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'I Am Nothing Just Zero': Exploring the Experiences of Black Unemployed Teachers in a South African Rural Community.

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Research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Psychology (Community Counselling)

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ABSTRACT

A substantial body of international research exists dealing with the experiences of unemployment. However, there is relatively little research focusing on unemployed people with postgraduate degrees and no research on qualified unemployed teachers in South Africa. Against this background, this research explored the experiences of eight unemployed Black African teachers in a rural village in the Limpopo province, South Africa by means of face-to-face, in-depth interviews. The study found that the majority of those interviewed had chosen teaching because it had a vocation or calling and that this aspect of their career choice made their experiences of unemployment even more painful. It was also noted that being unemployed was a particularly difficult state to accept because of the emphasis on the importance of education in the communities from which the teachers came and the accompanying belief that a tertiary qualification would almost inevitably secure employment. It also found that the participants expressed a number of the negative experiences such as loss of self esteem and a sense of self worth. More specifically, it was found that the inability to fulfil the traditional gender role as head of a household was one of the most significant problems confronting the unemployed men. Additional findings of particular interest include the fact that by contrast with other research, this group of teachers did not experience the extent of social isolation so often found in the international literature. It was suggested that a possible explanation for this finding related to the particularly strong social ties that operate in Black African rural communities in South Africa. A number of suggestions concerning further research into the experiences of unemployed graduates are made in the concluding sections of the study. It is suggested, for example, that it would be useful to explore the extent to which the experiences of unemployed Black African teachers in urban communities relate to those described in this research.

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my late daughter, Tlou Nthabiseng Hlahla, who passed away before this research was completed.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts in Psychology (Community Counselling) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any university.

_____

(Name of Candidate)

____day of _____2008

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