender) on the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in support of Paul and Moser's (2009) assertions that demographic factors influence the impact of unemployment on well-being and affect coping mechanisms. Despite the focus of this research on age and gender, the evidence of this research might suggest that education also influences participants' coping mechanisms. Hence, the emergent themes and sub-themes are discussed in the order set in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Emergent Themes Informing Analysis of Research Sub-Question Two

Themes	Sub-Themes
Age	This older sample used both problem-focused coping (Hong Kong's government retraining) and emotion-focused coping (control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management).
Gender	Men were less likely to use control-oriented strategies (social support) than women to share their emotional problems with others, but relied more on symptom management (relaxation and leisure activities).
Education	<p><u>Leisure Activities</u></p> <p>The lower educated tended to use less leisure activities than their better educated counterparts to regulate their stress and preferred relaxation activities instead.</p> <p><u>Coping Outcome</u></p> <p>Following re-employment, the better educated felt more underemployed than the lower educated and continued to seek for a better job.</p>

Theme (A) Age

Old age is often considered a barrier to employment (Paul and Moser, 2009). Older workers aged 50+ are particularly vulnerable to being laid off and to having difficulty in finding re-employment in Hong Kong (EOC, 2016). They are also generally stereotyped as lacking in up-to-date jobs skills (Chiu and Ho, 2006). Consequently, older unemployed workers may prefer emotion-focused coping to ameliorate the negative impacts of unemployment to less successful problem-focused coping in ending unemployment (Fielden and Davidson, 1999).

Consistent with some comments cited above, 13 participants encountered barriers to employment, particularly with regard to age discrimination and low levels of education. Acting as active agents, participants used problem-focused coping by attending Hong Kong's government retraining for re-employment. This is concurrent with Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model in that active agents proactively cope with unemployment and bring about change in valued directions. Yet it is contrary to Fielden and Davidson's (1999) suggestion whereby older unemployed workers are less likely to engage in problem-focused activities.

This result may arise for the following three reasons. The deprivation of latent and manifest benefits may motivate participants to find re-employment in order to satisfy their economic and psychosocial needs for better mental health (Lai and Chan, 2002). Another possible explanation may be related to self-reliance through employment to enhance self-esteem in Chinese society (Chung, 2010). Finally, in light of barriers to employment, all participants may consider that government retraining can help them to cope with unemployment (Sousa-Ribeiro *et al.*, 2014). The following quotes give positive aspects of government retraining in helping this older cohort to find a job:

I felt emotionally very low after being rejected by a number of potential employers who had already employed younger employees. I hope government retraining can continue to help unemployed individuals acquire new skills for re-employment and to start a new life. (Male with low education).

Because of my older age and lower levels of education, government retraining gives me the opportunity to find a job. (Female with low education).

These findings might suggest that the relationship between older workers and the labour market seems to be mainly related to age discrimination and to their qualifications not in demand in the labour market. Therefore, when government retraining can guarantee this older cohort a job following retraining, the situation is made easier for them to cope with the period of unemployment.

Moreover, problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies are complementary in improving mental health (Leana *et al.*, 1998). In fact, participants also utilised emotion-focused coping (control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management) to enhance well-being (Latack, 1986). Results indicated that these emotion-focused strategies differed according to gender and education.

Theme (B) Gender

Gender differences in this regard are related to how different genders react to unemployment (Paul and Moser, 2009). In a male breadwinner context, men tend to be more psychologically vulnerable than women as men may lose their only - and perhaps their major - source of household income, whereas women may assume their traditional role of homemaker while unemployed (Strandh *et al.*, 2013). However, women who are single or the primary wage-earners of the family may also suffer similar stresses as men when unemployed (De Witte, 1999). In contrast, there are no gender differences in a dual breadwinner context where men and women have similar employment rates and careers (Strandh *et al.*, 2013).

In Hong Kong, although the female labour force participation has increased, men still dominate the labour market (Census and Statistics Department, 2016).

Furthermore, women in general earn lower wages than men (Census and Statistics Department, 2015b). The picture of a male breadwinner model emerges. In this context, the work role identity of men increases the financial importance of having a job while unemployed men are more vulnerable than unemployed women (Strandh *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, Pang *et al.* (2005) argue that some unemployed women feel unhappy in light of having to make an involuntary retreat to their traditional role of homemaker in a gendered labour market where they have fewer job opportunities than men.

Consistent with previous research (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011), the results of this study showed that most female participants (6 out of 8) were more likely to engage in control-oriented strategies (social support) than men to share their negative emotions with others. In contrast, most male participants (6 out of 7) tended to use symptom management (relaxation and leisure activities) but were reluctant to share their emotional problems with people.

When discussing social contact during participation in government retraining, one woman illustrated the importance of social support, namely for her to share her negative emotions with others in order to then find a job. In the first instance, she described her involuntary retreat to the traditional role of homemaker following job loss: "About 12 years ago, I lost my job after a factory closing then returned home with no alternative. When my children grew older, I wanted to work again. I did not want to idle away my time only as a housewife".

This sense of apathy and helplessness is reflected in the findings of Pang *et al.* (2005) in that unemployed women appeared deeply unhappy when forced to assume

the traditional role of homemaker in a gendered labour market, which particularly hindered their search for new jobs compared to men. After consulting with friends, this participant knew that she could work at the age of 50 as a security guard through government retraining: "I attended the government retraining programme for a security job via social networks among parents".

This finding offers an indication that positive social support from friends promotes invaluable encouragement that is particularly important for unemployed older workers at a time of high stress and low confidence. This would be concurrent with Latack's (1986) notion whereby social support can enhance proactive thoughts so as to take control actions as well as Jahoda's (1982) concept of social contact that mediates the relationship between unemployment and negative psychological consequences.

In government retraining, female participants continued to seek social support from friends. One woman illustrated this point: "While being a trainee, I sometimes talked over the phone with my friends about my unemployment and retraining experiences as well as information about job offers". Some female participants even extended their social networks to derive social support from fellow trainees. This sort of social support is particularly important for female breadwinners to find new jobs.

For example, a widow illustrated her close relationships with fellow trainees in seeking re-employment: "After school, I would go out with fellow trainees, and speak about our future employment prospects. In my free time, I also got to meet them to check whether there were any good working vacancies for us". This

remark highlights the importance of maintaining relations with support groups in the same situation (Yang, 2002). This finding also reflects that there is a similar need for employment among female breadwinners and male breadwinners (De Witte, 1999). However, unemployed female breadwinners may be more vulnerable than their male counterparts because they need to fulfil their traditional household duties in Chinese society (Women's Commission, 2011).

Conversely, when answering the question about social contact during participation in government retraining, 4 male participants preferred to relax at home, watching television, sitting around, seeking company of family or preparing for a new job. Two quotes exemplify:

I stayed at home with my family, took a rest and watched television. (Male with low education).

Most of my free time I stayed at home and did some research into security work on whether it would be a good job for me. For instance, I tried to talk with a security guard in my building to understand the nature of the job. (Male with low education).

These findings show that unemployed men seem to keep their stresses at home and are more likely to solve their problems regarding unemployment on their own accord. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which found that unemployed men tended to retain their unemployment experiences as their own 'private' issues (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011).

In addition, 2 men sometimes pursued leisure activities with friends, like doing exercises, pursuing hobbies and drinking alcohol, as indicated in the following quotes.

I went out with friends to have drinks but we never talked about our jobs.
(Male with low education).

I was busy pursuing my hobby of horse-racing and swimming with friends.
However, we didn't discuss our personal problems. (Male with low education).

These quotes indicate that though unemployed men can engage in leisure activities with others, they are unlikely to talk about their personal problems and emotions during this time regarding unemployment, consistent with the results of the earlier research (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011).

There are two possible reasons why gender differences in coping strategies are relevant to this research. In a male breadwinner context, when a man becomes unemployed, his traditional masculine identity as breadwinner is taken away from him (Yip and Ng, 2002). Family members and others may then challenge his position. In this context, men tend to rely on symptom management (relaxation and leisure activities) and decline to talk about their failure with regards the role of breadwinner.

A second possible explanation may be due to a gendered labour market structure in Hong Kong. Data here suggest that the lower female labour force participation rate than men reflects the differentiated demand in the labour market for both

genders (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2016). There is also an income disparity between men and women. Generally, women earn less than men (Census and Statistics Department, 2015b).

In this gendered labour market, some unemployed women are dissatisfied to stay at home, especially taking into account that they have less job opportunities than men (Pang *et al.*, 2005). In modern societies, employment is also important to women, particularly those who are the primary family earners (De Witte, 1999). Women may be more exposed to the risks of unemployment stress than their male counterparts while they still need to fulfil their traditional household duties in Chinese society. As such, unemployed women tend to seek social support from others to reduce negative emotions and in order to find jobs.

Overall, there are gender differences in coping mechanisms in Hong Kong Chinese society. Unemployed men are less likely to talk about their failure to fulfil their social role as breadwinner and rely more on symptom management (relaxation and leisure activities) in a male breadwinner context. Alternatively, women tend to use control-oriented strategies (social support) to share negative emotional feelings with others, and find jobs in a gendered labour market by spending more time searching for jobs, compared to men.

Theme (C) Education

The effect of unemployment on psychological distress differs by education level. According to Schaufeli (1992), the better educated may occupy a higher socially and culturally privileged position than the lower educated. One reason for this is

that the former have adequate information available about alternatives for paid work and have learned to spend their leisure time in more meaningful ways and generally have broader cultural interests than the latter.

Moreover, the better educated may also have more resources than the lower educated in dealing with stress (Mandemakers and Monden, 2013) and enjoy more leisure activities. As financial resources are the key predictors of leisure activities, financial deprivation may restrict the lower educated from engaging in them as often as the better educated (Hoare and Machin, 2010). However, the better educated may suffer from underemployment with less pay and lower occupational status, compared to their previous high-level jobs (Feldman *et al.*, 2002). Correspondingly, evidence in this research might suggest that there are differences between the better educated and the lower educated groups in the amount of leisure activities spent and coping outcomes practiced.

(A) Leisure Activities

When discussing activities in participants' free time during participation in government retraining, the better educated (3 out of 7) were more likely to enlarge their social horizon and pursue more leisure activities than their lower educated counterparts. This was reflected in a comment made by a former small-factory owner with secondary education: "I did physical exercise (swimming and jogging) with friends. At that time, I was about 40 and wanted to feel more refreshed. So I set new goals for my life". This finding reflects that being unemployed allows participants the opportunity to put their life into a new perspective by realising the importance of having a good work-life balance.

As discussed so far, involvement in government retraining can lead participants to change their behaviour towards people and society. When unemployed, most participants felt socially isolated and idle. During the government retraining, they extended their social networks with trainers, trainees and friends, and made social contributions to their community as valued members. For example, a university-educated participant took part in some high-level volunteering and thereafter found a sense of purpose in everyday life:

I volunteer to teach English in a hospital for low-income groups because of my good academic background and positive attitudes in my life. Accordingly, I can experience the joys of helping people and find meaning in my life.
(Female with high education)

This finding is consistent with previous research (Waters and Moore, 2002) that showed unemployed individuals who participated in meaningful social leisure activities could gain access to Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits for improvements in well-being. This also lends support to Cole's (2008) proposition that unemployed individuals can search for meaningful alternatives to paid work in order to enjoy similar latent benefits for better well-being.

In addition, Giuntoli *et al.* (2014) propose that voluntary work can provide a fallback social role to compensate for the loss of one's identity and status. In this respect, the participant, quoted earlier, added: "My unique abilities are recognised by other people who show respect for me as their English teacher". This quote illustrates this participant's new identity of being an English teacher, which can lead to feelings of status and identity.

As discussed earlier, those who previously held high-status occupations used higher-level terms of self-categorisation (professional, protector, professional certificate holder and English teacher) while those who previously held low-status occupations used lower-level self-categorisation term (helper) to enhance self-esteem (Cassidy, 2001).

However, voluntary work as an English teacher or the reinterpretation of the position of a security guard as higher-level professional, protector, or professional certificate holder by those participants who previously held high-status occupations could be interpreted as escape techniques to avoid the realities of their low-status security jobs (Latack, 1986). Nevertheless, the findings suggest that escaping from low-status security work may help these participants to adapt themselves to their current life situations in order to increase well-being (Lazarus, 1993).

Incidentally, lower educated participants (5 out of 8) aged 58+ who had lower secondary education led a solitary life at home. Their activities included "watching television" (1), "sitting around" (1), "doing housework" (1) and "seeking the company of family" (2). One man reflected these sentiments: "I always stayed home and sometimes went out with my young daughter". One woman added: "I have a family. I needed to stay at home to help family members to do housework". These results show that the lower educated were more likely to use relaxation activities at home than pursue leisure activities out of home with friends to increase well-being.

In all, these results might suggest that the lower educated tend to use less leisure activities than their better educated counterparts to regulate their stress and prefer

relaxation activities at home. There are two plausible explanations for these results. First, financial constraints may restrict the lower educated from participation in leisure activities (Mandemakers and Monden, 2013). Second, the lower educated may have inadequate information about the benefits of meaningful social leisure activities (Schaufeli, 1992).

(B) Coping Outcomes

In Hong Kong, low-skilled manufacturing workers have been vulnerable to job displacement under economic restructuring since the 1980s (Lee and Wong, 2004). Given recent changes in the economy, Hong Kong is now witnessing a rise in middle-class unemployment (Chan and Chan, 2013). As Feldman *et al.* (2002) point out, underemployed executives who are re-employed in low-paying jobs at low levels of organisational hierarchies suffer poor mental health.

When discussing satisfaction with their re-employment as security guards, the better educated with a bachelor degree (1 out of 15) felt more underemployed and distressed than the lower educated (Friedland and Price, 2003). One woman's reflections capture this perspective: "I'm prepared to seek a new position in property management after half a year". This sentiment shows that the better educated consider this low-skilled security job in terms of successful re-employment and as a stepping stone in finding a better job.

This result is contrary to the findings of Mandemakers and Monden (2013) where better educated individuals experienced less distress than the lower educated owing to their better re-employment chances. This result also cast further doubt on

Jahoda's (1982) notion that a bad job is better than no job at all, but supports Wanberg's (1995) suggestion whereby the outcomes of unsatisfactory re-employment may be negative. Burris (1983) also found that those individuals who perceived their jobs to be beneath their educational attainments suffered more psychological distress. Therefore, underemployed individuals will continuously seek for better jobs until satisfactory re-employment is found (Kinicki *et al.*, 2000).

Conversely, the lower educated were satisfied with their low-skilled security job in terms of satisfactory re-employment that produced emotionally satisfying coping outcomes. One man with lower secondary education illustrated this point: "In view of my old age and low educational attainments, I feel very satisfied when doing voluntary work during holidays to help other people. I have a feeling of success and achievement in my security job". Consistent with this idea, McKee-Ryan *et al.* (2009) found that re-employed individuals who did not view themselves as subjectively underemployed had obtained satisfactory re-employment, became committed to their new organisations and did not think of quitting for another (better) job.

Hence, these results might suggest that following re-employment, the better educated tend to feel more underemployed than the lower educated and continue to seek for a better job. Nevertheless, only one participant had a bachelor's degree; therefore, this educational category was under-represented in this sample. In other words, there is insufficient evidence to substantiate the current findings of educational differences in coping outcomes. This raises the question that large samples with different qualifications may show such differences. Therefore, these findings should not be undermined in the unemployment literature.

Overall, these results are consistent with the literature. The evidence might suggest that demographic factors (age, gender and education) mediate the effects of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms of participants. Now, it is time to answer all the research questions and to raise some theoretical and policy issues that merit further attention in this thesis.

CONCLUSION

This conclusion section answers all research questions and revises the theoretical framework according to the emerging themes from the literature.

Answering the Research Sub-Question One

1. What are the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest coping strategies and psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees?

The research sub-question one is related to the role of Hong Kong's government retraining in facilitating unemployed older and low-skilled trainees' coping to access latent and manifest benefits for better mental health in line with previous research (Strandh, 2001).

These results endorse Jahoda's (1982) latent functions approach as an explanation for the positive relationship between government training and well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees. Participants in the government retraining programme were given the opportunity to access a daily structure, social

contact with fellow trainers and trainees, collective purpose for re-employment, identity of trainee and enforced retraining activities. Moreover, participants enjoyed Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits in terms of a retraining allowance to meet their meals and travelling expenses. In other words, government retraining can service both latent and manifest functions of coping to improve well-being in support of Strandh (2001).

These results also showed that participants had access to Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins: opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security for better well-being. For example, participants reported having opportunities for learning various job skills for re-employment, and enjoying novel learning experiences and comfortable retraining environments.

Altogether, the positive psychological effects of participation in government retraining are related to the features from the frameworks of Jahoda (1982), Fryer (1986) and Warr (1987). Immediate effects include happiness, optimism for re-employment and self-esteem during the course along with long-term effects such as job satisfaction in their current security job. Evidence shows that participants like to work in an age-friendly working environment that can meet their basic needs: employment stability, being respected, decent salary, good working conditions, chance to use skills and working near their home. Therefore, this research indicates a need to promote an age-friendly working environment in organisations to retain and encourage older workers to work longer. However, these results might suggest that the better educated felt underemployed and continued to seek a better job.

With regards to Chinese culture, these results might suggest that participants relied on self-reliance through employment and showed reluctance to receive government assistance in order to make contributions to society as valued members. These coping strategies could be interpreted as face-saving strategies as shown also in Yang's (2002) study of face-saving in South Korea where the most functional way to save face was to find re-employment. Within these cultural boundaries, many participants took part in government retraining for re-employment in order to save face.

Nevertheless, these results do not endorse Jahoda's (1982) model in three important points. First, Jahoda (1982) underestimated Fryer's (1986) psychological effects of financial deprivation on well-being. The results of this thesis showed that about half of the participants suffered financial strain and felt distressed during unemployment. Moreover, participants in retraining enjoyed manifest benefits (a retraining allowance) to improve well-being, which supports Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model that claims manifest benefits are related to well-being.

However, the retraining allowance was insufficient for a living. These results might suggest that most participants sought financial support from family members rather than to ask for social welfare assistance so as to save face even in times of financial hardship, which can be hazardous to mental health (Fryer, 1986). Therefore, this research indicates the need to raise public awareness of the negative impacts of unemployment and to reduce the welfare stigma in order to help the most distressed groups at high risk of long-term unemployment and poverty.

Second, these results contradict Jahoda's (1982) assumption that portrays

unemployed individuals as passive victims. The participants under review behaved as active agents, took part in government retraining for re-employment and took control of their lives. This would be consistent with Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model that people are active agents, who proactively make decisions, strive for self-determination, cope with events and bring about change in valued directions.

Finally, these results showed that government retraining provided participants with an alternative avenue to coping with access to the latent benefits of employment. Therefore, these results question whether or not the latent features of employment are achievable only through employment. As Jahoda (1982:94) argues, to recreate the latent features of employment would require "*personal initiative that is rare among all strata of the population*". The results from this thesis associated with such features clearly refute Jahoda's (1982) proposition.

The current research and Jahoda *et al.*'s (1972 [1933]) study vary in time and place. Jahoda *et al.*'s (1972 [1933]) study was conducted in a small industrial Austrian village of Marienthal in the 1930s, while this research was carried out in a global city, Hong Kong in 2015. In the small Austrian village, the closure of industrialised processes meant a disaster among unemployed individuals. As a densely populated city, Hong Kong provides a variety of opportunities for participants to pursue meaningful alternative for paid work to access latent benefits of employment, such as government retraining in this study.

These results might suggest that participants tended to be self-reliance through employment to save face in Hong Kong Chinese society. Within these cultural

boundaries, participants were motivated to participate in government retraining for re-employment that helped them to gain access to the latent functions of employment (time structure, enforced activity, social contact, collective purpose, and status and identity).

Moreover, Jahoda (1982) emphasises the context of employment for better mental health, but pays less attention to the aspect of job variety. These results showed that participants had access to Warr's (1987) environmental features or job variety that may motivate them to participate in government retraining to enjoy latent benefits. In other words, Jahoda (1982) downplays the quality of employment. These results might also suggest that the better educated rejected underemployment.

Altogether, the evidence indicates that participants engaged in government retraining activities can access the latent benefits of employment. Therefore, employment is not seen as the single best provider of these latent features in modern societies. Moreover, cultural differences and the content of job variety are absent in Jahoda's (1982) model that may motivate participants to take part in government retraining to carve out such latent features. Thus, these results refute the notion that such personal initiative is rare.

Overall, these findings show that Hong Kong's government retraining can help unemployed older and low-skilled trainees increase their coping strategies to access Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits and Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits for better mental health in answering research sub-question one as anticipated. Furthermore, evidence shows that Hong Kong's government retraining can aid trainees in accessing environmental benefits for better mental health. These findings might also suggest

that cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) play an important role in how people cope with unemployment. Therefore, these findings in sum provide a better understanding of the experiences and coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled trainees in Hong Kong Chinese society.

With a good understanding of these economic and psychosocial features for the well-being of older workers, policymakers and practitioners can design effective interventions to facilitate their coping to access the latent, manifest and environmental benefits, and work re-entry to enhance well-being. These findings may also help researchers build theories and frameworks in the Chinese cultural context.

Answering the Research Sub-Question Two

2. How do demographic factors (age and gender) influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers?

The research sub-question two is related to the effects of demographic factors (age and gender) on unemployment and the coping of older and low-skilled workers in support of Paul and Moser's (2009) assertions that the effects of demographic factors can influence the impact of unemployment on well-being and affect coping mechanisms.

As with age, those older persons aged 50+ appear to face a higher risk of experiencing layoffs, early retirement and long-term unemployment in Hong Kong

(EOC, 2016). These results might suggest that they are more likely to suffer age discrimination in employment and to be stereotyped as lacking in up-to-date job skills (Chiu and Ho, 2006). Despite these barriers to employment, the participants performed as active agents to use problem-focused coping by attending Hong Kong's government retraining towards their goals of re-employment (Fryer, 1986). At the same time, they used emotion-focused coping (control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management) to enhance well-being (Latack, 1986). However, emotion-focused coping mechanisms differed according to gender and education.

Regarding gender, the result showed that men were less likely to use control-oriented strategies (social support) than women in sharing negative emotions with others, but rather relied on symptom management (relaxation and leisure activities). On the contrary, female participants tended to use social support to share their negative emotions and find jobs through social networks of friends and fellow trainees in order to improve well-being.

Given men's traditional role as financial provider in a breadwinner model in Hong Kong, financial responsibilities increase the negative effects of unemployment on their well-being (Yang, 2002). Hence, male participants were unwilling to talk about their failure to perform their role as breadwinner during unemployment (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011). As social support can promote proactive thoughts in stressful situations (Latack, 1986) and social contact can increase well-being (Jahoda, 1982), this research indicates the need to help unemployed men to address the importance of social support in order to increase mental health.

Moreover, female participants felt unhappy when forced to revert to their traditional role as homemakers and became 'hidden-away' unemployed individuals in a gendered labour market where they had less job opportunities than men (Pang *et al.*, 2005). Evidence also indicates that employment is important to unemployed women, especially female breadwinners (De Witte, 1999). They might be more psychologically impaired than their male peers because of their traditionally high involvement in household chores in Chinese society (Women's Commission, 2011). Therefore, female participants tended to use social support to regulate their negative emotions with friends and to find jobs. Thus, this research indicates the need to address the problem associated with a gendered labour market structure in Hong Kong and to facilitate psychological support for hidden unemployed women.

With respect to education, these results might suggest that the lower educated reported taking part in less leisure activities than the better educated to reduce negative emotions. They relaxed at home, watching television, sitting around, doing housework and seeking the company of family. Conversely, the better educated enjoyed leisure activities with friends. There are two plausible explanations for this result. The lower educated may have financial hardships that restricts them from participation in leisure activities (Mandemakers and Monden, 2013) or may be unaware about alternatives to paid work, such as leisure activities and government retraining (Schaufeli, 1992).

As meaningful social leisure activities are better than solitary activities to gain access to Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits for increased well-being (Waters and Moore, 2002), this research indicates the need to help the lower educated to address the benefits of social leisure activities to enhance well-being. Moreover, older and

low-skilled workers who mainly come from the lower socio-economic strata may be unaware of the latent, manifest and environmental benefits of government retraining. Therefore, this research indicates the need to promote government retraining as an effective way of coping with unemployment.

Furthermore, these results might suggest that the better educated felt more underemployed and distressed than the lower educated (Friedland and Price, 2003). As Burris (1983) point out, any job perceived to be beneath one's educational attainments leads to psychological distress. Consequently, the better educated continued to look for other jobs, whereas the lower educated were satisfied and settled down in their re-employment. Moreover, the better educated used the sideline of voluntary work as an English teacher to escape from their low-status security job. Hence, this research indicates the need to help the better educated resolve their sense of unemployment by finding another job. However, the results of educational differences in coping outcomes should be interpreted with caution as the better educated were under-represented in this sample.

Overall, these results might suggest that demographic factors (age and gender) can influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in answering research sub-question two as expected. Moreover, evidence might suggest that education can also mediate the effects of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms, thus in total providing a better understanding of the coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in Hong Kong Chinese society. The most distressed groups in this older sample were found to include men, hidden unemployed women, the better educated and the lower educated in need of support.

Answering the Central Research Question

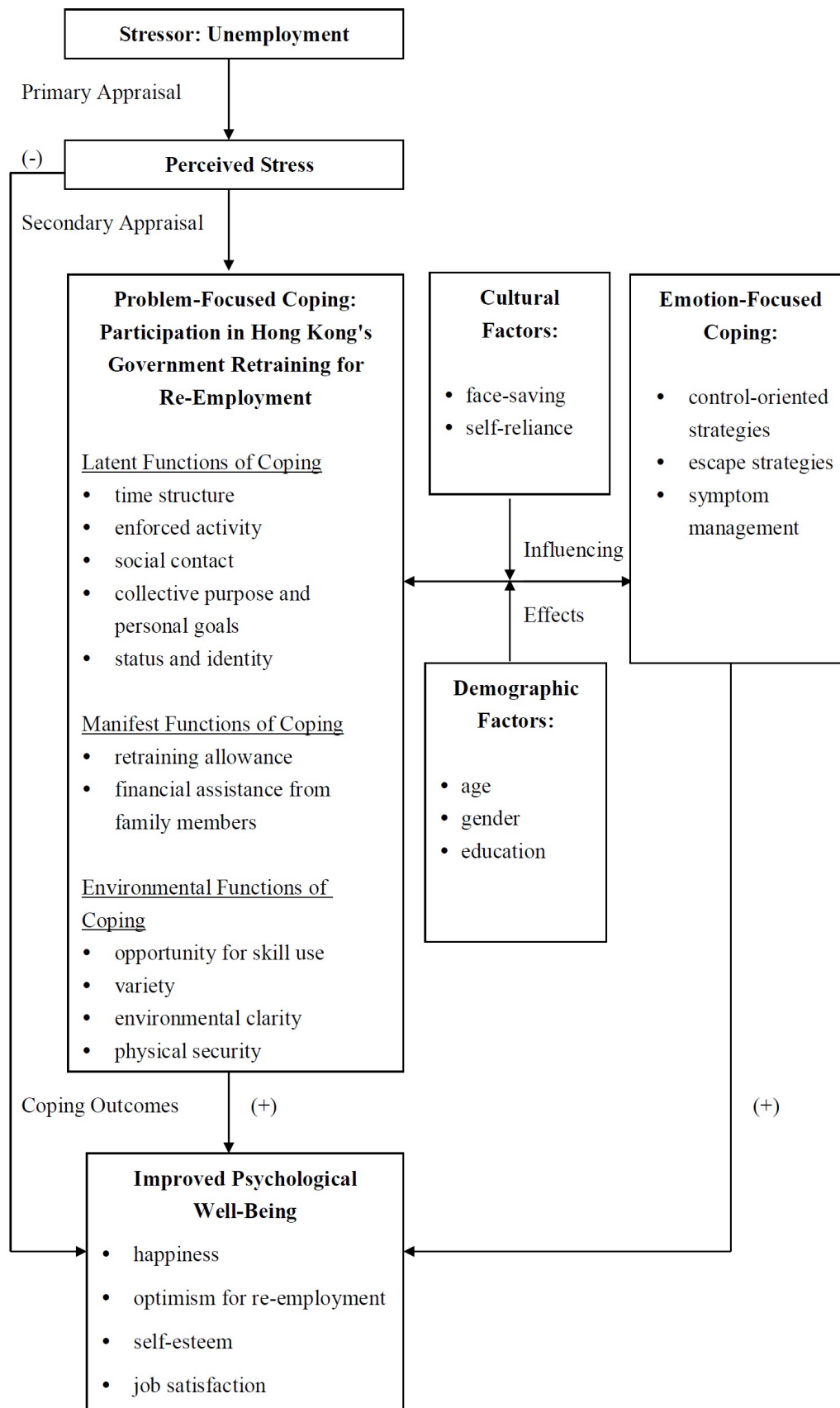
How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?

The answers to both research sub-questions pave the way to answer the central research question. As a whole, these results might suggest that participants used both problem-focused coping (Hong Kong's government retraining) and emotion-focused coping (control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management), which are related to good well-being. Moreover, these results might also suggest that coping mechanisms were affected by demographic factors (age, gender and education) and cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance). Arising from these findings, the proposed theoretical framework (Figure 2.1) in Chapter 2 is revised to show the key contributions this thesis makes to existing knowledge (Figure 5.1): environmental functions of coping, improved psychological well-being, cultural factors, gender differences and educational differences.

Environmental Functions of Coping

Prior research (Strandh, 2001) showed that government retraining could help trainees to fulfil Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits (time structure, social contact and regular activities), while unemployment benefits (income replacement) might provide them with Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits for better well-being. Results of the present study showed that Hong Kong's government retraining could also serve the environmental functions of coping by helping trainees to access Warr's (1987) environmental benefits (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security).

Figure 5.1 Revised Theoretical Framework



Taking Jahoda's (1982) deprivation theory, Fryer's (1986) agency restriction theory and Warr's (1987) environmental vitamin model into account, this research thus provides a clearer understanding of the coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled trainees in Hong Kong's government retraining. This finding is important for the design of effective interventions to facilitate their coping to access the latent, manifest and environmental benefits, and re-entry into the labour market to improve well-being.

Improved Psychological Well-being

In the present study, the positive psychological effects of participation in government retraining were related to the features taken from the frameworks of Jahoda (1982), Fryer (1986) and Warr (1987). Immediate effects included happiness, optimism for re-employment and self-esteem during the course along with a long-term effect of job satisfaction following retraining.

In Western literature, Andersen (2008) reported that the positive psychological effect of participation in government training decreased over time due to trainees' continued unemployment. Results are contrary to the present study. In Hong Kong, the ERB offers unemployed trainees employment-oriented retraining courses to secure re-employment (ERB, 2016). This situation may have made it easier for trainees to cope with the period of unemployment. Therefore, the present study empirically shows different retraining settings between Hong Kong and other Western countries. This 'one-stop service' retraining setting for unemployment to re-employment is important to facilitate work re-entry and good well-being.

Cultural Factors

These results might suggest that cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) mediated the effects of unemployment and affected coping mechanisms in Hong Kong Chinese society. Participants were likely to be supportive of self-reliance through employment and unwilling to seek social welfare assistance, which could be interpreted as face-saving (Yang, 2002). In time of need, they tend to seek financial assistance from family members (Pang *et al.*, 2005).

In contrast, social welfare assistance is socially acceptable to help unemployed individuals cope with unemployment in Western societies (OECD, 2015b). Thus, social welfare assistance is more stigmatising in Chinese collectivistic societies than it in Western societies due to a different cultural interpretation of welfare payments. This finding is important for the design of effective interventions to mitigate emotional distress associated with societal norms and cultural values.

Gender Differences

Previous research (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011) conducted in the UK showed that men were reluctant to search for social support to share with others their psychological distress, whereas women were more open to talk about their unemployment experiences to reduce stress. This gender difference in coping mechanisms may arise from the traditional family with men as breadwinners and women as homemakers in a male breadwinner model. Therefore, unemployed men are less likely to talk about their failure to fulfil their expected role as breadwinner.

A second possible explanation for this gender difference found in the present study may be due to a gendered labour market structure in Hong Kong. Female participants felt resentment because they were forced to retreat back into their traditional domestic role as hidden unemployed individuals because of limited job opportunities in a gendered labour market (Pang *et al.*, 2005). Unemployed female breadwinners in particular were more exposed to the risk of stress than their male counterparts as they still needed to fulfil their traditional household duties in Chinese society. As a result, unemployed women tend to seek social support from others to reduce negative emotions and find jobs.

The finding in Strandh *et al.*'s (2013) study may have been different as Sweden has a high gender equality index. This may suggest that men in Sweden may not consider employment as more important to their identity and role in the family unit in a dual breadwinner context. In this context, women have similar job opportunities and labour market careers as men (Strandh *et al.*, 2013), and men increase their domestic duties (Neilson and Stanfors, 2014). This finding is crucial for the design of effective interventions that improve Hong Kong's gendered labour market structure so as to enhance well-being among both men and women.

Educational Differences

In the West, researchers suggest that compared to higher educated individuals, the lower educated have lower financial resources (Mandemakers and Monden, 2013) and less information about alternatives for paid work, like leisure activities (Schaufeli, 1992). The results of the present study might suggest that the lower educated took part in less leisure activities than their better educated counterparts to

improve well-being. Therefore, their lack of leisure activities may be related to the cost of such activities as well as having knowledge about them. This finding would seem to be of value to practitioners to help the lower educated pursue leisure activities within their limited financial budgets.

Moreover, Mandemakers and Monden (2013) reported that the lower educated suffered heightened psychological distress than the better educated due to their lesser re-employment chances in their Western samples. However, the present study yields a different portrait of the better educated following re-employment. These findings might suggest that the university-educated participant felt more underemployed and distressed than the lower educated in pursuit of a good job (Friedland and Price, 2003). Therefore, this finding may help practitioners ensure the better educated to find a good job instead of any job (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, the results of educational differences in coping outcomes should be interpreted with caution because the better educated were under-represented in this sample.

Taken together, the findings of the present study provide a more complete picture of coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in Hong Kong Chinese society. They contribute to, and have implications for, the study of employment and coping.

The next concluding chapter presents an overview of the research project, a summary of the findings, and their contributions and implications. Finally, the limitations of the thesis and future research directions are addressed.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter presents an overview of this research project, a summary of the findings, and its contributions and implications. Finally, this chapter concludes with the limitations of the thesis and future research directions.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Amid an ageing population, the ERB has launched retraining programmes to encourage unemployed older workers aged 50+ to re-enter the labour market (SCPP, 2015). However, little is known about the role of Hong Kong's government retraining in helping older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment.

Hence, the central research question posed in this thesis is:

How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?

Within this broad research question, two research sub-questions are drawn out to specify the aims of this study.

1. *What are the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, latent and manifest coping strategies and psychological well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees?*

2. How do demographic factors (age and gender) influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect the coping of unemployed older and low-skilled workers?

The first aim is to explore how Hong Kong's government retraining helps participants cope with access to Jahoda's (1982) latent functions of employment and Fryer's (1986) manifest functions of employment for improvements in well-being. The second aim is to explain how demographic factors (age and gender) mediate the effects of unemployment on mental health and affect coping mechanisms.

In answering the research questions, this research focused on the ERB's full-time security retraining programme in Hong Kong. The primary aim of the ERB is to offer full-time market-driven and employment-oriented retraining programmes for unemployed individuals to secure re-employment (ERB, 2016). A retraining allowance is offered to those unemployed trainees to encourage their participation to seek jobs.

As the main purpose of this research is to illuminate the experiences of unemployed older workers in government retraining, it adopted a qualitative research design. Consequently, a purposive sample of 15 Chinese re-employed security guards (7 men and 8 women aged 50-63) following retraining was used to attain data saturation. Trustworthiness and ethical issues were considered and addressed throughout.

The findings of this research are based on the interpretation and thematic analysis of data obtained through interviews with participants, using a semi-structured interview guide. In answering the research questions, some quotes that are linked

to the literature and theories are provided. A theoretical framework proposed in Figure 2.1 (Chapter 2) helped organise these results and analysis.

Due to the research findings, the proposed framework in Figure 2.1 had to be revised to improve the fit of the framework. The revised framework in Figure 5.1 (Chapter 5) highlights five salient changes to advance the body of literature:

1. Compared with prior research in the West (Strandh, 2001), this research finds that besides latent and manifest functions of coping, Hong Kong's government retraining can serve the environmental functions of coping (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security) for improvements in psychological well-being.
2. Improved psychological well-being (happiness, optimism for re-employment, self-esteem and job satisfaction) related to the features from the models of Jahoda (1982), Fryer (1986) and Warr (1987) are added in the framework. There is a long-term effect of 'one-stop service' retraining settings on well-being (job satisfaction) in Hong Kong because guaranteed jobs following retraining are rare in the West (Andersen, 2008).
3. Cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) are added in the framework. These findings might suggest that Hong Kong Chinese tend to be self-reliant through employment and refuse to seek social welfare assistance, which could be interpreted as face-saving strategies (Yang, 2002). Facing financial difficulties, they are more likely to seek financial assistance from family members (Pang *et al.*, 2005). This finding has been included in the

framework. Compared with the West (OECD, 2015b), social welfare assistance in Hong Kong is not socially acceptable (Chiu and Wong, 2005). Therefore, this research suggests that social welfare assistance is more stigmatised in Hong Kong Chinese society than it is in the West.

4. Gender differences in coping skills in a gendered labour market were found in this research. Research in the West suggests that men are less likely to seek out social support than women because they are unwilling to talk about their failure to fulfil their role as breadwinner in a male breadwinner context (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011). Alternatively, this result could be explained in the sense that unemployed women tend to feel unhappy because they are forced to retreat back into their traditional family role owing to fewer job opportunities than men in a gendered labour market (Pang *et al.*, 2005). Hence, they are more likely to seek social support from friends than men to reduce negative emotions and find jobs.
5. Education is added in the framework. These findings might suggest that the lower educated with less resources and knowledge tend to take part in less leisure activities than the better educated (Schaufeli, 1992; Mandemakers and Monden, 2013). Compared with findings in the West (Mandemaker and Monden, 2013), a contradictory finding might suggest that the better educated with better qualifications feel more underemployed and distressed than their lower educated counterparts in Hong Kong.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

After outlining the research process, this section presents a summary of the findings in the context of the research questions: the role of Hong Kong's government retraining and the effects of demographic factors on coping mechanisms of participants.

Role of Hong Kong's Government Retraining

In answering research sub-question one, the findings show that Hong Kong's government retraining can facilitate participants' coping to access the latent and manifest benefits for improved well-being, consistent with prior research (Strandh, 2001). The results showed that participation in government retraining could help to fulfil Jahoda's (1982) latent functions of employment: time structure, enforced retraining activity, social contact with fellow trainees and trainers, the new status and identity of trainee, and participation in collective purpose towards re-employment, thereby positively affecting well-being. Moreover, participants could enjoy Fryer's (1986) manifest functions in the form of a retraining allowance to cover their daily expenses of meals and travelling for better well-being.

Furthermore, the results indicated that government retraining might help participants to access Warr's (1987) environmental benefits (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security) for well-being improvement. Participants could benefit from the novel experiences of various retraining activities for skills development and enjoyable retraining environments. Importantly, the participants clearly understood their retraining environments in the

sense that the ERB offered them a 'one-stop service' for unemployment to re-employment.

Following re-employment, participants experienced job satisfaction in age-friendly working environments where their basic needs could be met such as: employment stability, being respected without age discrimination, decent salary, good working conditions, chance to use skills and knowledge, and working in close proximity to home in fulfilment of Warr's (1987) environmental benefits.

Altogether, the features from these three frameworks found to be related to the well-being of participants were in the form of happiness, optimism for re-employment, self-esteem and job satisfaction. Moreover, the findings might suggest that cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) mediated the effects of unemployment and affected coping mechanisms. Participants tended to be self-reliant through employment and showed a reluctance to receive social welfare assistance, which could be interpreted as face-saving strategies (Yang, 2002). In this cultural environment, all participants used a problem-focused coping strategy to attend government retraining for re-employment and were more likely to rely on the financial support of family members as retraining benefits were insufficient for a living.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Hong Kong's government retraining can serve the latent, manifest and environmental functions of coping to improve the well-being of participants. Moreover, the findings might also suggest that cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) can affect coping strategies, thus they can provide a thorough explanation for the coping mechanisms of Chinese participants.

These findings may help policymakers and practitioners to design effective interventions to facilitate unemployed individuals' coping efforts and re-entry to the labour market in order to enhance well-being.

Effects of Demographic Factors

In answering the research sub-question two, the findings indicate that age and gender can influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms of participants, consistent with Paul and Moser's (2009) assertions. With respect to older age, these results might suggest that participants faced barriers to employment including age discrimination and being perceived as having obsolete production skills (Chiu and Ho, 2006). Acting as active agents, the participants used problem-focused coping (Hong Kong's government retraining) in order to achieve their goals of re-employment (Fryer, 1986). They also employed emotion-focused coping (control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management) to enhance well-being (Latack, 1986). Nevertheless, their emotion-focused coping differed according to gender and education.

Relative to gender differences, the results showed that men were less likely than women to share their emotional problems with others, but rather relied more on symptom management (relaxation and leisure activities). This could be explained in that men viewed employment as central to their social obligations in a male breadwinner context and were thus less likely to talk with others about their inability to fulfil the role of breadwinner (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011). In this context, men are more distressed by unemployment than women because they lose their only, or primary, household income to support their families (Strandh *et al.*, 2013).

In addition, this result could be explained in this research by unemployed women feeling a sense of resentment when having to involuntarily retreat back into their traditional domestic role as hidden unemployed individuals in a gendered labour market where women have fewer job opportunities than men (Pang *et al.*, 2005). Thus, women are more likely to seek social support than men to share unemployment stress with others and find jobs.

As with educational differences, these results might suggest that lower educated participants took part in fewer leisure activities to reduce distress than the better educated, and relied more on relaxation activities at home. Their lack of leisure activities may be due to financial strain (Mandemakers and Monden, 2013) or inadequate information about alternatives to paid work, like leisure activities and retraining programmes (Schaufeli, 1992). Regarding re-employment, these results might also suggest that the better educated with better qualifications felt more underemployed and distressed in the pursuit of a good job than the lower educated (Friedland and Price, 2003). However, these results should be interpreted with some caution because the better educated were under-represented in this sample.

It is also worth mentioning that following re-employment, those who previously had low-status jobs categorised themselves as lower-level helpers, whereas those who previously had high-status jobs used some other higher-level self-categorisation such as professional, protector, professional certificate holder and English teacher to enhance self-esteem (Cassidy, 2001). However, such reinterpretation of the position of security guard as higher-level professional, protector, professional certificate holder or English teacher as a sideline could be interpreted as a way to escape from their low-status security job in order to improve well-being (Latack,

1986).

Overall, the findings of the study might suggest that age, gender and education can influence changes in mental health and affect coping mechanisms, thereby providing a clearer picture of the coping mechanisms of participants. As a whole, the most distressed groups in this older sample were men, hidden unemployed women, the better educated and the lower educated in need of support.

The answers to these two research sub-questions help to address the central research question. These findings show that unemployed older and low-skilled workers use both problem-focused coping (Hong Kong's government retraining) and emotion-focused coping (control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management) to enhance well-being. Nevertheless, these findings might also suggest that demographic factors (age, gender and education) and cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) influence the psychological impact of unemployment and affect coping mechanisms. Taken together, these findings show a fuller picture about the meanings behind coping with unemployment for this specific group in Hong Kong Chinese society.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

These research findings make relevant contributions to, and have implications for empirical, theoretical and practical domains. In particular, they will be of value to unemployed older individuals, researchers, policymakers, retraining providers and career counsellors working with unemployed and ageing populations in Hong Kong and overseas.

Contributions to the Literature

This thesis contributes to the under-researched areas of unemployed older and low-skilled workers' coping mechanisms in a Hong Kong Chinese context. Table 6.1 summaries some major differences between extant literature/frameworks and the findings in Hong Kong, in older workers and in low-skilled workers, highlighting original contributions to the knowledge of unemployment and coping.

Table 6.1 Contributions to the Literature

Features	Summary
Hong Kong	<p>Consistent with previous findings in the West (Strandh, 2001), Jahoda's (1982) latent and Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits can act as predictors of well-being of unemployed trainees in Hong Kong's government retraining. Moreover, these findings suggest that Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security) are also important predictors of well-being. Taken together, this thesis combines three specific theoretical frameworks to better understand the relationships between Hong Kong's government retraining and improved well-being of unemployed trainees (happiness, optimism for re-employment, self-esteem and job satisfaction).</p> <p>Importantly, this thesis raises a greater awareness of the long-term effect of 'one-stop service' retraining settings on well-being (job satisfaction). In Hong Kong, government retraining provides unemployed trainees with a 'one-stop service' for unemployment to re-employment. Following re-employment, they can experience job satisfaction in age-friendly working environments where their basic needs can be met such as: employment stability, being respected without age discrimination, decent salary, good working conditions, chance to use skills and knowledge, and working in close proximity to home. However, job guarantee</p>

	<p>following retraining is rare in the West (Andersen, 2008).</p>
Older Workers	<p>This thesis adds cultural values (self-reliance and face-saving) in the framework. These findings might suggest that face-saving is particularly important among older workers because they are older and less educated. This could be explained in that they have their cultural roots deeply engrained in the tradition of Confucian work-related values (thrift, persistence, shame and face) (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). The persistence of perceptions about self-reliance and face-saving from generation to generation has been significantly influenced by Confucian work ethic in Chinese culture.</p> <p>Hence, older and less-educated Chinese workers tend to be self-reliant and would rather attend government retraining for re-employment than receive social welfare assistance to save face (Yang, 2002). In times of financial hardship, they are more likely to seek financial assistance from family members (Pang <i>et al.</i>, 2005). Alternatively, asking for welfare benefits from the government can lose face in Chinese culture (Tsui <i>et al.</i>, 2013), probably due to their lack of knowledge about social welfare assistance that is socially acceptable in the West (OECD, 2015b).</p>
Low-Skilled Workers	<p>In line with previous research in the West (Giuntoli <i>et al.</i>, 2011), low-skilled men are less likely to search for social support than women to share their unemployment problems with others in a male breadwinner context. Another possible explanation for this in this study is that low-skilled women are more likely to seek social support from friends than men to reduce negative emotions and find jobs in a gendered labour market where they have fewer job opportunities than men (Pang <i>et al.</i>, 2005).</p> <p>Furthermore, these findings might suggest that lower-skilled workers with less resources and knowledge tend to use less leisure activities than their higher-skilled counterparts in accord with the general claim in the West (Schaufeli, 1992; Mandemakers and Monden, 2013). The findings here might also suggest that higher-skilled workers with better qualifications might feel more</p>

	underemployed and distressed than their lower-skilled counterparts, which is contrary to previous studies in the West (Mandemaker and Monden, 2013).
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Empirical Implications

An extensive literature review revealed that there was no in-depth qualitative research on unemployment and coping of older and low-skilled workers in government retraining, while there was scant indigenous research done to collect qualitative data on this specific group in Hong Kong.

In answering the research questions, this thesis used a purposive sample of re-employed older and low-skilled security guards aged 50+ following the ERB's full-time security retraining programme. These qualitative data present an excellent ground for testing existing theories of unemployment and coping. Empirically, this thesis has therefore made a great step forward in understanding this specific group more thoroughly from their own perspective in the context of Hong Kong.

In the results and analysis chapter, the proposed framework (Figure 2.1) guides the empirical analysis. The proposed framework was revised on account of the empirical results. The empirical data were strongly supportive of the revised framework (Figure 5.1) for the following three reasons.

Firstly, the empirical results showed that most participants (13 out of 15) experienced deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits of employment as well

as psychological distress. This is in agreement with Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model and Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model, which proposed to explain the decline in psychological well-being experienced when unemployed people cannot meet their psychosocial and economic needs. This idea that unemployment is significantly connected to psychological distress was reflected in this sample.

Secondly, empirical data indicated that participants used both problem-focused coping (Hong Kong's government retraining) and emotion-focused coping (control-oriented strategies, escape strategies and symptom management) to enhance well-being. Furthermore, the interrelationships between Hong Kong's government retraining, Jahoda's (1982) latent functions, Fryer's (1986) manifest functions, Warr's (1987) environmental functions and well-being among participants were empirically correlated. The empirical analysis also showed that Latack's (1986) emotion-focused coping had a positive relationship with well-being.

Finally, the empirical findings lent support to Paul and Moser's (2009) proposition that demographic and cultural factors can influence changes in mental health and affect coping mechanisms. For example, empirical data might suggest that demographic factors (age, gender and education) and cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) were correlated with well-being and coping behaviours.

Overall, the empirical data were generated to provide a clearer insight into the coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in Hong Kong Chinese society. These findings have empirical implications for researchers as a starting point for further investigations into unemployment and the coping

mechanisms of older workers in Hong Kong. Hence, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the empirical relationship between the coping and well-being of this specific group of Hong Kong Chinese.

Theoretical Implications

As shown in Figure 5.1, this thesis provides empirical evidence to explain how Hong Kong's government retraining facilitates participants' coping to access the latent and manifest benefits for increased mental health. Interestingly, the results of the study discovered that Warr's (1987) vitamin model also helps to explain that Hong Kong's government could aid participants in accessing environmental benefits to enhance well-being. This finding has theoretical significance to extend the existing literature on the positive psychological effects of participation in government retraining on Hong Kong's unemployed older and low-skilled trainees.

In this study, Warr's (1987) vitamin model presents a rich understanding of the psychological well-being among participants in government retraining settings. These results identified four environmental features or job characteristics of government retraining settings (opportunity for skill use, variety, environmental clarity and physical security), which are important for good well-being. In other words, this finding implicates environmental features as important in determining mental health.

In fact, there are few studies found in the literature that have examined the relationship between environmental features and well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees, a group that has rarely been studied in retraining

settings (Sousa-Ribeiro *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the present study contributes to a greater awareness of the importance of environmental features for the well-being of this specific group in Hong Kong's government retraining settings.

Importantly, these results suggest that when three models in the unemployment literature are combined, we have a clear understanding of what features contributes to increased well-being. For example, Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model may account for meeting the five psychosocial needs, Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model for the fulfilment of financial needs and Warr's (1987) complementary environmental features for the development of job skills for re-employment.

Therefore, the findings of this study may be useful for the design of effective interventions to facilitate the coping of older and low-skilled trainees to access the latent, manifest and environmental benefits, and work re-entry to enhance well-being. In fact, the analysis of relative individual contributions as outlined by the three models and the combining of these three for the prediction of well-being has been rare in previous research. Thus, the present study advances knowledge in this regard.

Furthermore, these findings might suggest that participants' choice of coping strategies is interwoven with Chinese cultural values (face-saving and self-reliance) and demographic factors (age, gender and education). Ultimately, the effects of cultural and demographic factors influence the impact of unemployment on levels of distress and affect the coping of participants. Taken as a whole, these findings implicate the need to adjust the existing framework (Figure 2.1) to be appropriate

for the Hong Kong context. Therefore, the revised framework (Figure 5.1) aimed to give a clearer and fuller picture.

Along these lines, these findings have theoretical implications for researchers. Evidence shows that Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model, Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model and Warr's (1987) vitamin model are complementary to provide a clear understanding of the positive psychological effects of government retraining on unemployed trainees. Therefore, researchers should not rely solely on one of these models to investigate the relationship between government retraining and well-being in future research.

Importantly, the results of the present study reveal the limitations of dominant theories of unemployment and coping in Western literature when they are applied to a specific group of older and low-skilled workers in the Hong Kong Chinese context. To have a better understanding of how older Hong Kong Chinese experience unemployment and participation in government retraining, it can only be achieved by utilising an integrative theoretical framework in which universal dimensions are supplemented by Chinese cultural factors. For instance, these findings might suggest that face-saving, self-reliance and male breadwinning in Chinese culture are important dimensions along which coping with unemployment can be described and explained.

Though there are specific cultural findings found from this research, the Western theories and approaches utilised here explain well the underlying coping mechanisms of participants. In other words, the critique the researcher originally posed, namely that Western theories and approaches may not apply to Hong Kong

Chinese society were not found to be true.

Consequently, the findings of the present study confirms what the researcher originally predicted with regard to the positive psychological effects of government retraining and the effects of demographic factors (age and gender) on coping mechanisms. In addition, the researcher also found other results that were unexpected, namely coping mechanisms in a gendered labour market and educational differences in coping strategies. Altogether, these findings have important theoretical implications for researchers to build theories and frameworks that are sensitive to specific cultural contexts.

Overall, this research seeks to advance the relevant body of literature by exploring the coping mechanisms of one specific group of unemployed older and low-skilled workers in Hong Kong. Confucianism in moulding Chinese culture is also explored in this research. As a result, the findings of the present study show that no existing theories alone in Western literature is sufficient to provide a full explanation of unemployment and coping of this specific group in Hong Kong.

Taken all factors discovered in this research together, the present study provides a better understanding of the coping mechanisms of participants as shown in Figure 5.1. Hence, this thesis makes an original contribution to the unemployment and coping literature by outlining how older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment in Hong Kong Chinese society.

Practical Implications

As shown in this study, the loss of the latent and manifest functions of employment is detrimental to individuals' well-being. This thesis offers a number of important practical implications for policy and practice to help older individuals to cope with unemployment and enhance well-being in the areas of retraining policy, gendered labour market, unemployment benefits, age-friendly working environments, retraining programmes, career counselling services and re-employment of older individuals.

Implications for Retraining Policy in Hong Kong

Unemployment among older and low-skilled workers and the problems associated with an ageing population have been features for Hong Kong as well as for other developed countries. Most of the current retraining policy efforts focus on alleviating poverty. As evidenced in the findings, government retraining can enable unemployed trainees to acquire vocational skills to secure re-employment and also to improve their access to the latent, manifest and environmental benefits that are related to good well-being.

Therefore, the latent, manifest and environmental benefits are of practical value to policymakers to design a retraining policy in terms of what makes effective government retraining as perceived by research participants. Amid an ageing population, Hong Kong's government encourages unemployed older workers aged 50+ to re-enter the labour market through various ERB retraining programmes (SCPP, 2015). However, older workers aged 50+ mainly come from the lower

socio-economic strata, and may be unaware of alternatives for paid work, such as retraining programmes (Schaufeli, 1992).

Consequently, the implication or challenge for policymakers here is the need to promote these benefits of participation in government retraining to create more incentives for unemployed older persons to re-enter the labour market. Therefore, this thesis may contribute to retraining policy in order to increase enrolment of those economically inactive older persons rather than lose them to early retirement amid an ageing population.

Implications for Retraining Policy in the West

It is evidenced from the findings that participants tend to opt for government retraining to secure re-employment because the ERB can provide them with a 'one-stop service' for unemployment to re-employment in the government retraining settings (ERB, 2016). This may have made it easier for unemployed individuals to cope with the period of unemployment. However, there seems to be no such relevant academic publications about this kind of 'one-stop service' retraining setting in the West.

Moreover, studies with Western samples showed that the positive psychological effects of government retraining decreased over time owing to trainees' continuous unemployment (Andersen, 2008). Hence, the practical implications of these findings are that policymakers in the West should plan the delivery mode of their retraining programmes in a similar setting with that of Hong Kong to improve the well-being of unemployed trainees. For this reason, this thesis may contribute to

the planning of retraining policy for unemployed individuals in the West.

Implications for a Gendered Labour Market in Hong Kong

Results showed that male participants viewed employment as central to their social obligations in a traditional male breadwinner context and that they were unwilling to share their emotional problems with others and admit their failure to fulfil their role as breadwinner. Generally, unemployed men are more psychologically impaired than their female peers in Hong Kong (Lai and Chan, 2002). In addition, some female participants felt resentment because they involuntarily retreated back into their traditional domestic role and joined a hidden group of unemployed individuals in a gendered labour market. In this gendered labour market context, women have fewer job opportunities than men and have difficulty in finding jobs in Hong Kong (Pang *et al.*, 2005).

In turn, the practical implications of these findings are that policymakers should decode the cultural interpretation of gender roles within couples and learn from the dual breadwinner model of Sweden. In this dual breadwinner context, men would therefore not consider employment as central to their identity and role in the family, whereas women could enjoy similar employment opportunities and labour market careers as men (Strandh *et al.*, 2013). This could mitigate the gender gap, increase the participation of women in the labour market and ease work-family conflicts for better well-being among men and women.

Implications for Unemployment Benefits in Hong Kong

With the current global economic crisis, many older workers face the risk of layoffs, early retirement and long-term unemployment in difficult situations. In this research, unemployed participants in government retraining showed that retraining benefits were insufficient for a living. These findings might suggest that rather, they were more likely to be self-reliant and rely on financial support from family members than receive social welfare assistance so as to save face in Chinese culture. At worst, financial hardship associated with unemployment can cause the decline of well-being (Fryer, 1986).

These findings therefore have important practical implications for policymakers to raise public awareness of the cultural interpretation of unemployment and social welfare assistance in order to loosen the cultural grip on unemployed Hong Kong Chinese, thus reducing the stigma. Policymakers should also learn from the unemployment benefits of the West, which can help unemployed individuals to cope with unemployment and to improve well-being (OECD, 2015b). Thus, this thesis may contribute to a better understanding of recurring social issues for unemployed older workers at high risk for long-term unemployment and who are left in poverty, and in need of financial support for better mental health.

Implications for Age-Friendly Working Environments in Hong Kong

Although the population is aging and older workers should become a larger part of the workforce, ageist stereotypes of older workers are still prevalent in many organisations in Hong Kong (Cheung *et al.*, 2011). As evidenced in the findings,

re-employed older and low-skilled workers can enjoy job satisfaction in age-friendly working environments following retraining. Therefore, this finding has practical significance for policymakers to promote societal recognition of the value of older workers' expertise in the labour market and to encourage employers to create age-friendly working environments to meet older persons' needs in order to attract them to retain in the workforce. For this purpose, this thesis may contribute to labour market policy so as to better cope with an ageing population.

Implications for Retraining Programmes in Hong Kong

Results showed that when participants became unemployed, their level of well-being was likely to be damaged due to the deprivation of latent and manifest benefits of employment. In contrast, participants in government retraining could access Jahoda's (1982) latent benefits, Fryer's (1986) manifest benefits and Warr's (1987) environmental vitamins to reduce psychological distress.

These results offer practical implications for retraining providers to better serve their unemployed trainees. They should design and implement retraining programmes to improve trainees' coping strategies to access latent, manifest and environmental benefits to meet economic and psychosocial needs, as well as to develop new job skills for re-employment in order to increase mental health.

Evidence also demonstrates that the most distressed groups in this older sample include men, hidden unemployed women, the better educated and the lower educated. Therefore, these findings have practical significance for retraining providers to develop interventions to help these groups to cope with increased

emotional distress through emotion-focused activities to prevent feelings of apathy and helplessness such as self-help groups, informal classes, and job search clubs.

Regarding men's reluctance to employ control-oriented strategies (social support), retraining providers should encourage ongoing social networking and brainstorming as ways to increase their social support as part of an effective retraining programme in line with Latack's (1986) concept of social support as well as Jahoda's (1982) notion of social contact. For the better educated, retraining providers should help them to find meaningful alternatives to paid work so as to enjoy similar latent benefits that are important for good mental health (Cole, 2008).

Correspondingly, Waters and Moore (2002) argue that meaningful social leisure activities are better than solitary activities to access the latent functions for increased well-being. These findings might suggest that lower educated participants seldom participate in leisure activities, but rather rely on solitary activities. This disadvantaged group may face financial hardship (Mandemakers and Monden, 2013) or may be unaware of the positive health benefits of leisure activities (Schaufeli, 1992), thus seldom scheduling leisure pursuits into their routine.

Hence, the implication this has for retraining providers concerns the need to help participants to understand the benefits of leisure activity as a coping strategy. Nevertheless, such leisure activities should not tax their limited financial budgets. Taken together, this thesis may contribute to enhanced retraining programmes to support the changing needs, values and attitudes of an older population for well-being improvement during unemployment.

Implications for Career Counselling Service in Hong Kong

These findings might suggest that the disadvantages that the participants encountered were significant. In particular, their old age and obsolete production skills make it difficult for this older cohort to seek job opportunities (Chiu and Ho, 2006). Therefore, these findings have practical significance for career counsellors to expand the understanding of government retraining and job opportunities available to unemployed older workers. This can enable unemployed older workers to have a good understanding of the labour market and the need to consider occupational change to improve their chances of re-employment.

These findings might also suggest that the better educated faced the problem of underemployment and felt stressed in the pursuit of a good job. As McKee-Ryan *et al.* (2009) points out, a good job is associated with job satisfaction, commitment and retention in the new job. Accordingly, the practical implications of these findings are that career counsellors should encourage underemployed individuals to pursue their values and vocational interests that can lead to finding a good job instead of any job.

Furthermore, career counsellors should include job satisfaction as one of the criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of these counselling interventions. These interventions are becoming increasingly crucial, as there are a growing number of unemployed individuals that come from higher educated white-collar occupations in Hong Kong (Chan and Chan, 2013). Thereupon, this thesis may contribute to an enhanced career counselling service for unemployed older and low-skilled workers to find a good job instead of any job.

Implications for Re-Employment of Older Individuals in Hong Kong

As indicated above, improvements in well-being among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees in Hong Kong's government retraining could be achieved. Accordingly, non-participants might be stimulated to participate in government retraining to enhance skills for re-employment, and to gain access to latent, manifest and environmental benefits in order to enhance mental health.

With an ageing population, the recent retraining developments in Hong Kong implicate increased retraining and job opportunities for unemployed older workers aged 50+ (SCPP, 2015). Therefore, the present study, through providing information about well-being improvement among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees, has the potential for significant contributions to practice.

Drawing from the current findings, unemployed older workers should develop a proactive approach to cope with unemployment by attending government retraining to enjoy latent, manifest and environmental benefits and to secure re-employment for better mental health. In this turbulent economic situation, they should also find meaningful alternatives to paid work such as volunteering in order to have a good work-life balance (Waters and Moore, 2002).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Despite the above empirical, theoretical and practical contributions, this research is not without limitations. This thesis has some limitations in its design and methods that should be addressed, which future research can overcome. The research

reported here is limited by a small sample size of older and low-skilled security guards whose experiences might not be representative of a larger group.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the results have explained the latent, manifest and environmental benefits of government retraining correlated with good well-being, and the effects of demographic factors (age, gender and education) and cultural factors (face-saving and self-reliance) on unemployment and coping in the Hong Kong Chinese context. Future research could then benefit from making use of larger samples of greater diversity. This would help increase the power of the findings and generalisability of the results.

Moreover, participants drawn from the ERB's full-time security retraining programme mainly came from the lower socio-economic strata. They voluntarily participated in government retraining towards their goals of re-employment. These workers may differ in some aspects from the average unemployed older and low-skilled worker. It is possible that they were more active and motivated to work than the average older worker. This may influence the findings with regards their access to financial, psychosocial and job experiences during employment transitions. Nevertheless, this research can be replicated when examining the latent, manifest and environmental coping functions experienced during older and low-skilled trainees' participation in the ERB's full-time retraining programmes to improve well-being.

The use of retrospective recall also brings limitations such as memory biases. This may obscure the original meanings and reactions of participants. It is possible that some participants were unlikely to talk openly about their traumatic experiences of

unemployment in favour of elevating retraining and job satisfaction as a means of saving face. Further research could consider a longitudinal design that better illustrates how employment transitions affect access to specific financial, psychosocial and job experiences along with psychological well-being.

Finally, the research used self-reported data, which may not reflect the actual behaviour of participants. Even so, as this research focuses on the perceived access to the latent, manifest and environmental benefits as well as mental health, participants' assessments must be subjective. Moreover, the use of self-reported data is well established in unemployment research, and factual information about participants' employment status and other demographic characteristics are unlikely to be influenced by bias. Nevertheless, future research could supplement self-reported data with peer reports and behavioural observations.

In conclusion, this theory-building research shows that coping mechanisms of unemployed older and low-skilled workers are more complex than the literature suggests. It is evident from the research that a government retraining context can facilitate trainees' coping with access to the latent, manifest and environmental benefits for improvements in well-being. However, coping with unemployment differs in different cultural societies with different institutional settings. It is also affected by demographic factors such as age, gender and education. Therefore, this research sets a foundation for further research about the interface.

Importantly, unemployment rates have surged to historical high levels in many countries since the 2008 Financial Crisis. When jobs are scarce, older workers tend to encounter unemployment challenges. As such, the researcher believes that

the findings presented above could be pertinent for researchers, policymakers and practitioners working with unemployed and ageing populations to mitigate negative effects of unemployment and facilitate re-employment of older workers through theory-building government retraining programmes and effective retraining settings.

APPENDICES

Appendix I (p.1 of 3)



For Trainees' Reference
Effective Date: 1 April 2015

標準保安及物業管理基礎證書 (英語授課)

Foundation Certificate in Standard Security & Property Management (English Medium)

Target Trainees: Unemployed or non-engaged non-Chinese speaking eligible employees in Hong Kong, who wish to get a job in property management and security industry.

Course Objective:

1. To enable the trainees to understand the roles and required work attitude of a Security Guard and acquire the relevant job skills;
2. To help the trainees secure employment as a Security Guard.

Entry Requirements:

- Aged 18 or above *; and
- Primary 6 or above (For applicants without Primary 6 qualification, admission will be subject to the applicant's performance at the admission interview); and
- Eligible for applying the Security Personnel Permit; and
- Pass the English entry test; and
- Interest in security and property management or related work; and
- Demonstrate inclination for employment at the admission interview.

* According to the Security and Guarding Services Ordinance, applicants of the Security Personnel Permit must be aged 18 or above.

Course Duration: 128 hours(approximately 7 weeks)

Teaching and Learning Activities: Classroom teaching, group discussion, demonstration and practice.

**Graduation
Criteria:**

Trainees will be awarded the certificate if they have fulfilled the following course requirements:

- (i) Attain an attendance of 80% or above; and
- (ii) Pass the overall assessment; and
- (iii) Pass the written test in the final exam.

Course Outline:

Module	Content	Training Hours
1. Introduction to Industry	1. Basic operations and concepts of property management	6
	2. Industry overview and entry requirements*	
2. Skill Trainings	1. Recognition of environment of guard position*	74
	2. Site visit to housing estates, shopping malls, car parks and loading area, understanding of facilities and equipment*	
	3. Job duties, patrol and procedures of visitor control of a property guard*	
	4. Access control & patrolling practice*	
	5. Operations of security system and facilities*	
	6. Legal responsibilities & relevant legislations*	
	7. Related government departments and public service organizations	
	8. Skills training and case studies on fire prevention and handling emergency*	
	9. Types, usage, delivery and receipt of related forms and work records	
	10. Application for documents	
	11. Frontline services for owners and tenants	
	12. Facilities in car park and loading area	
	13. Control work of car park and loading area	
	14. Introduction to computer	
3. Vocational Language	Vocational Cantonese	8
4. Personal Attributes	1. Self-understanding and management	23
	2. Mindset and emotion management	
	3. Understanding working culture and skills	
	4. Communication skills and interpersonal skills	
	5. Customer Service Skills*	

Appendix I (p.3 of 3)

Module	Content	Training Hours
	6. Team spirit	
5. Job Search Skills	1. Job seeking and interviewing skills	15
	2. Basic labour ordinances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Ordinance • MPF Schemes Ordinance • Prevention of Bribery Ordinance* 	
	3. Basic occupational safety and health	
	4. Occupational safety knowledge in property management and security industry *	
6. Course Assessment	Final Written exam	2
Total:		128

* SGSIA recognized training modules

Assessment:

(A) Continuous Assessment (15%): Assessment on Personal Attributes and Job Search Skills.

(B) Final Exam (85%): Written exam.

Remarks:

The training bodies will provide a 6-month placement follow-up service for trainees with 80% or above attendance in this course.

The award of concerned certificates does not mean to the fulfillment of all criteria for a security personnel permit (hereafter "permit") set by SGSIA. For the application of permit, the graduates are required to make applications to the Commissioner of Police and satisfy the criteria for issuing permits.

[The content of this course outline would be updated in accordance with the comments received from HKCAAVQ, amendments made in relevant legislation, license or industry certification requirements. The latest version of the course outline published by Employees Retraining Board shall prevail.]

* SGSIA (Security and Guarding Services Industry Authority)

HKCAAVQ (Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications)

Source: ERB (2015a)



供學員參閱
生效日期：2015 年 4 月 1 日

標準保安及物業管理基礎證書

Foundation Certificate in Standard Security & Property Management

- 課程對象：**有意入職物業管理及保安行業的失業或待業人士
- 課程目標：**
1. 讓學員掌握保安與物業管理行業的基本實務技能，及認識應有的工作態度；
 2. 協助學員入職有關工作。
- 入讀資格：**
- 年滿 18 歲或以上*；及
 - 小六學歷程度（如未達小六學歷程度者，按面試表現決定取錄與否）；及
 - 符合「保安人員許可證」發證要求；及
 - 具就業意欲；及
 - 對保安及物業管理工作有興趣；及
 - 須通過面試
- * 根據《保安及護衛服務條例》規定，申請「保安人員許可證」必須年滿 18 歲或以上。
- 時數：**128 小時（訓練期約 7 週）
- 教學方法：**課堂教授、小組討論、示範及實習
- 畢業要求：**學員必須達到下列畢業要求，方獲頒畢業證書：
- (i) 學員的總出席率須達課程之最低要求(80%)；及
 - (ii) 必須於課程評估考獲整體合格分數；及
 - (iii) 必須於期末筆試考獲合格分數。

訓練大綱內容：

單元	內容	訓練時數
(一) 行業簡介	1. 物業管理的基本運作、概念及認識合作伙伴	6
	2. 行業簡介及入職條件*	
(二) 技能訓練	1. 看守地的基本環境認知*	82
	2. 參觀大型屋苑、商場、停車場及卸貨區，具體認識各類設施器材*	
	3. 保安及管理員的實務工作、巡邏及甄別訪客程序*	
	4. 實習巡邏及站崗*	
	5. 認識一般保安系統及器材的基本操作*	
	6. 法律責任及有關法例的認識*	
	7. 認識相關之政府部門及公共服務機構	
	8. 防火及處理緊急事故的技術訓練和個案研究*	
	9. 認識與工作崗位有關的文件類別、用途、收發及工作記錄	
	10. 認識一般証件申請	
	11. 執行日常前線業戶服務	
	12. 車場及卸貨區的設施認知	
	13. 管制車場及卸貨區的實務工作	
	14. 簡單的電腦機件介紹	
	15. 行業實用英語及普通話簡介	
(三) 個人素養訓練	1. 自我認識及管理	23
	2. 思維及情緒管理	
	3. 工作服務文化及技巧	
	4. 溝通技巧及人際關係	
	5. 顧客服務應用技巧*	
	6. 團隊精神	
(四) 求職技巧及就業知識	1. 求職及面試技巧	15
	2. 僱傭、強積金、及防止賄賂條例簡介*	
	3. 職業安全健康簡介	
	4. 行業適用的職業安全健康知識*	
(五) 課程評核	筆試	2
合計：		128

*代表獲 SGSIA 認可的課題

評估：

1. 持續評估 (15%)：「個人素養及求職技巧」單元評核
2. 期末考試 (85%)：筆試

註：培訓機構會為本課程出席率達 80%的學員提供 6 個月的強化就業及留職跟進服務。

備註：獲頒發有關證書不代表學員已完全符合 SGSIA 所訂的發牌要求，學員如欲申請保安人員許可證，仍須另向警務處處長申請，並須符合許可證的簽發準則，方可獲發許可證。

【本課程大綱的內容或須因應香港學術及職業資歷評審局就課程進行評審時所提出的意見、相關法例的修訂、相關牌照或行業認證要求的轉變等情況而作出修訂。課程大綱以僱員再培訓局最新公佈的版本為準。】

Source: ERB (2015b)

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT LETTER
(English Version)

Dear Participants,

You are invited to participate in research on "How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?" This research focuses on perceptions and experiences of older and low-skilled security guards after their participation in the Employees Retraining Board's full-time security retraining programme for re-employment.

As a doctorate student at the University of Leicester, United Kingdom, I am carrying out this research for a thesis. This research aims to explore the interrelationships between participation in Hong Kong's government retraining, coping strategies and psychological health among unemployed older and low-skilled trainees; and how demographic factors (age and gender) affect coping strategies. You are invited to take part in this research because you have participated in the Employees Retraining Board's full-time security retraining programme after job loss for re-employment and your age is 50+.

If you decide to take part in the research, please sign a consent form below giving your agreement. You can still withdraw from the research at any time after signing the form.

The interview will be conducted in Chinese and it will last for 45-60 minutes. I will ask you about your perceptions and experiences of participation in the Employees Retraining Board's full-time security retraining programme. The information you provide will be treated in the strictest of confidentiality and will only be used for my doctorate thesis. Your own data will be completely anonymous and you will not be identifiable. During the interview, you can ask me any questions you may have.

Your kind support to participate in this research is highly appreciated. You may contact me on xxxx xxxx to schedule our meeting at your convenience or enquire about the issue. I am looking forward to meeting you soon.

Yours sincerely,

SUNG Yim-ling
Candidate for the degree of
Doctor of Social Science
School of Management
University of Leicester
United Kingdom

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(English Version)

Research Question: How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?

I agree to take part in an interview as part of the above-named project. The research has been clearly explained to me by the researcher and I have read and understood the participant informed consent letter. I understand that by signing the consent form I am agreeing to participate in this research and that I can withdraw from the research at any time.

I understand that any information I provide during the interview is confidential and only for use in the research project outlined above, and will not be shared with any other organisations for other purposes. Furthermore, all data will be destroyed after the researcher's completion of the doctorate course.

I agree/do not agree that the interview can be audio taped.

Name:.....

Signature:.....

Date:

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT LETTER
(Chinese Version)

參與研究同意信

親愛的參與者:

謝謝閣下接受邀請參加「年長及低技術工人如何應對失業問題?」的學術研究。是項研究的重點為了解重新就業而參與僱員再培訓局全日制保安再培訓課程的年長及低技術保安員的觀點和經驗。

作為英國萊斯特大學的博士生，我正為我的博士論文進行是項學術研究。而研究目的是探討年長及低技術工人在失業時，參加香港政府再培訓課程與應對策略及心理健康之間的相互關係；以及其人口因素（年齡和性別）如何影響其應對策略。閣下因在失業期間，為重新就業，曾參與僱員再培訓局全日制保安再培訓課程和年齡是50歲以上，故此獲邀參加是項研究。

如閣下決定參加是項學術研究，請簽署下列的「參與研究同意書」，以示同意參加是項研究。簽署後，你仍可隨時退出此項研究。

此訪談將用中文進行及需時 45-60 分鐘。我會徵詢閣下有關參與僱員再培訓局全日制保安再培訓課程的觀點和經驗。你所提供的資料將被嚴格保密，並僅用於我的博士論文報告中。你的個人資料是完全不記名的，別人將無法辨識你。在訪談過程中，你亦可查詢任何問題。

本人十分感謝閣下支持參與是項學術研究。請致電xxxx xxxx與本人安排訪談或查詢有關問題。我期待儘快與你見面。

祝 安康

宋艷伶
英國萊斯特大學
管理學院
社會科學博士生

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(Chinese Version)

參與研究同意書

研究主題：年長及低技術工人如何應對失業問題？

本人同意參加是次訪談，並了解此訪談為上述學術研究的其中一部份。是項研究已由研究者向本人詳細解釋，本人亦已閱讀並理解「參與研究同意信」的內容。本人明白簽署此同意書後，表示本人同意參加是項研究，但仍可隨時退出此研究。

本人明白在訪談過程中，本人所提供的資料均是保密的，只供此學術研究之用，不會與任何團體共用作其他用途。再者，研究者的博士學位課程結束後，所有資料將被銷毀。

本人同意／不同意接受訪談時被錄音。

姓名：

簽名：

日期：

**Interview Guide Based on Latent and Manifest Functions of Coping
(English Version)**

Research Question: How do older and low-skilled workers cope with unemployment?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name of Participant: _____

ID No.: _____ **Telephone:** _____

Date: _____ **Time in:** _____ **Time out:** _____

- Thank the participant for taking time to participate in this research project.
- Introduce myself, give the participant a copy of Participant Informed Consent Letter and explain the purpose of this interview and ethics covering this interview.
- Advise the participant the interview will be conducted in Chinese and it will last for 45-60 minutes.
- Encourage the participant to communicate freely; and reassure the provided information will be treated in the strictest of confidentiality and completely anonymous. Furthermore, all data will be destroyed after the researcher's completion of the doctorate course.
- Ask the participant whether the researcher can use a digital voice recorder to record the interview for transcription purpose. If yes, the researcher requests the participant to sign a consent form. After a consent is given, the researcher turns on a digital voice recorder and the interview starts.

INTERVIEW TOPICS

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Please tell me your name and a little bit about yourself.

Probes

- What is your marital status (single/married/separated/divorced/widowed)?
- Do you live with your family or alone?
- Do you have any children? What are their ages?
- Is your wife/husband/partner employed? If yes, what is his/her occupation?

PART II: DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Please tell me your age, gender and education level.

PART III: UNEMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Please think back to your last employment, and tell me your previous industry and occupation.

Probes

- What was your previous industry and occupation?
- Was that a good job for you?
- What was your past monthly income?
- What is your current income as a security guard?
- When and why did you become unemployed?
- How did you feel to be made unemployed?
- What was the duration of your unemployment before you attended the Employees Retraining Board's full-time security retraining programme?

PART IV: PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENT RETRAINING PROGRAMME FOR RE-EMPLOYMENT

Please think back to your participation in the Employees Retraining Board's full-time security retraining programme after job loss. When did you participate? What was the duration of the programme?

(A) Latent Functions of Coping:

1. Time Structure and Activities

Please tell me what a daily routine and activities that you needed to follow from the time you got up until you slept at night.

Probes

- What time did you get up?
- What did you do then?
- What were retraining activities during participation in the government retraining programme, for example, security job skills, computer operation, vocational English and Putonghua, personal attributes, security guard licence examination, job search skills and so on?
- Were there special events that you looked forward to, and vice versa during participation in the government retraining programme? What were they? Why?
- After leaving the retraining centre, were you engaged in any evening activities? What were they? Were they important to you? Why?
- In your free time during participation in the government retraining programme, were there certain kinds of activities you liked to do? Were they important to you? Why?
- Overall, how do you compare the time structure of these days during participation in the government retraining programme with the time while being unemployed?

2. Social Contact

Please tell me whether your participation in the government retraining programme affected your relationships with other trainees, trainers, family and friends.

Probes

- Did you get on well with your fellow trainees on the government retraining programme?
- Did you get on well with your trainers on the government retraining programme?
- Did you receive family support while attending the government retraining programme?
- Did you still see friends while attending the government retraining programme?
- Overall, did things change positively or negatively? How? Why?

3. Collective Purpose and Personal Goals

Please tell me what your collective purpose and personal goals were during participation in the government retraining programme.

Probes

- Why did you participate in the government retraining programme for a security job?
- Did you feel that you made a contribution to society while participating in the government retraining programme?
- What personal goals did you pursue during participation in the government retraining programme? [Prompts: such as social interactions and subsequent re-employment.]
- Did you think that you attained your collective purpose and personal goals?

4. Status and Identity

Please tell me whether your participation in the government retraining programme affected your status and identity.

Probes

- Did you feel respected or looked down upon by people while participating in the government retraining programme?
- Did people value you while participating in the government retraining programme?
- Overall, did things change positively or negatively? How? Why?

(B) Manifest Functions of Coping

Please tell me how you lived on the retraining allowance.

Probes

- How much retraining allowance did you receive?
- When did you receive your retraining allowance?
- Did you have trouble living on the retraining allowance you received?

(C) Psychological Well-Being

Please describe your feeling of participation in the government retraining programme and subsequent re-employment as a security guard.

Probes

- Did you feel happy or depressed during participation in the government retraining programme?
- Did the government retraining programme provide you with a sense of confidence and self-esteem?
- Did you feel in control of what happened around you during participation in the government retraining programme?
- Did you enjoy the activities during participation in the government retraining programme?
- How satisfied are you with your current job as a security guard?
- Overall, at the present, do you feel happy or depressed in comparison to being unemployed?
- Have your work priorities changed as a result of being unemployed, for example, wage, occupation position, voluntary work and so on?

Finally, do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you.

**Interview Guide Based on Latent and Manifest Functions of Coping
(Chinese Version)**

基於潛在和明顯應對功能的訪談指南

研究主題：年長及低技術工人如何應對失業問題？

訪談進程表

參與者姓名： _____

編號： _____ 聯繫電話： _____

日期： _____ 開始時間： _____ 結束時間： _____

- 感謝參與者抽出時間參加這個研究項目。
- 自我介紹，給予參與者一份「參與研究同意信」，並解釋這次訪談的目的和道德涵蓋範圍。
- 告知參與者此訪談將用中文進行及需時45-60分鐘。
- 鼓勵參與者暢所欲言，並確保其提供的資料將被嚴格保密及個人資料是完全不記名的。再者，研究者的博士學位課程結束後，所有資料將被銷毀。
- 徵詢參與者是否同意接受訪談時被錄音，以作轉錄之用。如果同意的話，研究者要求參與者簽署一份「參與研究同意書」。簽署後，研究者接通錄音機，進行訪談。

訪談主題

第一部分：前言

請告訴我你的名字和一些個人資料。

問題探討

- 你的婚姻狀況如何（未婚/已婚/分居/離婚/喪偶）？
- 你是否與家人同住或一個人居住？
- 你是否有孩子？他們的年齡是什麼？
- 你的妻子/丈夫/伴侶是否工作？如果是的話，他們的職業是什麼？

第二部分：人口因素

請告訴我你的年齡、性別和教育程度。

第三部分：失業歷史

請你回想你最後的一份工作，並告訴我你以前的行業及職業。

問題探討

- 你以前的行業及職業是什麼？
- 對你來說，這是否一份好工作？
- 你過去每月收入是多少？
- 目前當保安員每月收入是多少？
- 你在什麼時候失業及為什麼失業？
- 失業時，你覺得怎麼樣？
- 你參加僱員再培訓局全日制保安再培訓課程之前，你失業多久？

第四部分：為重新就業而參與政府再培訓課程

請你回想在你失業後而參與僱員再培訓局全日制保安再培訓課程。你是什麼時候參加？課程有多久？

(A) 潛在應對功能：

1. 時間安排和活動

請告訴我，由你起床，直到晚上睡覺，你日常的生活情序及常規活動。

問題探討

- 你什麼時候起床？
- 然後，你做什麼呢？
- 你參與政府再培訓課程期間，有什麼再培訓活動，例如保安工作技能、電腦操作、行業實用英語及普通話、個人素養、保安牌照考試及求職技巧等？
- 在那裡，有沒有什麼特別活動你期待參與的，反之不喜歡參與的呢？這是什麼活動？為什麼呢？
- 離開再培訓中心後，你有沒有參與晚間活動？這是什麼活動？這是否對你很重要？為什麼呢？
- 在參與政府再培訓課程期間，在空閒時，你喜歡做那類型的活動？這些活動是否對你很重要？為什麼呢？
- 總括而言，你如何比較你參與政府再培訓課程及失業期間的日常時間安排？

2. 社交往來

請告訴我，你參與政府再培訓課程，有否影響你與其他學員、導師、家人和朋友的關係。

問題探討

- 你是否與政府再培訓課程的學員融洽相處？
- 你是否與政府再培訓課程的導師融洽相處？
- 當你參與政府再培訓課程期間，你是否得到家人的支持？
- 當你參與政府再培訓課程期間，你是否仍然和朋友們來往？
- 總括而言，你在社交往來方面，有否改變，是正面或負面的？怎麼樣？為什麼呢？

3. 集體目標和個人目的

請告訴我，你在參與政府再培訓課程期間，你的集體目標和個人目的是什麼。

問題探討

- 你為什麼要參加政府再培訓課程作為保安員？
- 在參與政府再培訓課程期間，你有沒有覺得你會對社會作出貢獻呢？
- 你參與政府再培訓課程，追求什麼個人目標呢？[提示：例如社交往來，以及隨後的重新就業。]
- 你是否覺得你已達到你的集體目標和個人目的呢？

4. 地位和身份

請告訴我，你參與政府再培訓課程，有否影響你的地位和身份。

問題探討

- 當你參與政府再培訓課程期間，你是否覺得被人尊重或鄙視？
- 當你參與政府再培訓課程期間，人們有否重視你呢？
- 總括而言，你在地位和身份方面，有否改變，是正面或負面的？怎麼樣？為什麼呢？

(B) 明顯應對功能

請告訴我，你是怎樣靠再培訓津貼過活的。

問題探討

- 你收到多少再培訓津貼？
- 你什麼時候收到你的再培訓津貼？
- 你靠收到的再培訓津貼，你的生活有沒有困難？

(C) 心理健康

請描述你參與政府再培訓計劃期間和及後作為一名保安員的感受。

問題探討

- 當你參與政府再培訓課程期間，你覺得快樂還是鬱悶？
- 政府再培訓課程有沒有為你提供自尊和自信心？
- 當你參與政府再培訓課程期間，你有否感覺到你可以控制身邊發生的事情？
- 你有沒有享受參與政府再培課程期間的活動？
- 你是否滿意目前保安員的工作？
- 總括而言，若與失業時比較，你覺得現在較快樂還是鬱悶？
- 失業後，你的工作重點有沒有改變，例如考慮工資、職業地位、義務工作等因素？

最後，你有沒有問題向我查詢呢？

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