

# Resilience needs of retrenched workers in Harare and the need for mental health professionals

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**Abstract:** *Job loss comes with severe challenges that affect the psychosocial, economic, and overall wellbeing of victims. Providing such affected persons with psychosocial support is recommended as an important element of building resilience. Thus the study sought to help the retrenched workers to become aware of the resilience needs to facilitate early supportive programmes before the conditions become severe. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of 19 participants. The sample size was determined by the saturation level which occurred when the participants were repeating responses. The participants had varied educational backgrounds and previous work-related experiences. Of the participants, 12 (63%) were permanently employed before retrenchment while the other 7(37%) were not. In-depth interviews were conducted, using semi-structured interview guides, to collect data on the resilience needs of the sample. Data were grouped into themes, categories, subcategories and analysed using both content and thematic analysis. The study found that premature loss of employment through retrenchment brings a sense of hopelessness, helplessness, uncertainty, guilt, and shame among the retrenched workers. It was concluded that social connectedness, relational structures, and emotional regulation were important protective factors of building resilience in the face of employment loss. Functional cognitive skills enabled the retrenched workers to exercise positive thinking. Professional mental health counselling services helped to restore the lost hope and confidence among the retrenched workers.*

**Keywords:** cognitive; encouragement; resilience; retrenchment; social; workers; Zimbabwe

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## Introduction

Loss of employment through retrenchment is associated with several negative psychological outcomes. The cognitive and social competencies are attenuated or impaired among the retrenched individuals as they battle to adjust after losing their livelihoods. The loss of employment impairs normal thinking and behaviour patterns (Danaher, Cook, Danaher, Coombes & Danaher, 2013; Mugodzwa, 2017). Workers who lose their jobs experience normal daily routine disruption, loss of socioeconomic status, as well as loss of psychological sense of affiliation (Hall, 2013). As put across by Aldrich and Meyer (2015), Dooley (2003), and Mastern (2014), retrenched individuals are neither socially interactive nor socially connected. Some may go through emotional instability, a negative perception of the self, the environment and a sense of pessimism as they try to come to terms with the loss of employment (Medlineplus, 2016; Thorpe, 2016; Riggio, 2015; Cherry, 2017).

Kasuso (2020) posits that retrenchment triggers a sense of disbelief. The retrenched individuals initially find it difficult to accept the reality of employment loss. They become susceptible to a sense of low self-esteem accompanied by the negative perception of the self and others (Makubaza, 2018). The individuals may engage in risky behaviours such as taking intoxicating drugs as temporary measures of dealing with employment loss distress. This can, however, worsen mental and physical health problems. Not only have the retrenched individuals experienced distress but also the respective family members. Shonhiwa (2017), Matika, Makunike and Mhizha (2021) view retrenchment as a possible cause of homelessness as individuals fail to service mortgages. They find it difficult to afford the cost of living due to limited financial income. The future is viewed as uncertain which triggers feelings of frustration, anger, and uncertainty (Seteni, Joubert & Dhurup, 2019). A sense of hope, nevertheless, settles in as the retrenched workers adjust, adapt, and become optimistic despite the loss of employment (Vilhauer, 2016). Even though there is high competition in the job market in Zimbabwe, the retrenched workers can still have the chance of being hired for new jobs. Those who got hired serve as a source of inspiration for those not yet employed.

Research suggests that retrenched workers need to be resilient to overcome the adversities of retrenchment (Yoon, 2017). Positive Psychology (2021) views resilience as a trait that can be learned. It can be modified or enhanced through interventions and serves as a life protective factor (Embury, 2014). According to Hildon, Smith, Netuveli and Blane (2008), to be resilient is to be able to bounce back from adverse experiences and succeed despite adversity. Mastern (2007) described resilience as positive adaptation following exposure to a stressful environment. The retrenched workers learn to bounce back and face the adversities of employment loss. Social skills may enable retrenched workers to engage and connect with significant others such as family members, friends, relatives, neighbours, and counsellors to enhance their resilience (Rahat & Ihan, 2016; Mutanana, 2020). Social bonds and

structures are essential for resilience enhancement (McDonnell 2014; Sims, Hosey, Levy, Whitfield, Katzel & Waldstein, 2014). Social support promotes feelings of psychological sense of identity, belonging and comfort. Emotional regulation cannot be ignored in resilience-building because the ability to control emotions can strengthen interpersonal relationships. For retrenched workers, emotional regulation involves remaining silent in an explosive situation while planning to speak up at another time, thereby constructively using the anger to identify problems and suggest solutions (Braunstein, Gross & Ochsner, 2017).

The retrenched workers need the help of social workers to regain cognitive skills essential for them to interpret the meaning of their behaviour and thought patterns. They need to be problem solvers, capable of exercising critical and creative thinking to bounce back from adversities brought about by retrenchment (Francis, 2014; Manyaya, Bhebhe, Chavhunduka & Nikisi, 2016). Functional cognitive skills promote independent decision-making. The autonomy in decision-making builds confidence and self-esteem among retrenched workers (Shatil, 2013 & Kuldass, 2015).

It should be realised that some retrenched workers showing severe psychological distress may not be able to bounce back without professional mental health assistance. For example, workers having depression would need psychotherapy to process the loss and regulate their emotions as well as psychiatric medication. The need for professional mental health services serves as a source of building hope and accepting the reality of employment loss. However, the crippling economy and abject poverty experienced in Zimbabwe have limited the availability of and access to mental health support services (Madhombiro, Dube, Marimbe & Mutsvuke, 2017; Tsiko, 2009).

There was massive retrenchment of workers in Harare, Zimbabwe following a Supreme Court judgement that legalised the termination of employment without retrenchment packages (Supreme Court Judgement 43 of 2017). According to Vava (2015), more than 27 000 workers were retrenched in Harare alone within a period of nine months. Workers were retrenched from government-owned parastatals such as the National Railways, Grain Marketing Board, Air Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, Harare City Council, mining industry, tourism and hospitality among the other sectors (Moyo, 2015). Although the former and late President of Zimbabwe Mugabe spoke out against retrenchment, workers remained retrenched from state-owned entities in Harare (Zulu, 2015; Manayiti, Nyoni & Dube, 2015). Many walked away from their former jobs in a hopeless and helpless state with nothing to take home after toiling for many years (Evans, 2015). The massive job losses without the help of social workers had detrimental mental health consequences among the retrenched workers.

Ogbechie (2015) researched on the socio-economic effects of retrenchment on individuals, families and society in Nigeria. A sample size of 250 participants was drawn from the civil service, banking and manufacturing factors. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data. The statistical package for social sciences

(SPSS) was used to analyse the data. It was found that there were no mental health promotion programmes to assist the retrenched workers to deal with distress. The study, however, did not consider the strategies of alleviating the distress experienced by the retrenched individuals which this study seeks to address.

Dibua, Idemobi and Okoli (2018) made another study on the effect of retrenchment on employees' service delivery at Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) in Southeast Nigeria. The study found that an increased workload and pay cuts made the workers more susceptible to depression and anxiety. The study, however, did not consider the resilience needs of those who were retrenched. It only considered those who remained at work after retrenchment without addressing the mental health problems experienced by the retrenched workers. In another study, Chingwaru and Jakata (2017) made a study on the survival strategies of retrenched workers in Bindura, Zimbabwe. Semi-structured interview questions were used to collect data and the descriptive design was employed in the study. The study found that retrenched workers survived on informal sectors such as gold panning. The study, however, was silent on the mental health needs of retrenched workers which this study seeks to address.

Globally, the plight of retrenched workers needs to be properly conceptualised before helpful interventions are proposed. The first step could be exploring and documenting the resilience needs of retrenched workers in their respective ecological environments. The study aimed at helping the retrenched workers to become aware of the resilience needs to facilitate early supportive programmes before the conditions become severe. It sought to answer the following questions: What are the resilience needs of retrenched workers? What are the implications of these needs for interventions for retrenched workers?

## **Methodology**

The study adopted the qualitative approach to explore the underlying experiences, reality and meanings that cannot be quantified. The descriptive design was appropriate because it allowed the participants to freely express their felt distress and enabled the researchers to gain insights through discovering meaning, exploring the depth, richness and complexity inherent in the studied phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

## **Sampling procedure**

The researchers initially sought permission from The Clinical Director for Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals under which Annex Hospital falls. Permission was

granted to use the institution for study information. The Zimbabwe Mental Health Analysis tool (2020) was used as a screening tool to identify participants having distress attributable to retrenchment. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of nineteen participants. The sample size was determined by the saturation level which occurred when the participants were repeating responses. The participants had visited Annex Hospital in Harare, Zimbabwe to get treatment for distress. Annex Hospital is the only major referral hospital for mental health cases in Harare. The institution served as a rich source of information as it is strategically positioned and convenient for the distressed retrenched workers in Harare to visit whilst seeking mental health treatment services. Code numbers one to nineteen were assigned to the participants to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants. The age range of the participants varied from 27 to 57. Of the participants, 14 (74%) were males and 5 (26%) were females. The participants had different marital statuses. Table 1 shows that 12 (63%) of the participants were married, 6 (32%) were divorced and 1 (5 %) was single. Their educational backgrounds varied as follows: 8 (42%) had secondary education certificates, 1 (5%) had a certificate in public relations, 7 (37%) had college diplomas, 2 (11%) had first degrees and 1 (5%) held a Master's degree. The participants had varied occupational designations and work experience which served as a rich source of varied data for the study. Of the participants, 12 (63%) were permanently employed before retrenchment while the other 7(37%) were not.

Table 2 illustrates that 3 (16%) of the participants were retrenched from government-controlled parastatal sectors. Of the participants, 1 (5%) was retrenched from the tourism industry while 2(11%) were from the manufacturing industry. The other sectors namely the security, mining, textile and motor industries retrenched a total of 20%. Of the participants, 3(16%) were retrenched from the commercial sector whilst the construction and the agriculture industries retrenched 2(11%) and 4(21%) respectively. The reasons for retrenchment varied as follows: downsizing 7(37%), lack of operational costs for the organisation 1 (5%), organisations incurring losses 4(21%), closure of the organisations and land taken for resettlement purposes 3(16%) and 4(21%) respectively. The participants had been out of employment for a different length of time ranging from 1 to 6 years. Only 3(16%) of the participants were rehired and the other 16(84%) were still searching for another form of employment.

Table 1  
Characteristics of the participants N=19

	Gender	Age	Marital status	Educational qualifications	Previous career	Experience	Previous employment status
1	Female	27	Married	'A' level	Public relations officer	5 years	Permanently employed
2	Male	54	Married	Degree in tourism	Hotel manager	12 years	Permanently employed
3	Female	45	Divorced	'A' level	Petrol attendant	10 years	Renewable contract
4	Male	29	Married	'O' level	Security guard	8 years	Renewable contract
5	Male	31	Married	Diploma in journalism	Comm'n's officer	6 years	Renewable contract
6	Male	36	Single	Diploma in marketing	Sales manager	9 years	Permanently employed
7	Female	40	Married	'A' level	Driver	12 years	Renewable contract
8	Male	33	Divorced	Certificate in public relations	Public relations officer	10 years	Permanently employed
9	Male	55	Married	Degree in Human resources	Human resources	16 years	Permanently employed
10	Female	37	Divorced	'A' level	Bank tailor	8 years	Permanently employed
11	Male	48	Married	Diploma in bricklaying	Builder	20 years	Renewable contract
12	Male	50	Married	Diploma in horticulture		30 years	Permanently employed
13	Male	36	Divorced	'O' level		12 years.	Renewable contract
14	Male	43	Married	Diploma in motor mechanics.	Motor mechanic	19 years	Permanently employed
15	Male	39	Married	Diploma in plumbing	Plumber	13 years	Permanently employed
16	Male	35	Married	'A' level	Till operator	10 years	Renewable contract
17	Male	49	Divorced	Degree in agriculture		21 years	Permanently employed
18	Male	42	Married	Master's degree in accounting	Bank manager	16 years	Permanently employed
19	Female	53	Divorced	'O' level	Farm manager	32 years.	Permanently employed

Table 2  
Retrenchment details N=19

	Previous industry	Reasons for retrenchment	Notice period	Period after retrenchment	Have participants been rehired
1	Parastatal public relations officer	Downsizing manpower	3 months	3 years	Not yet
2	Tourism industry as hotel manager	Lack of operational capital	3 months	2 years	Not yet
3	Confectionary industry as petrol attendant	Company running at a loss.	3 months	3 years	Rehired as a petrol attendant at a milling company
4	Security industry as security guard	Downsizing of manpower	3 months	1 year	Rehired as security guard at a college
5	Mining industry as communications officer	Closure of mine	3 months	4 years	Not yet hired
6	Textile industry as sales manager	Closure of industry	2 months	3 years	Not yet hired
7	Confectionary industry as driver	Downsizing manpower	3 months	6 years	Not yet hired
8	Aviation industry as public relations officer	Company running at a loss	3 months	2 years	Not yet hired
9	Parastatal company as human resources manager	Company running at a loss	3 months	5 years	Not yet hired
10	Banking sector as a bank tailor	Downsizing of manpower	3 months	3 years	Not yet hired
11	Construction industry as a builder	Downsizing of manpower	3 months	2 years	Not yet hired
12	Agriculture industry as farmworker	Land taken for resettlement	1 month	6 years	Not yet hired
13	Agriculture industry as farmworker	Land taken for resettlement	2 months	4 years	Rehired as a farm labourer
14	Motor industry as a mechanic	Closure of industry	3 months	5 years	Not yet hired
15	Construction, plumber	Downsizing of manpower	1 month	2 years	Not yet hired
16	Commercial sector as till operator	Company running at a loss.	3 months	1 year	Not yet hired
17	Farmworker	Land taken for resettlement	1 months	5 years	Not yet hired
18	Banking sector as a bank manager	Downsizing manpower	3 months	3 years	Not yet hired
19	Farm manager	Land taken for resettlement	1 month	6 years	Not yet hired

## **Data collection**

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa (Psychology Department Ethics Committee). Before the study commenced, participants received information about the research. The information provided explained in detail the research purpose, procedures, benefits as well as the rights of the participants and contact information of the researchers. It was made clear to the participants that participation in the study was purely voluntary and participants had the autonomy to withdraw from the study if willing to do so. The participants were informed of the expected interview time frame of 45 to 60 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews were administered to individual participants to get to the core of their social, cognitive, emotional and mental health needs. Permission was sought from participants to audio-record the interviews, thus all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The credibility of the collected data was considered as interview scripts were written in a notebook to allow for auditing of the research process and this helped to improve the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Every care was taken to avoid any form of harm to the participants. Provision was made that those who felt psychological discomfort would be able to get help from a Clinical Psychologist on standby. The participants were still emotionally unstable and needed care, warmth, and protection to avoid emotional breakdown while discussing their experiences. This enabled them to develop a sense of belonging and realise that the felt distress was equally a concern for others. They needed to be given time to express and validate the felt painful emotions. This helped them to have ample time to release painful feelings which ensured the attainment of emotional stability. Care was taken to ensure that the participants were comfortably seated and ready to take part in the interviews. In other words, the interviews were scheduled for a time when the participants felt comfortable talking to the interviewer.

## **Data analysis**

Content and thematic analysis were used to analyse and draw themes from the data. The aim was to attain a condensed and broad description of resilience needs amongst retrenched workers. This involved reading out each in-depth interview to identify potential codes and creating a coding system and assigning predetermined codes to relevant texts. An independent expert independently coded the data which was compared with the investigator's codes to ensure reliability. The researchers initially transcribed the audio data. This was meant to gain a deep understanding and knowledge of the collected data. Further, the researchers identified the themes related to the collected data. The various data subcategories

were closely compared to come out with themes. Next, the researchers coded the identified themes. And finally, identified categories and sub-categories were translated into normative account.

## Results

Table 3  
Showing themes, categories and subcategories

Themes	Categories	Subcategories
Social needs	Social cohesion	Inclusion Recognition Acknowledgement Care Warmth Acceptance
Cognitive needs	Cognitive competence	Autonomy Sharing ideas Innovation
Emotional needs	Temperament control	Exercising patience Solidarity Sympathy
Mental Health needs	Counselling services	Counselling Accessibility

Table 3 above shows the themes, categories and subcategories which emerged from the analysed data. The four themes were social needs, cognitive needs, emotional needs and mental health needs. The main categories that emerged under respective themes were social cohesion, cognitive competence, temperament control and counselling services. Furthermore, subcategories emerged within each category as shown in Table 3. The sentiments which came from different participants are illustrated in the respective themes below.

## Findings

### Social needs for building resilience following retrenchment

Social cohesion was viewed as an essential aspect of building resilience among the participants. Social inclusion, recognition and acknowledgement were viewed as essential in resilience building. There was a total of 18 (95%) of the participants who acknowledged the need for social cohesion as essential for resilience building. The following are examples of sentiments given by the participants.

*It is important to live peacefully as family members. Misunderstandings should be avoided, find better ways of solving disputes...avoid confrontations.* (Participant 6)

Care, warmth, acceptance and protection are necessary for us to bounce back from distress. (Participant 10)

The participants' sentiments showed the need for social integration in resilience building. The family members were viewed as the primary source of warmth, care and protection. They provided a sense of identity and belonging. The participants needed to be protected and acknowledged as valuable members of the society irrespective of being retrenched. However, not all the participants valued social cohesion in resilience building as revealed by the following sentiments.

*Family members do not understand us, they blame and consider us as mentally weak.* (Participant 2)

The participants needed to be viewed as mentally strong and given enough respect by the other family members. There is need to have a better understanding of the participants' respective social ties and connections.

### Cognitive needs for building resilience following retrenchment

The need to restore cognitive competence was perceived as a critical component of disputing negative thoughts associated with employment loss. A total of 17 (89%) participants acknowledged the need to exercise autonomy in decision making and sharing of ideas. The participants did not want to be dependent on other people for decisions about their future following retrenchment from work.

I mustn't be dependent too much on other people. My decisions must be personal

and free from interference. (Participant 19)

Sharing of ideas is an inherent activity of our collective culture...we need to live together as a society. (Participant 8)

The analysed data showed that 17 (89%) of the participants were aware that bouncing back after retrenchment requires autonomy in decision making and sharing of ideas. It was clear from the analysed data that the participants needed to exercise autonomy in decision making. The autonomy in decision making was viewed as a sign of respect given to them. They felt the need to have their voice and concerns being heard and given appropriate attention. They considered participating in decision making which affects their lives as essential in promoting mental wellbeing. The need to accept ideas from other family and community members helped to build trust and understanding of each other. Participants perceived sharing of ideas as a beneficial cognitive need that could help retrenched workers to strengthen and build up minds to avoid making mistakes.

### **Emotional needs for building resilience following retrenchment**

The participants desired to control their emotions and avoid confrontational situations. Participants disclosed that emotions such as anger, frustration and self-doubt bothered them following retrenchment.

Firstly, one should accept that confrontations can worsen the distress. It is not ideal to be led by emotions...learn to control temper...everyone can make mistakes, be tolerant. (Participant 2)

I share strong emotional connections and experiences with my relatives, family Members and friends...I hope if I can receive warmth, love and care from them. (Participant 10)

The participants viewed the need to exercise emotional regulation as an important aspect of resilience building. Impulsive behaviour and thinking patterns were viewed as counterproductive. They valued logic to prevail over emotional drives as this helped to instil peace of mind. They found it essential to be patient when deciding the appropriate course of action in different situations and circumstances.

### **Mental health needs for building resilience following retrenchment**

Of the participants, eighteen (95%) of them reported that they needed counselling

services and medication to bounce back following retrenchment.

I need a counsellor to assist me to think properly...I was devastated by the loss of employment...even my family members were adversely affected...they also need counselling. (Participant 15)

The cultural values and norms that they held played a critical role in deciding the preferred medication.

I prefer traditional medicine... I believe in my tradition that... gives mental peace. (Participant 12)

The cultural endogenous approach to resilience-enhancement was equally valued by the participants. The retrenched workers held different beliefs which influenced their mental health seeking behaviour.

## **Discussion**

It is a common perception in Zimbabwe that if a worker loses employment he or she is blamed and viewed as unreliable and unproductive at work (Nemukuyu, 2017; Munyoro & Rapapa, 2017; Murahwa, 2017). Instead of getting social support, the worker is ridiculed for losing employment. The loss of employment through retrenchment hurt the participants. It becomes increasingly difficult to be rehired in an environment where there is massive retrenchments. The retrenched workers felt dejected not only by their former employers but also by their communities. They were mentally impaired and it increasingly became difficult for them to make realistic plans to earn a living. Some related findings were made by Friederike (2014) and Abiri, Oakley, Hitchcock and Hall (2016) that retrenched workers excessively seek reassurance from relatives and friends. The retrenched workers' psychological sense of identity and belonging was eroded. They felt misunderstood and struggled to normalise relations. They were socially isolated, relegated to a passive role and subsequently not involved in finding their solutions to resolve the perceived distress. This was an undesirable situation as noted by Östberg and Lennartson (2007) that lack of social support, connections and sharing of personal problems worsen distress. Thus, the participants desired to be understood and accorded the chance to express their views and social needs essential for the enhancement of resilience. They still held the desire to get another form of employment and earn a living.

Interpersonal relationships and social interconnectedness were viewed as sources of building resilience by the participants. The retrenched workers needed encouragement to gain the lost confidence and hope. They needed to be accepted by the family members and given due respect despite losing employment. Related

findings were made by McDonnell (2014) and Sims, Hosey, Levy, Whitfield, Katzel and Waldstein (2014) that family and societal structures inculcate a psychological sense of belonging and hope. Family and society members are viewed as the primary source of hope and encouragement essential for resilience building.

The community sense of belonging and relatedness served as sources for building trust, reciprocity and resilience. The family and community members provided comfort to the distressed retrenched workers. There was tolerance of individual differences which promoted peace, unity, and resilience among the participants. The retrenched workers got encouragement, warmth, care, and acceptance from the community members essential for resilience building. Related findings were made by Schwarzer and Warne (2013) and Prince-Embury (2014) that building close interpersonal relationships serve as a protective factor of adapting to a stressful life event such as employment loss. The retrenched workers felt integrated, understood, accepted and trusted by society. This inculcated a sense of endurance and optimism essential for resilience building.

The functional cognitive skills in decision making and sharing of ideas were viewed as essential resilience needs by the retrenched workers. Similar findings were made by Shatil (2013) and Kuldass (2015) that cognitive competence enable the participants to utilise and benefit from the local environment. The creative and reflective cognitive skills helped the participants to discover new ways of building resilience. The skills to engage, negotiate and implement an appropriate course of action were essential resilience needs among the retrenched workers. Similar findings were made by Bahadur and Doczi (2016) and Manning and Robertson (2016) that cognitive competence enabled the participants to have a better understanding of themselves, others and the environment around them. They can make realistic decisions and deal with any form of negative thoughts related to employment loss.

The participants needed to be autonomous in decision making. Empowerment on decision making assisted them to develop alternative ways of dealing with employment loss grief. The participants needed to decide on realistic and practical ways of earning a living after losing employment. The innovative approach built a sense of confidence and courage to explore other opportunities of earning a living. They collaboratively shared innovative ideas for building resilience. The retrenched workers were, however, still recovering from the perceived distress which compromised the cognitive competence in decision making. Retrenched workers' failure to plan and execute realistic resilience-building plans to alleviate distress is attributed to cognitive deficits (Aleksandra, Ralf, Sonia & Magda, 2011; Hall, 2013; Stevenson, 2015). They needed guidance as they explored different alternatives of earning a living. The retrenched workers were encouraged to conduct wide consultations to avoid making embarrassing mistakes.

Emotional regulation was an essential need for building resilience among the retrenched workers. The participants were emotionally delicate. They had moments of anger outbursts as they struggled to contain the painful feelings of employment

loss. The participants found it difficult to exercise logical thinking as they were emotionally unstable. The gloomy facial expressions among the participants suggested depressed mood states. The loss of employment signalled dark moments ahead of them. The thinking and behaviour patterns were impaired among the retrenched workers. Tan, Reich, Hart, Thuma and Grigorenko (2014) note that depressed retrenched workers present with personal and social deficits in everyday skills, social interactions, and communication proficiency. The use of counsellors helped the participants to regain the lost sense of belonging. The participants negatively viewed themselves as worthless and helpless. They experienced suicide ideation and found it difficult to sleep and participate in recreational activities. The intended career goals and obligations were shuttered down and had nothing to take home. Dysphoric facial expressions in the form of unhappiness and disgruntlement were common amongst the retrenched workers (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2003; Lee, Lin, Huang & Fredrickson, 2012).

The ability to exercise emotional and temperament control were therefore, viewed as essential in promoting logical thinking and behaviour patterns among the participants. They had to exercise patience instead of being temperamental. The participants needed to exercise patience to avoid impulsive behaviour. As put across by Gross (2002), emotional regulation requires the understanding of the context and intensity of expressing emotions. The participants found it essential to control their temperament before it grew of proportion. The need for support in the form of care, protection, love and warmth was valued by all the participants. They acknowledged themselves as experiencing some painful feelings and anxiety. They aspired to regain the lost hope, confidence, and peace of mind. The participants' ability to regain the lost social and cognitive competency differed and needed to be given time to attain emotional regulation.

Participants needed the help of mental health professionals to regain their normal behaviour and thinking patterns. Social work in the form of counselling services helped the participants to deal with depressive thoughts. It is, however, important to note that the participants had different cultural affiliations which influenced their health-seeking behaviour. The participants' culture was respected and had the autonomy in choosing the preferred mental health services. Care was, however, taken in guiding them to make appropriate decisions. Family members were the primary sources of encouragement, hope and belonging. They were initially consulted for advice during decision making before seeking the services of mental health professionals. It is, however, important to note that in developing countries in Africa especially in Zimbabwe, there are limited mental health professionals like social workers. This makes it difficult for all the retrenched workers to easily access professional psychosocial support services. The limited financial disposition experienced by the retrenched workers made it difficult for them to afford professional mental health services. Irrespective of the given limitations, the participants needed the services of trained counsellors and social workers to help them to successfully

adjust and pursue resilience.

It is important to note that the retrenched workers need to be conscientised on the signs and symptoms of distress to facilitate early intervention before the conditions become severe, and workers should have access to professional mental health services before and after leaving employment. Professional mental health counselling services should be decentralised and affordable in developing countries such as Zimbabwe. It will be great to see mental health programmes funded by employers to cater for retrenched workers who cannot afford to pay for mental health services after leaving employment. In consideration of the foregoing findings, future studies should focus on understanding effects of climate change on the resilience of retrenched workers, especially those likely to go into activities that could be affected by climate change, such as agriculture.

## **Conclusion**

The loss of employment through retrenchment brings a sense of hopelessness, helplessness, uncertainty, guilt, and shame. Some moments of grief and sadness are experienced by the retrenched workers. The study found out that social connectedness, relational structures, and emotional regulation are important protective factors of building resilience in the face of employment loss. The retrenched workers receive encouragement, comfort and sympathy from family members, relatives, and friends. This helped them to develop a psychological sense of belonging. The study found that functional cognitive skills enabled the retrenched workers to exercise positive thinking and discover the beautiful aspects of life irrespective of employment loss. Professional mental health counselling services helped to restore the lost hope and confidence among the retrenched workers, and this should be built upon by granting more impetus to the social work and allied professions.

## **Limitations of the study**

Not every retrenched worker who experienced distress was able to visit Annex Hospital in Harare. The limited financial disposition experienced by the retrenched workers made it difficult for them to afford professional mental health services. Those who faced challenges to visit the hospital could not be traced by the researchers and their respective views were missed in the study.

## Declaration

We declare that the authors do not have conflicting interests.

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