

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAREER RESOURCES AND COPING RESOURCES OF THE YOUNG UNEMPLOYED AFRICAN GRADUATE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Orientation: Youth unemployment in South Africa presents unique challenges to the young unemployed graduate and requires a range of psychological coping capacities from the young adult.

Research purpose: This study explored the relationship between the psychological career resources (as measured by the Psychological Career Resources Inventory) and coping resources (as measured by the Coping Resources Inventory) of a sample of 196 young unemployed African graduates.

Motivation for study: There is an increasing need for career counsellors and practitioners to explore the psychological attributes and career-related resources that young people employ or require to help them deal with the challenges posed by unemployment during the school-to-work transition phase of their lives.

Research design, approach and method: A survey design and quantitative statistical procedures were used to achieve the research objective. Convenience sampling was used on a population of 500 unemployed graduate black people who attended a 12-week Work Readiness Programme (39% response rate).

Main findings: Multiple regression analyses indicated that dimensions of psychological career resources contribute significantly to explaining the proportion of variance in the participants' coping resources scores.

Practical implications: The insights derived from the findings can be employed by career counsellors and practitioners to construct a more comprehensive career framework for the individual in the school-to-work transition phase.

Contribution/value-add: The findings add valuable new knowledge that can be used to inform career services concerned with guiding and counselling young graduates in the school-to-work transition phase.

INTRODUCTION

Key focus of the study

Youth unemployment, particularly in the 20- to 24-year age group, remains the key challenge for transformation of the South African labour market (Marock, 2008). The provision of career guidance and training during the school-to-work transition phase, especially to the historically disadvantaged unemployed youth, could enhance their prospects of accessing the labour market (Department of Labour, 2009). Young people entering the world of work for the first time are faced with many challenges, such as dealing with unemployment after qualifying or, upon finding employment, coping with the transition from student to employee, adjusting to their new work environment and navigating the many global career challenges of the 21st century. These challenges include creating a career in a world with decreased employment opportunities and diminished job security, fast-paced technology and increasing personal responsibility for constant up-skilling, employability and lifelong learning (Marock, 2008; Pool & Sewell, 2007).

In addition, the South African career environment, specifically, is beset with additional adverse factors – namely, a legacy of apartheid that resulted in a high rate of unemployment among the historically disadvantaged youth (especially Africans), skill shortages and employment equity drivers impacting on the distribution of available opportunities for young black graduates (Department of Labour, 2009; Pauw, Oosthuizen & Van der Westhuizen, 2008). This South African context makes psychological demands on especially the young unemployed graduate who is faced with this often stress-inducing experience (Van Vuuren & Fourie, 2000). Within such contexts, the career counselling of young graduates who are preparing to enter the world of work has shifted from focusing predominantly on vocational assessment and job search guidance to engaging these young adults in proactive, self-directed career-development planning activities, assessing their readiness to participate in life as independent individuals, promoting goal-directed attitudes and behaviour and empowering them with the competencies required to make an effective transition to employment and a positive adjustment to the world of work (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007).

Background to the study

In view of the foregoing, the South African government has established national strategies such as the National Skills Development Strategy and the National Human Resources Development Strategy to enable the funding of national and sectoral initiatives aimed at equipping young Black (African, Coloured, Indian) unemployed graduates with the skills and experience they require to obtain appropriate employment (Department of Labour, 2009). Initiatives such as the Work Readiness

Programmes offered by non-profit organisations in partnership with higher education institutions and the employment sector have become an important avenue for young Black unemployed graduates to enhance their employability and increase their opportunities for employment (Marock, 2008).

Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) present employability as a person-centred, psycho-social construct, decoupled from one's employment status. Employability refers to proactive career behaviours and abilities, which include people's ability to gain access to the workplace, adjust to the workplace, be productive in the workplace as well as to the continuous ability to fulfil, acquire or create work through the optimal use of both occupation-related and career meta-competencies (Coetzee, 2008; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Herr *et al.*, 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Proactive career behaviour further includes the ability to employ a range of psychological career resources (or career meta-competencies) such as being behaviourally adaptable and flexible, coping positively with the stress associated with career transitions, workplace and career-related pressures and demands, and proactively identifying and realising career opportunities throughout the lifespan (Coetzee, 2008; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Griffin & Hesketh, 2005; Hall, 2002; Herr *et al.*, 2004; Parker, 2008). Contemporary career literature emphasises the assessment of individuals' repertoire of personal or psychological resources in order

to gain insight into individuals' employability and career adaptability (Buchner, 2007; Coetzee, 2008; McArdle *et al.*, 2007; Sinclair, 2009; Van Dam, 2004). Griffin and Hesketh (2005) regard the ability to cope with stress and uncertainty during career transitions as an additional important characteristic of adaptive career behaviour.

Given that young unemployed people have many challenges to face as they begin their careers, the following research questions were formulated: what psychological career resources and coping resources do these young people employ or require to deal with the challenges they face during the school-to-work transition phase of their lives? More specifically, in the context of careers, how do individuals' psychological career resources relate to their coping resources?

Trends from the research literature

Psychological career resources

In the context of this study, the construct *psychological career resources* is defined as the set of career-related preferences, values, attitudes, abilities and attributes that lead to self-empowering, proactive career behaviour that promotes general employability (Coetzee, 2008). Psychological career resources are also regarded as individuals' inherent resources or meta-competencies that enable them to adapt to changing

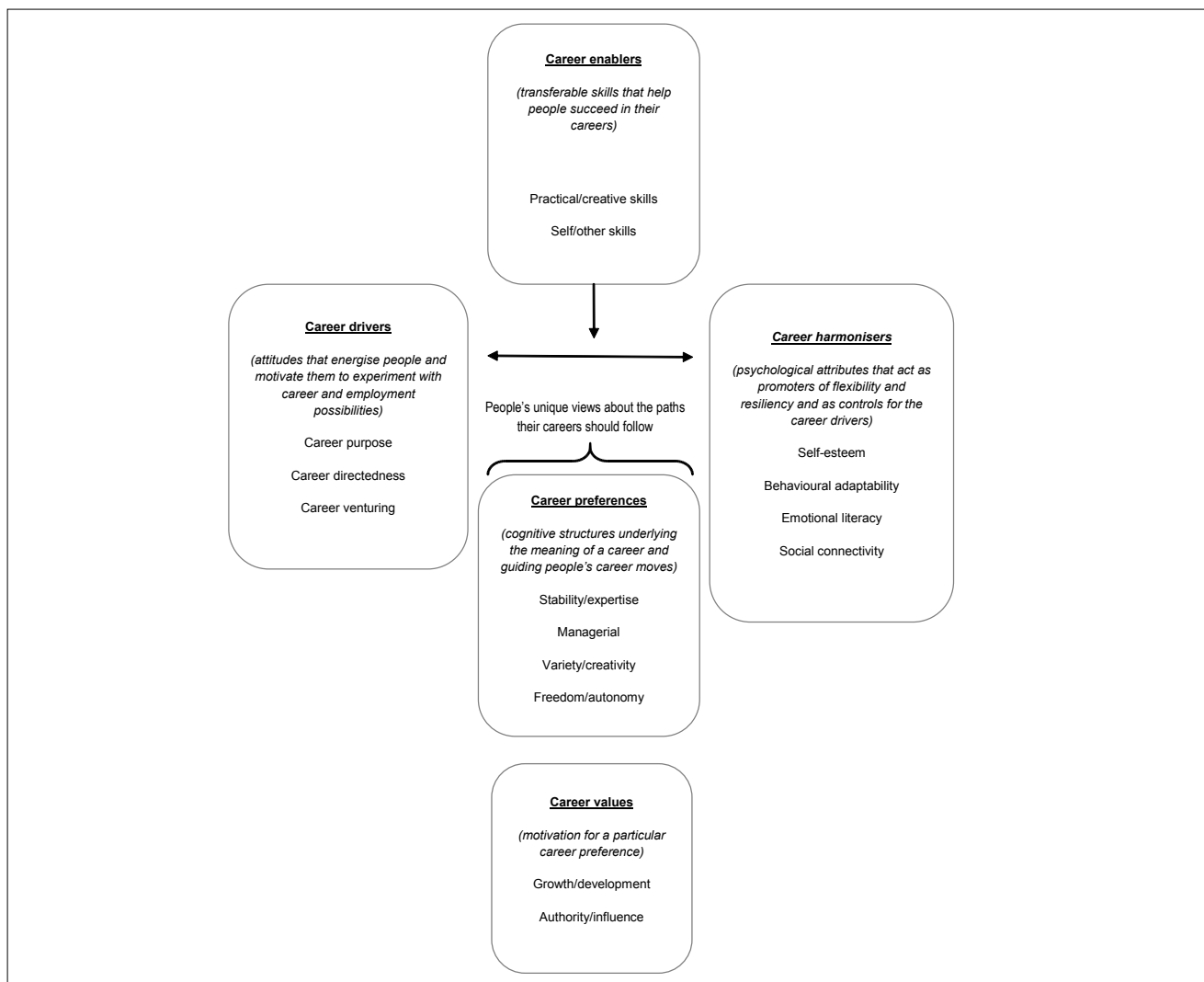


FIGURE 1

A theoretical framework of the construct psychological career resources (based on Coetzee, 2008)

or uncertain career circumstances and to shape and select environments in order to attain success within a particular socio-cultural context (Ebberwein, Krieskok, Ulven & Prosser, 2004; Gowan, Craft & Zimmermann, 2000; Sternberg, 1999).

The psychological career resources model developed by Coetzee (2008) is used in this study as a theoretical framework. An individual's psychological career resources profile reflects the dominant career consciousness of that person. Based on Adler's (1956) viewpoints on the concept of consciousness, Coetzee (2007) describes career consciousness as people's conscious, career-related cognitions (that is, perceptions, awareness and self-evaluations) of their career preferences, values, skills, attitudes and behaviours that are understood and regarded by people as helpful in realising their goals and achieving career success. Psychological career resources have been found to be linked to people's experiences of life satisfaction and job/career satisfaction, perceptions of general employability and their ability to deal resourcefully with life and career challenges (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Parker, 2008). People who possess a wide range of psychological career resources are generally more able to adapt to changing career circumstances and tend to demonstrate higher levels of employability (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Griffin & Hesketh, 2005; McArdle *et al.*, 2007).

The various components of an individual's repertoire of psychological career resources need to be well developed to enable the enactment of proactive career behaviour (Coetzee, 2008). If any one facet is out of balance (that is, not well-developed), none of the other career resource components can function optimally to facilitate self-empowering career behaviour. A well-established psychological career resources profile enables people to proactively engage in career self-management activities that enhance their job performance and experiences of subjective career success within a particular socio-cultural context (Coetzee, 2008; Ebberwein *et al.*, 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

An overall well-developed psychological career resources profile suggests conscious, self-directed career behaviour that is internally guided and driven by the individual's career preferences, career values, career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers.

As depicted in Figure 1, people's *career preferences and career values* (people's unique views about the paths their careers should follow) guide their career decisions. Individuals' career preferences and career values are regarded as the enduring cognitive or conceptual structures underlying their thinking about their careers and defining the meaning of a career to them (Driver, 1982; Kim, 2005). Career preferences and career values therefore become the guiding foundation for individuals' long-term career choices. Whereas individuals' career preferences guide their career moves, career values represent the motivation for a particular career preference (Brousseau, 1990).

The *enablers* (people's transferable skills such as their practical/creative skills and self/other skills) are those abilities that help them succeed in their careers.

The *drivers* (people's sense of career purpose, career directedness and career-venturing attitude) are the attitudes that energise people and motivate them to experiment with career and employment possibilities that are based on their viewpoints of the possible selves of the persons they can become and their possible future work roles (Coetzee, 2008). People with a calling orientation (or strong sense of purpose) tend to work for the fulfilment their jobs and careers offer and, in addition, believe that their work impacts society in some way (Bellah, Sullivan, Tipton, Madsen & Swindler, 1996). Career directedness is described as individuals' sense of clarity about future career directions and goals as well as the clarity in terms of where and how to find support for achieving their career goals or finding

new job opportunities. The term 'career venturing' relates to individuals' willingness to take risks to find and experiment with new career opportunities (Coetzee, 2008).

The *harmonisers* (people's self-esteem, behavioural adaptability, emotional literacy and social connectivity) are the psychological attributes that not only act as promoters of flexibility and resiliency, but also as controls to keep the career drivers in balance so that people do not go overboard (or burn themselves out) in the process of pursuing and reinventing their careers (Coetzee, 2008).

In this regard, individuals' repertoire of psychological career resources can also be regarded as the range of career orientations, values, attitudes and other meta-competencies that facilitate proactive agency with regard to career planning and development.

Coping resources

In the context of this study, the construct *coping resources* is presented as derived from the theoretical framework developed by Hammer. Hammer (1988) describes coping resources as those psychological capacities inherent in individuals that enable them to handle stressors (such as those experienced during unemployment and career transitions) more effectively, to experience fewer or less intense symptoms upon exposure to a stressor or to recover faster from exposure.

The resource domains outlined in Hammer's theoretical framework of coping resources were established on the basis of an extensive literature review, including his experience in conducting stress programmes and in working with individual clients (Hammer, 1988). The construct *coping resources* refers to a range of psychological coping capacities such as the following:

- **Cognitive resources:** these have to do with the extent to which individuals maintain a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook towards others and optimism about life in general.
- **Social resources:** these involve the degree to which individuals are imbedded in social networks that are able to provide support in times of stress.
- **Emotional resources:** these concern the degree to which individuals can accept and express a range of affect, based on the premise that a range of emotional responses helps to ameliorate long-term negative consequences of stress.
- **Spiritual/philosophical resources:** these involve the degree to which an individual's actions are guided by stable and consistent values derived from his or her religious, familial or cultural tradition, or from personal philosophy. These values may actually define the meaning of potentially stressful events and prescribe strategies that enable the individual to respond effectively.
- **Physical resources:** these have to do with the degree to which individuals enact the health-promoting behaviours believed to contribute to increased physical wellbeing. Physical wellbeing is thought to decrease the level of negative response to stress and to enable individuals to recover faster (Hammer, 1988).

In the context of unemployment and general career transition experiences, the notion of coping resources is regarded as closely related to adaptive career behaviour. According to Savickas (2005), adaptive career behaviour is characterised by a curiosity to explore possible selves and future scenarios, a positive self-evaluation of one's ability to pursue one's aspirations, a general attitude of 'planfulness' and optimism and proactive career agency in planning and directing one's future. Career agency is characterised by taking control of one's career with a sense of self-efficacy, including proactively seeking and exploring new information about a career that will enhance the fit between self and the environment (Buchner, 2007).

The presence of coping resources provides both deterring and coping functions. Psychosocial adaptive capacities allow

the individual to uphold and maintain self-identity in times of unemployment and when experiencing career transitions (Herr *et al.*, 2004; McArdle *et al.*, 2007). The presence of coping resources reduces distress and preserve people's psychological and social equilibrium. In this regard, psychosocial coping resources are regarded as valuable assets or protective factors that enable an individual to deal with problematic encounters and experiences, if and when such encounters and experiences occur. In other words, when people are confronted with stressful conditions and situations such as those caused by unemployment, they can draw on their psychosocial coping resources to cope with stimuli which, if not dealt with, may potentially challenge or threaten the person's survival or wellbeing (Ensel & Lin, 1991).

Summary and research objective

In view of the foregoing, the constructs *psychological career resources* and *coping resources* appear to be conceptually related. Both these variables focus on psychological attributes that relate to career adaptive behaviours that potentially facilitate individuals' general employability. Accordingly, it stands to reason that individuals who exhibit proactive career behaviour will most likely possess a well-developed range of psychological career resources and coping resources. However, the relationship between the two variables has not yet been empirically investigated. Therefore, the goal of this study was to investigate whether individuals' psychological career resources are related to their coping resources. The following research hypothesis was formulated:

H1: There is a significant relationship between individuals' psychological career resources and their coping resources.

Potential value-add of the study

In view of the foregoing, this article extends the research on psychological attributes and capacities that are related to proactive and adaptive career behaviour by examining whether people's psychological career resources relate to their coping resources (or their inherent capacity to deal with adverse or stressful circumstances such as unemployment).

By capitalising on the associations between the psychological attributes and capacities underlying the constructs *psychological career resources* and *coping resources*, career counsellors and clients may develop a broader understanding of how individuals' career-related psychological resources relate to their inherent capacity to deal effectively with career-related stressors such as unemployment. In this regard, Ackerman and Beier (2003) also posit that empirical research in the field of careers that aims to establish relationships between the measures of various career-related constructs is regarded as valuable in constructing career-counselling frameworks that address the contemporary career needs of clients.

The following sections describe the research design, the findings, conclusions and implications for practice and future research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

A quantitative survey research approach was followed to achieve the research objective.

Research method

Participants

The participants were a convenience sample of 196 African graduates of a population of 500 unemployed graduate Black people who attended a 12-week Work Readiness Programme sponsored by both the Bank Sector Education and Training

Authority (SETA) and the Financial, Accounting, Management Consulting and other Financial Services SETA (FASSET). The Work Readiness Programme seeks to equip unemployed Black finance graduates who would like to pursue a career in the FASSET sector with workplace and general employability skills. Upon successful completion of the programme, qualifying graduates are placed into full-time employment or a three-year learnership agreement. Black unemployed graduates with BCom degrees or national diplomas are annually invited to apply for enrolment in the programme. In the context of this study, the notion of unemployment includes both discouraged work seekers (those who have not actively sought work for at least four weeks) and unemployed people who have actively sought work in the last four weeks. The participants who volunteered to participate in the present study had graduated within the previous year, had been unemployed for 12 months and were actively seeking employment.

Participants originated from all nine provinces in South Africa. Women represented 53% of the sample, while men represented 46%. The participants were predominantly in their early adulthood life stage (exploration career stage), with 85% of the sample between the age of 20 and 25. Participants between the age of 26 and 29 represented only 15% of the sample. The mean average age of the sample was 23 years.

The sample had a relatively high educational level, with 36% having attained a diploma or certificate-level higher education qualification. Participants with a third-year level degree represented 64% of the sample. The fields of study represented by the participants' qualifications were predominantly the economic, financial and business management sciences (63%), followed by the human resources and psychology fields (17%) and information technology sciences (11%). Policing and criminal justice and marketing represented only 5% and 4% of the sample respectively.

Measuring instruments

The Psychological Career Resources Inventory (PCRI) (Coetzee, 2007) and the Coping Resources Inventory (CRI) (Hammer, 1988) were used to measure the variables of concern to this study.

The Psychological Career Resources Inventory: The PCRI (Coetzee, 2007) is a self-rated multi-factorial measure that contains 64 items and five subscales (career preferences, career values, career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers). The PCRI measures 15 constructs in total. In addition, the PCRI contains two additional questions. These questions relate to participants' self-evaluations of their future career prospects and employability. A 6-point Likert scale was used for subject responses to each of the 64 items. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale ranged from 0.71 to 0.88. In terms of validity, inter-construct correlations ranged from 0.14 to 0.58, indicating small to large practical effect size. The PCRI has also evidenced good psychometric validity and reliability in terms of other South African samples (Coetzee, 2008; Coetzee & Bergh, 2009; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009; Ferreira, 2009).

In the present study, the internal consistency coefficients for each scale ranged from 0.51 (self/other skills) to 0.81 (career venturing). The lower internal consistency coefficients for some of the PCRI variables could be attributed to the life stage and inexperience of participants regarding employment seeking and career-development matters.

The Coping Resources Inventory: The CRI was chosen since it was developed for junior and senior high school students, college (university) students and adults. The CRI uses a 4-point Likert scale to measure individuals' coping resources. High scores indicate that the individual being assessed has many resources with which to handle stressors effectively, will

experience fewer or less severe stress-related symptoms upon exposure to a stressor, and will recover more quickly from exposure to stress. Low scores indicate areas for improvement and potential symptoms of stress, because higher resources are associated with fewer symptoms (Hammer 1988).

The CRI consists of five subscales and 60 items: the cognitive subscale (nine items), the social subscale (13 items), the emotional subscale (16 items), the spiritual/philosophical subscale (11 items) (the content domain of this subscale is broader than traditional Western religious definitions of spirituality) and the physical subscale (11 items) (Hammer, 1988).

Validity studies on the CRI justify the various underlying constructs of the five subscales. Hammer (1988) reports Cronbach's alpha coefficients and test-retest reliability varying from 0.71 (physical), 0.77 (cognitive), 0.79 (social) to 0.80 (spiritual/philosophical) and 0.84 (emotional). Since the CRI has not been standardised for South African populations, scale reliability tests were conducted for the sample group. In the present study, the internal consistency coefficients for each scale were as follows: 0.59 (physical); 0.70 (cognitive); 0.72 (social); 0.66 (spiritual/philosophical) and 0.75 (emotional). Hammer (1988) reports similar lower internal consistency coefficients for the physical and spiritual/philosophical scales for samples comprising junior and high school and college (university) students. A South African study conducted by Coetzee, Jansen and Muller (2009) has evidenced the psychometric validity and reliability of the CRI for South African samples, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the CRI varying from 0.68 (cognitive), 0.71 (spiritual/philosophical), 0.73 (physical) to 0.81 (social) and 0.83 (emotional).

Since both the PCRI and the CRI were used to determine broad, group-based and not individual trends, the psychometric properties of the instruments were regarded as acceptable for the purpose of this study.

Research procedure

All participants who attended the Work Readiness Programme were invited to participate in the survey on a voluntary basis. Permission to conduct the survey was obtained from the programme coordinator and the relevant SETAs. One of the researchers of the present study acted as a co-facilitator of the Work Readiness Programme and coordinated the completion of the questionnaires by the participants. In terms of ethics, permission from the programme coordinators and participants were obtained. A cover letter stated that by completing the questionnaires and returning them, agreement to use the results for research purposes only was assumed. Once the purpose of the survey was explained, anonymity and confidentiality were also guaranteed. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaires in a session allocated for this purpose and they returned the completed questionnaires to the psychometrist who coordinated the session.

Statistical analyses

The statistical procedures chosen for this study were based on their applicability to the exploratory nature of the research design. The statistical analysis was carried out with the help of the SAS System, Version 9.1, statistical package (SAS Institute, 2003). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Standard multiple regression analyses were carried out to identify the PCRI variables that provide the best explanation of the proportion of the total variance in the scores of the dependent variables (the five CRI variables). Since a large number of independent (PCRI) variables had to be considered, the value of adjusted R^2 was used to interpret the results. In order to counter for the probability of a type I error, it was decided to set the significance value at a 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0.05$). The F -test was used to test whether there was a significant regression between the independent and dependent variables.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Most of the participants felt optimistic and hopeful regarding their future career prospects, with 48% feeling good and 50% feeling very good about their future career prospects. In terms of participants' self-perceptions regarding their employability (that is, their self-evaluations of their knowledge, skills, attributes, experience and occupational expertise to create/attract employment with ease), 68% felt confident about their employability and 24% felt highly confident. Only 9% indicated a lack of confidence in terms of their employability.

Means and standard deviations

Psychological career resources: The means and standard deviations of each PCRI subscale are presented in Table 1, which shows that *stability/expertise* ($M = 5.40$; $SD = 0.52$) and *variety/creativity* ($M = 4.92$; $SD = 0.90$) are indicated as the dominant career preferences for the total sample. *Freedom/autonomy* ($M = 3.99$; $SD = 0.99$) was indicated as the least preferred career preference. In line with this observation, the sample indicated *growth/development* ($M = 5.45$; $SD = 0.56$) as their dominant career value. With respect to the career enabler subscale, participants obtained the highest score on the *self/other skills* ($M = 5.25$; $SD = 0.59$) variable. In terms of the career driver and career harmonisers subscales, participants scored the highest on the *career purpose* ($M = 5.63$; $SD = 0.44$), the *self-esteem* ($M = 5.48$; $SD = 0.53$) and the *social connectivity* ($M = 5.22$; $SD = 0.71$) subscales.

Coping resources: The means and standard deviations of each CRI subscale are presented in Table 1, which shows that participants scored the highest on both the *cognitive* ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 0.35$) and the *spiritual/philosophical* ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 0.35$) coping resources variables. The *emotional* coping resources variable obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 3.08$; $SD = 0.49$).

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics: PCRI and CRI ($n = 196$)

PCRI scale	M	SD
Career preferences		
Stability/expertise	5.40	0.52
Managerial	4.68	0.89
Variety/creativity	4.92	0.90
Freedom/autonomy	3.99	0.99
Career values		
Growth/development	5.45	0.56
Authority/influence	4.16	0.99
Career enablers		
Practical/creative skills	4.46	0.94
Self/other skills	5.25	0.59
Career drivers		
Career purpose	5.63	0.44
Career directedness	4.19	0.88
Career venturing	4.15	1.38
Career harmonisers		
Self-esteem	5.48	0.53
Behavioural adaptability	4.84	0.76
Emotional literacy	4.48	0.95
Social connectivity	5.22	0.71
CRI scale		
Cognitive	3.62	0.35
Social	3.28	0.41
Emotional	3.08	0.49
Spiritual/philosophical	3.62	0.35
Physical	3.28	0.41

Hypothesis testing

Multiple regression analysis

The primary aim of the present study was to empirically assess whether people's psychological career resources relate to their coping resources. H1 was analysed by conducting standard multiple regression analyses. H1 proposed that psychological career resources (PCRI variables) would be positively related to coping resources (CRI variables). Tables 2 and 3 show that the regression of the PCRI variables to the CRI variables all produced highly statistically significant models ($F(p) \leq 0.000$). Except for the small percentage of variance explained in the CRI physical resource variable ($R^2 = 8\%$, small practical effect size) (Cohen, 1992), the other models explained large percentages of variance in the dependent variables (ranging from $R^2 = 38\%$ to $R^2 = 58\%$, large practical effect size). The results provide useful pointers regarding the influence of the participants' psychological career resources on their coping resources.

Cognitive coping resource variable: Table 2 shows that the regression of the PCRI variables (*self-esteem, self/other skills, stability/expertise, career directedness, career purpose* and *emotional literacy*) to the *cognitive* coping resource variable produced a statistically significant model ($F(6.188) = 36.78; p \leq 0.001$), accounting for 53% of the variance. Although all the PCRI variables in the regression model contributed significantly to the variance in the cognitive coping resources scores, the career harmoniser variable *self-esteem* obtained the largest beta weight ($\beta = 0.47; p \leq 0.000$), followed by the career enabler variable *self/other skills* ($\beta = 0.20; p \leq 0.001$). The career driver variable *career purpose* ($\beta = -0.17; p \leq 0.006$) contributed negatively to explaining the variance in the cognitive coping resources scores. The negative regression coefficient observed for *career purpose* could be attributed to a probable net suppression effect, in which case the variable *career purpose* may be seen to suppress or remove the unwanted variance in the variable *self-esteem*.

Social coping resource variable: The PCRI variables (*social connectivity, behavioural adaptability, emotional literacy, self-esteem* and *practical/creative skills*) in the regression analysis for the

social coping resource variable also produced a statistically significant model ($F(5.189) = 56.723; p \leq 0.001$), accounting for 59% of the variance. All the selected PCRI variables contributed significantly to the variance in the social coping resources scores. The career harmoniser variables *social connectivity* ($\beta = 0.34; p \leq 0.000$) and *behavioural adaptability* ($\beta = 0.22; p \leq 0.000$) obtained the largest beta weights.

Emotional coping resource variable: The PCRI variables (*emotional literacy, social connectivity, self-esteem, authority/influence* and *career directedness*) in the regression analysis for the *emotional* coping resource variable produced a statistically significant model ($F(5.189) = 58.375; p \leq 0.001$), accounting for 60% of the variance. All the selected PCRI variables contributed significantly to the variance in the emotional coping resources scores. The career harmoniser variables *emotional literacy* ($\beta = 0.56; p \leq 0.000$) and *social connectivity* ($\beta = 0.19; p \leq 0.001$) obtained the largest beta weights.

Spiritual/philosophical coping resource variable: Table 3 shows that the regression of the selected PCRI variables (*behaviour adaptability, self/other skills* and *self-esteem*) to the *spiritual/philosophical* coping resource variable produced a statistically significant model ($F(3.191) = 38.442; p \leq 0.001$), accounting for 37% of the variance. All the selected PCRI variables contributed significantly to the variance in the spiritual/philosophical coping resources scores. The career enabler variable *self/other skills* ($\beta = 0.31; p \leq 0.000$) and the career harmoniser variable *behavioural adaptability* ($\beta = 0.29; p \leq 0.000$) obtained the largest beta weights.

Physical coping resource variable: The PCRI variables (*self-esteem, managerial, career directedness, career purpose* and *growth/development*) in the regression analysis for the *physical* coping resource variable also produced a statistically significant model ($F(5.189) = 7.650; p \leq 0.001$), accounting for 15% of the variance. Although all the selected PCRI variables contributed significantly to the variance in the cognitive coping resources

TABLE 2
Multiple regression analyses: CRI (cognitive/social/emotional) ($n = 196$)

Variable	Unstandardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	Adjusted <i>R square</i>	<i>R</i>
	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β					
Cognitive						36.78 *** **	0.53	0.74
(Constant)	0.84	0.26		3.21	0.002**			
Career preference: Stability/expertise	0.13	0.04	0.19	3.42	0.001***			
Career enabler: Self/other skills	0.12	0.04	0.20	3.39	0.001***			
Career driver: Career directedness	0.07	0.02	0.16	2.99	0.003**			
Career driver: Career purpose	-0.13	0.05	-0.17	-2.78	0.006**			
Career harmoniser: Self-esteem	0.32	0.04	0.47	8.20	0.000***			
Career harmoniser: Emotional literacy	0.05	0.02	0.13	2.28	0.024*			
Social						56.72 *** **	0.59	0.78
(Constant)	0.29	0.21		1.43	0.156			
Career enabler: Practical/creative skills	0.06	0.02	0.13	2.67	0.008**			
Career harmoniser: Self-esteem	0.13	0.04	0.16	2.90	0.004**			
Career harmoniser: Behavioural adaptability	0.12	0.03	0.22	3.70	0.000***			
Career harmoniser: Emotional literacy	0.10	0.02	0.22	4.19	0.000***			
Career harmoniser: Social connectivity	0.2	0.03	0.34	5.99	0.000***			
Emotional						58.38 *** **	0.60	0.78
(Constant)	-0.04	0.25		-0.18	0.859			
Career value: Authority/influence	0.06	0.02	0.11	2.37	0.019*			
Career driver: Career directedness	0.06	0.03	0.10	2.03	0.044*			
Career harmoniser: Self-esteem	0.12	0.05	0.13	2.42	0.016*			
Career harmoniser: Emotional literacy	0.29	0.03	0.56	11.07	0.000***			
Career harmoniser: Social connectivity	0.13	0.04	0.19	3.50	0.001***			

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$; * $R^2 \geq 0.26$ (large practical effect size)

scores, the career harmoniser variable *self-esteem* obtained the largest beta weight ($\beta = 0.33; p \leq 0.000$), followed by the career preference variable *managerial* ($\beta = -0.22; p \leq 0.003$).

Based on these results, H1 (which states that there is a significant relationship between individuals' psychological career resources and their coping resources) is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The rationale for this study was that individuals' psychological career resources (as a set of career meta-competencies and attributes) and coping resources (as the inherent capacity to deal with the potential stress associated with situations such as unemployment) should be considered in career-guidance activities for the young unemployed graduate. Given this rationale, the present study explored the relationship between a sample of young unemployed African graduates' psychological career resources and their coping resources.

Overall, the multiple regression analyses indicated that dimensions of psychological career resources contribute significantly to explaining the variance in participants' coping resources scores. The overall psychological career resources profile of the participants suggests a strong preference for stability/expertise, implying a need for steady and stable employment opportunities that will allow them to specialise and develop expertise in an area of interest. They also appear to value further growth and development opportunities, which suggest a desire to continuously improve their skills and knowledge in a particular field of interest. These findings may be related to the particular life stage and career phase of the participants and the attendance of the Work Readiness Programme. Research by Coetzee and Schreuder (2008) also indicates that people in the early life stage strongly value further growth and development opportunities.

It is interesting to observe that the PCRI self-esteem variable positively contributes to explaining the proportion of variance in all five the coping resources variables scores, suggesting self-esteem as a significant contributor to participants' psychosocial coping capacities. The findings further show that social connectivity contribute positively to social and emotional coping resources. This suggests that participants who perceived themselves as able to connect with and get along well with others are also more inclined to form supportive social networks. The finding that the PCRI self-esteem variable contributed significantly to all the CRI variables is in accordance with the finding of BarOn (1997), who also indicated that positive self-regard is related to emotional literacy and the ability to form positive, supportive social relationships.

McArdle *et al.* (2007) also found that self-esteem and the ability to form social support networks contributed to unemployed individuals' perceptions of their employability. When considering that the participants reported general optimism and confidence in their employability and future career prospects, the findings suggest that the participants' positive self-evaluations of their ability to connect with others, manage themselves and build positive interpersonal relations may have contributed to their sense of self-confidence and optimism about their future career prospects. Although not empirically tested, it could be hypothesised that the attendance of the Work Readiness Programme could have further contributed to participants' sense of optimism about their future career prospects.

The results further indicate practical/creative skills, emotional literacy and behavioural adaptability as having a potential positive influence on participants' social coping resources. The findings suggest that those participants who perceive themselves as able to apply problem-solving and practical skills in setting career goals and to put ideas into practical plans regard themselves as able to form supportive networks as a source of achieving their goals. They also seem to be able to deal with setbacks and failures in an emotionally literate manner, owing to their ability to form supportive social networks. Similarly, Griffin and Hesketh (2005) found problem-solving ability to be linked to proactive career-adjustment behaviour.

The lower scores obtained on the emotional coping resources scale suggest that participants predominantly draw on their cognitive and spiritual/philosophical capacities to adapt to stressful situations. This implies a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook towards others and optimism about life in general. Moreover, the findings indicate that participants' strong sense of self-esteem, self-management and relationship skills contribute significantly to their cognitive and spiritual/philosophical coping resources. In addition, it appears that their adaptive responses are mostly guided by stable and consistent values derived from religious, familial or cultural tradition, or from personal philosophy.

When considering the participants' apparent preference for secure, stable and steady employment, the findings suggest support and guidance in personal career goal setting as part of a career-coaching programme such as the 12-week Work Readiness Programme. Nabi (2000) indicates in this regard that guidance and coaching in personal career goal setting lead to more optimistic perceptions and a willingness to engage in career-enhancing strategies that give individuals a sense of control over their careers. Career-enhancing strategies

TABLE 3
Multiple regression analyses: CRI (spiritual/philosophical and physical) (n = 196)

Variable	Unstandardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient	t	p	F	Adjusted R square	R
	B	SE B	β					
Spiritual/philosophical						38.44***	0.37	0.61
(Constant)	0.71	0.28		2.52	0.01 *			
Career enabler: Self/other skills	0.22	0.05	0.31	4.34	0.000 ***			
Harmoniser: Self-esteem	0.11	0.05	0.15	2.20	0.029 *			
Career harmoniser:	0.16	0.04	0.29	3.91	0.000 ***			
Behavioural adaptability								
Physical						7.65***	0.15	0.41
(Constant)	1.72	0.42		4.11	0.000***			
Career preference: Managerial	-0.11	0.04	-0.22	-2.97	0.003 **			
Career value: Growth/development	0.14	0.06	0.19	2.41	0.017 *			
Career driver: Career directedness	0.09	0.04	0.19	2.55	0.011*			
Career driver: Career purpose	-0.20	0.08	-0.20	-2.59	0.01 **			
Career harmoniser: Self-esteem	0.27	0.06	0.33	4.25	0.000 ***			

***p ≤ 0.001; **p ≤ 0.01; *p ≤ 0.05; ***R² ≥ 0.26 (large practical effect size); *R² ≤ 0.12 (small practical effect size)

generally increase individuals' sense of job security and help them to proactively move towards achieving their personal growth and development goals, including their career goals and aspirations (Lee, 2002). Buchner (2007) also found that experiences or feelings of job security lead to positive self-regard and to having a more positive outlook towards others and life in general. Moreover, Coetzee and Bergh (2009) found that a positive self-esteem positively predicts life satisfaction and happiness, while Griffin and Hesketh (2005) regard continuous learning, physical adaptability and interpersonal skills as linked to adaptive behaviour.

The findings indicate participants' career directedness (having clarity regarding future career options and goals) to be lower than their sense of career purpose (feeling called towards a career that contributes to the common good of society), implying less clarity and decisiveness about their future career goals. The findings further indicate that career directedness positively contributes to participants' physical, cognitive and emotional coping resources. This suggests that having clarity about one's career goals stimulates health-promoting behaviours that lead to an improvement of one's physical and emotional wellbeing as well as an optimistic attitude towards oneself and one's life in general. Research by Emmerling and Cherniss (2003) indicates that the emotions experienced during the career decision-making process and in relation to social relations at work have implications for the perception of risk-related to specific career options, the amount and kind of self-exploration individuals will engage in, and the way in which information related to career choice will be processed. Moreover, wellbeing has been found to be linked to positive self-regard and experiences of general happiness, life satisfaction and job/career satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Coetzee and Bergh (2009) also found that career directedness positively predicts life satisfaction, job/career satisfaction and happiness.

Conclusions

Implications for practice and research

The results illuminated some significant associations between the psychological career resources and coping resources variables. While acknowledging the significance of participants' attendance of the Work Readiness Programme, which could have influenced the results obtained by the study, it should be noted that this study attempted to gain a broader understanding of individual-level aspects that contribute to unemployed people's capacity to deal with the uncertainty of their employment prospects. In general, the value of the findings obtained in the present study lies in the explanatory utility of the identified psychological career resources variables that seem to offer a broader understanding of participants' coping resources. In this regard, the findings of the study expand the career literature, particularly literature on research on the psychological coping capacities of young unemployed graduates in the school-to-work transition phase of their careers. In more practical terms, career counsellors and the young graduate can capitalise on the associations between the psychological attributes underlying these two constructs to develop a broader understanding of how individuals' psychological resources relate to their inherent capacity to deal effectively with career-related stressors such as unemployment.

However, given the paucity of empirical work on the relationship between the psychological career resources and the coping resources constructs relevant to this research, it would seem sensible not to over-interpret the present findings with reference to practical implications without further corroborative research. Yet, two preliminary implications may be suggested. Firstly, as the findings illustrate that people's psychological career resources may have some potential to explain their coping resources, the associations found between the psychological career resources and coping resources variables may serve

as a guideline to construct a more comprehensive career-counselling framework that serves to provide an integrative career-counselling tool to enable career adaptability during the school-to-work transition phase. Such a framework may also facilitate other important outcomes such as proactive career exploration and decision making during the school-to-work transition phase, optimal work and career adjustment, and a sustained sense of self-efficacy and career maturity in the young unemployed adult. Pool and Sewell (2007) propose that graduates should be guided to become more self-aware to enable them to give real consideration to the things they enjoy doing and are interested in, that motivate them and that suit their personalities and career interests. They also need to learn how to best research the job markets to see what opportunities are available to them, how to present themselves effectively to prospective employers and how to make considered decisions about their careers. Barnett and Bradley (2007) indicate that career-development support services positively affect the career-development ability, behaviour and motivation of people. Coetzee and Bergh (2009) posit that such services may include education, guidance and coaching for self-empowering career behaviours and career meta-skills that has been shown to underpin individuals' career adaptability and general employability.

Secondly, the findings underscore the importance of a positive self-esteem and other psychological career resources in the development of career literacy in the young graduate, such as self-management and interpersonal skills, emotional literacy and career directedness. The findings also showed that having clarity about one's career goals significantly influenced the capacity to maintain a sense of self-worth and optimism about life in general (Griesel & Parker, 2009; Pool & Sewell, 2007). Career-development programmes aimed at preparing graduates for the world of work, such as the Work Readiness Programme attended by the participants of this study, should therefore strive to include activities and counselling services that help young people to develop these psychological resources as a core element of their career literacy.

Methodological limitations

Future directions in research

Since the present study was limited to young unemployed African graduates predominantly from the economic, financial and business management fields of study, the findings cannot be generalised to other race, age and occupational contexts. Furthermore, given the exploratory nature of the research design, this study cannot yield any statements about causation. Associations between participants' psychological career resources and coping resources have therefore been interpreted rather than established. These findings need to be replicated by using other measures with broader samples across various age, gender, race and occupational groups and economic sectors before broader conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between these constructs.

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