

Dimensions of Coping in Individuals Facing Long-Term Unemployment: A Qualitative Exploration

Zosia. Zielińska¹, William. Harrison^{2*}, Ivana. Radić³

¹ Department of Health Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

² Department of Behavioral Neuroscience, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, USA

³ Department of Developmental Psychology, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

* Corresponding author email address: w.harrison@utexas.edu

Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

Section:

Occupational and Organizational
Counseling

How to cite this article:

Zielińska, Z., Harrison, W., & Radić, I. (2026). Dimensions of Coping in Individuals Facing Long-Term Unemployment: A Qualitative Exploration. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 4, 1-10.

<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ooc.psynexus.5655>



© 2026 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify and explore the emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social dimensions of coping among individuals experiencing long-term unemployment. This qualitative study employed a semi-structured interview design to capture the lived experiences of individuals facing extended unemployment. A total of 17 participants from various regions across the United States were recruited through purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted online, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. NVivo software supported the organization and analysis of data using open, axial, and selective coding procedures. Thematic analysis guided the identification of major themes and subthemes describing coping dimensions. Analysis revealed three overarching thematic dimensions of coping. First, emotional coping mechanisms included strategies for managing anxiety, shame, stigma, and depressive symptoms, as well as seeking emotional support. Second, behavioral and cognitive adaptation strategies encompassed structured job-search routines, skill-building efforts, daily routine maintenance, financial adjustments, and cognitive reframing. Third, social and identity-related coping processes involved reconceptualizing personal identity, navigating social expectations, adjusting family dynamics, managing social withdrawal, and reconnecting through community networks. Collectively, these findings suggest that coping with long-term unemployment is multifaceted and characterized by continuous psychological adaptation across emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social domains. Long-term unemployment generates substantial psychological and social challenges, requiring individuals to draw upon diverse emotional, behavioral, and relational resources. The findings underscore the need for supportive interventions that address the complex interplay between emotional resilience, routine-building, skill development, identity reconstruction, and social belonging. Programs aimed at strengthening coping capacities may enhance well-being and help individuals navigate prolonged joblessness more effectively.

Keywords: Long-term unemployment; coping strategies; qualitative research; emotional coping; cognitive adaptation; social identity; behavioral coping

1. Introduction

Long-term unemployment is increasingly recognized as a complex psychosocial phenomenon that influences emotional functioning, coping capacities, social participation, and overall well-being. Extended periods without work disrupt multiple spheres of daily life, intensifying stress, reducing motivation, and challenging individuals' sense of identity and purpose. As economic structures shift and labor markets evolve, understanding how individuals cope with prolonged unemployment has become essential for both research and practice. Within organizational and behavioral sciences, scholars have demonstrated that leadership, motivation, work culture, and employee engagement are strongly connected to psychological resources and coping patterns, creating a conceptual foundation from which the experiences of unemployed individuals can be theoretically examined. For example, research on servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership highlights how purpose-driven guidance can enhance ethical environments and human well-being (Zhu, 2025). Although these insights are rooted in workplace settings, they provide important parallels for understanding resilience and coping outside formal employment, where individuals must act as their own sources of guidance, structure, and motivation.

A substantial body of contemporary scholarship emphasizes the role of supportive leadership behaviors in shaping psychological functioning, satisfaction, commitment, and engagement. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been shown to improve performance and foster organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Aldossari & Alanizan, 2025). Even in non-work contexts, individuals experiencing unemployment often rely on self-transformational processes—such as reframing, motivation-building, or envisioning future opportunities—that resemble the internalized version of such leadership dynamics. Similar patterns appear in analyses of organizational climate and motivation, where leadership styles shape behaviors such as organizational citizenship and trust (Almaqableha & Omar, 2024). These dynamics suggest that the capacity to cope with uncertainty may mirror the psychological mechanisms seen in organizational settings, even if the structural environment is absent.

Studies focusing on public-sector workers have also shown that leadership styles influence performance through motivational, behavioral, and training-related mechanisms (Aman, 2025). For unemployed individuals, similar

mechanisms can be observed when they attempt to self-regulate, acquire new skills, manage financial constraints, or adjust their behavior to meet pressing life demands. Employee engagement, for instance, is strongly affected by transformational leadership in hybrid work contexts (Anggita, 2025), reinforcing the idea that engagement is not solely a function of the work environment—but also of personal and relational conditions. When employment is absent, maintaining engagement in job-search activities, daily routines, and motivational behaviors becomes a personal responsibility that often mirrors what supportive organizations would normally facilitate.

Workplace productivity, culture, and performance are also influenced by leadership styles in IT and corporate environments (Ankitha et al., 2025; Manoharan et al., 2025). These findings underscore the role of adaptive cognitive and behavioral patterns—such as strategic planning, problem-solving, and emotional regulation—in shaping outcomes. In unemployment contexts, these mechanisms are equally relevant because effective coping requires consistent goal-setting, cognitive reframing, and structured behavioral systems. Even motivation and satisfaction in healthcare institutions have been shown to respond strongly to leadership style (Appah, 2025), suggesting the universal importance of psychological support systems in sustaining well-being. For unemployed individuals, the absence of institutional support makes internal coping mechanisms even more crucial.

Organizational psychology literature further highlights how positive environments contribute to emotional balance, motivation, and reduced burnout (Bakri, 2024). When individuals face long-term unemployment, they must often reconstruct or compensate for this missing environment, developing new forms of internal or social support. The role of servant leadership, for example, has been shown to increase employee engagement in tourism offices (Citta et al., 2025), emphasizing values of care, empathy, and empowerment—values that often emerge as self-directed coping strategies when individuals confront adversity. Inclusive leadership also promotes psychological safety, trust, and engagement (Deepalakshmi, 2025), mirroring the conditions under which unemployed individuals seek community belonging, peer support, or emotional validation.

Scholars examining leadership in academic and institutional settings highlight the influence of motivational structures and identification processes on well-being and performance (Guzman et al., 2025). Literature reviews on leadership and intention to leave also point to the critical role

of relational and emotional factors (Handaya, 2025). In unemployment, relational strain, shame, and social expectations likewise play significant roles in shaping coping behaviors. Transformational leadership has been linked to stronger organizational commitment among civil servants (Hartono et al., 2024), and studies in modern organizations highlight the connection between leadership and employee engagement (K. & Lalwani, 2025). These findings collectively emphasize that individuals thrive when they experience guidance, structure, and support—elements often lost during prolonged unemployment, requiring individuals to develop substitute mechanisms.

Research on the performance of small and medium enterprises underscores the importance of appropriate leadership styles in sustaining organizational outcomes (Kawimbe & M., 2024). Similar principles apply when individuals experiencing unemployment must sustain their own long-term efforts despite financial stress, uncertainty, or loss of routine. In IT industries, leadership styles enhance employee engagement (Maindola et al., 2025), while leadership effectiveness improves commitment and satisfaction in corporate settings (Manoharan et al., 2025). The psychological correlates found in these studies—such as motivation, resilience, and emotional stability—are often mirrored in the strategies individuals adopt when coping with unemployment.

The relationship between leadership style and organizational performance has also been examined in Oman, showing that leaders influence not only output but also psychological functioning and satisfaction (Mukhaini et al., 2025). Studies on team performance reinforce the contribution of transformational leadership to work outcomes (Purwanti & Sari, 2024). Meanwhile, research in emerging economies demonstrates that servant leadership enhances employee well-being through trust and relational connection (Qureshi et al., 2024). These findings, though situated in organizational contexts, highlight mechanisms such as empowerment, meaning-making, and emotional support—mechanisms that individuals often rely on when negotiating the stressors of long-term unemployment.

Leadership's role in fostering engagement has been extensively documented in literature analyses (Ramlan et al., 2025). Ethical and effective leadership patterns offer pathways to improved organizational outcomes and personal development (Rao, 2025). Furthermore, leadership styles in relation to employee engagement and organizational growth show that supportive and transformational approaches enhance psychological stability (Rusilowati et al., 2025).

Organizational culture also significantly affects performance and success (Sahoo et al., 2025), underscoring the need for psychological stability and coping strengths in any environment. These findings have conceptual relevance for unemployed populations who must navigate difficult conditions without the benefit of supportive work environments.

Studies examining leadership's impact on happiness at work reveal the importance of satisfaction and empowerment in fostering positive emotional states (Sam et al., 2024). Additional research highlights how engagement, satisfaction, and motivation are influenced by relational and cultural contexts (Santiago, 2024; Sharma, 2024). Servant leadership also supports performance and engagement among university employees (Shafiq et al., 2025), and leadership approaches can shape emotions, behavior, and productivity (Sharma & Patel, 2025; Sharma, 2025). These insights reinforce the broader idea that emotional stability and motivation are central to human functioning, regardless of employment status.

Unemployment places unique demands on coping processes, particularly when individuals face prolonged joblessness. Research on work engagement emphasizes the role of psychological needs in sustaining motivation (Usman et al., 2024). Leadership strategies such as clarity, ethics, purpose, and empathy—identified across multiple studies—offer conceptual parallels for understanding coping outside the workplace. When formal employment is absent, individuals must rely on internalized leadership-like mechanisms, social support, and structured routines to maintain well-being. These self-guided coping processes often reflect practices such as self-motivation, self-direction, hope maintenance, and emotional regulation, which are documented across the leadership literature but take on heightened importance in unemployment contexts.

Despite extensive scholarship on leadership, engagement, well-being, and psychological functioning in organizational settings, significantly less attention has been devoted to understanding how individuals cope with long-term unemployment using similar psychological mechanisms. The existing literature provides conceptual foundations for understanding coping but does not directly address the emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social strategies employed by individuals navigating prolonged joblessness. This gap necessitates empirical exploration that centers on lived experiences, psychosocial stressors, and adaptive strategies within unemployed populations. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify and explore the dimensions of

coping among individuals experiencing long-term unemployment.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the multidimensional coping experiences of individuals facing long-term unemployment. A qualitative approach was selected to allow for an in-depth understanding of subjective interpretations, emotional processes, and behavioral strategies that emerge during extended periods of joblessness. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of individuals who had experienced unemployment for at least twelve consecutive months and could richly articulate their coping strategies.

A total of 17 participants from various states across the United States took part in the study. Efforts were made to achieve diversity in age, gender, educational background, and previous occupational roles to capture a broad range of perspectives. Recruitment was facilitated through online support groups, workforce development centers, and community organizations serving unemployed populations. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached—defined as the point at which no new categories, themes, or insights emerged from additional interviews.

2.2. Measures

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, chosen for their ability to generate rich, nuanced, and context-specific accounts of participants' lived experiences. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to explore emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioral dimensions of coping. Example prompts included inquiries about daily routines during unemployment, sources of stress, adaptive or maladaptive coping practices, social support, motivation, and perceived barriers to reemployment.

Interviews were conducted via secure online video or audio calls, depending on participant preference. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. Field notes were taken to capture nonverbal observations and contextual details. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and

completeness. To maintain confidentiality, all identifying information was removed during transcription, and participants were assigned numerical codes.

2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic, iterative qualitative coding process. The transcripts were first reviewed multiple times to ensure immersion in the data, followed by initial open coding to identify meaningful units of text. Codes were refined and grouped into categories and broader thematic patterns. The constant comparative method was used throughout analysis, allowing for ongoing comparison of new data with existing codes and categories to reveal similarities, differences, and evolving conceptual relationships.

All coding and analysis were managed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated organization of transcripts, storage of analytic memos, and systematic retrieval of codes. Axial and selective coding techniques were applied to integrate categories, refine emerging themes, and identify underlying dimensions of coping. Analysis continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring that the final thematic structure reflected the depth and diversity of participant experiences.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 17 participants from various regions across the United States who had experienced long-term unemployment for at least one year. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 59 years, with the largest proportion falling between 35 and 45 years old ($n = 7$). The sample consisted of 9 women, 7 men, and 1 non-binary participant. In terms of educational background, 5 participants held a bachelor's degree, 4 had completed graduate-level education, 6 had some college or associate-level training, and 2 had a high school diploma. Participants represented a diverse range of prior employment sectors, including service and retail ($n = 4$), administrative and clerical roles ($n = 3$), technology and information services ($n = 3$), healthcare support ($n = 2$), education ($n = 2$), and other mixed fields ($n = 3$). The duration of unemployment varied from 12 months to over 30 months, with 10 participants reporting unemployment exceeding 18 months. This demographic distribution reflects a heterogeneous sample that captures a broad range of personal and professional backgrounds relevant to understanding coping with long-term unemployment.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts

Category (Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
Emotional Coping Mechanisms	Emotional Regulation Strategies	managing daily stress; controlling negative thoughts; using breathing and grounding; self-soothing attempts; intentional emotional distancing
	Handling Anxiety About Future	fear of long-term instability; catastrophizing future; worry spirals; seeking reassurance; difficulty calming uncertainty; constant financial worry
	Maintaining Hope and Motivation	positive self-talk; hope renewal; reminding self of strengths; setting small goals; imagining future employment; looking for signs of progress
	Dealing With Shame and Stigma	hiding unemployment; avoiding social situations; feeling judged; internalized failure; embarrassment discussing job loss; self-blame patterns
	Coping With Depression and Low Mood	withdrawal from routine; sleep disruptions; low energy; loss of interest; difficulty starting tasks; emotional numbness; overthinking
	Emotional Support Seeking	talking to trusted friends; opening up during low moments; seeking validation; online peer support; family emotional support; using support groups
Behavioral and Cognitive Adaptation Strategies	Structured Job Search Routines	daily job search schedule; tracking applications; setting weekly goals; updating resume; practicing interviews; participating on LinkedIn
	Skill Building and Self-Improvement	online training; learning new software; certification courses; reading professional materials; self-directed learning
	Cognitive Reframing	viewing unemployment as temporary; reinterpreting setbacks; challenging negative beliefs; focusing on controllable actions; reframing identity beyond job role
	Maintaining Daily Structure	setting morning routine; consistent sleep schedule; daily to-do lists; organizing chores; creating boundaries between rest and tasks
	Financial Adjustment Behaviors	budgeting tightly; reducing expenses; seeking gig work; prioritizing essentials; using community resources; canceling subscriptions
	Engagement in Alternative Activities	volunteering; hobbies for distraction; physical activity; creative outlets; community participation; freelance work; time in nature
Social and Identity-Related Coping Processes	Problem-Solving Orientation	analyzing barriers; strategic planning; seeking solutions; breaking problems into steps; identifying resources; evaluating job market options
	Changes in Self-Identity	loss of professional identity; redefining purpose; identity beyond career; feeling disconnected from past self; search for meaning
	Navigating Social Expectations	pressure from family; societal expectations; social comparison; fear of disappointing others; avoiding conversations about job status
	Family Dynamics in Unemployment	emotional strain at home; changes in household roles; partner support; guilt toward dependents; conflict due to financial stress
	Social Withdrawal and Isolation	avoiding gatherings; reduced communication; feeling disconnected; minimizing exposure to others; limited social energy
	Seeking Community Connection	joining unemployment groups; online community engagement; peer validation; sharing experiences; mutual encouragement; belonging
	Reconstructing Social Identity	redefining success; shifting life priorities; new meaning-making; adopting alternative roles; embracing non-work identities

Participants described a range of emotional responses to long-term unemployment and the strategies they used to manage these experiences. A central subtheme involved emotional regulation strategies, in which individuals attempted to maintain stability by “trying to keep my mind from spiraling every morning” (Participant 3) and using grounding or self-soothing techniques. Another prominent subtheme, handling anxiety about the future, reflected intense uncertainty, with one participant explaining, “I worry constantly about what the next six months will look like” (Participant 11). Many participants also emphasized maintaining hope and motivation, often through positive self-talk or setting small achievable goals, such as reminding themselves of past strengths or imagining future employment paths. Feelings of shame and stigma emerged

strongly, with participants describing a tendency to hide their employment status: “I don’t tell people I’m still unemployed because it just brings judgment” (Participant 6). Symptoms related to low mood and depression—withdrawal, sleep disturbances, and loss of energy—were also widely reported. Despite these challenges, participants frequently relied on emotional support seeking, such as reaching out to trusted friends or engaging with online peer groups, to lessen psychological burden. Together, these emotional experiences capture the internal struggle and resilience embedded in coping with prolonged unemployment.

Participants employed a variety of behavioral and cognitive strategies to navigate the ongoing challenges of unemployment. A common strategy involved structured job-

search routines, such as daily application goals or scheduled résumé updates, with one participant noting, “I treat job hunting like a job itself” (Participant 5). Alongside this, many engaged in skill building and self-improvement, taking online courses or acquiring new technical competencies. Cognitive reframing emerged as another important subtheme, where individuals actively reinterpreted setbacks—“I tell myself this is temporary, not who I am” (Participant 9). To counteract the loss of structure that unemployment often brings, participants emphasized maintaining daily routines, including consistent sleep patterns, to-do lists, and organized living environments. Financial strain prompted financial adjustment behaviors, such as strict budgeting or reducing expenses: “I cut everything down to just the essentials” (Participant 14). Participants also described engagement in alternative activities, including volunteering, physical exercise, and creative hobbies, which provided meaningful distraction and emotional restoration. Finally, a problem-solving orientation characterized those who systematically analyzed obstacles and sought strategic pathways back to the workforce. Taken together, these behavioral and cognitive patterns reveal the active efforts individuals make to retain agency and adapt constructively during extended unemployment.

Long-term unemployment significantly shaped participants’ social lives and sense of identity. Many described profound changes in self-identity, including a perceived loss of professional role and a shift in how they viewed their self-worth. As one participant expressed, “I used to introduce myself by my job title—now I don’t know what to say” (Participant 2). Participants struggled with navigating social expectations, often feeling judged or pressured by family and societal standards, which led to frequent avoidance behaviors: “People keep asking if I’ve found something yet, and it makes me not want to see anyone” (Participant 8). At home, family dynamics were often strained, with shifts in household roles and emotional tension linked to financial stress. Another subtheme, social withdrawal and isolation, reflected participants’ tendency to reduce communication and limit social interactions to preserve emotional energy. Yet, some were able to counter this isolation by seeking community connection, particularly through online unemployment groups or local community programs, which offered mutual encouragement and validation. Finally, the process of reconstructing social identity emerged as a deeper transformative experience, with some individuals redefining their understanding of success or cultivating identities beyond employment. These social

and identity-related processes highlight the complex interpersonal and self-concept transformations that occur during prolonged unemployment.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal three interrelated dimensions of coping among individuals facing long-term unemployment: emotional coping mechanisms, behavioral and cognitive adaptation strategies, and social and identity-related coping processes. Together, these themes illustrate how unemployment is experienced not merely as an economic disruption but as a complex psychological and social stressor that requires sustained adaptive effort. The patterns emerging from participants’ accounts align with broader theoretical insights found in leadership, organizational psychology, and employee-engagement scholarship, even though these bodies of literature originate from workplace contexts. Their relevance lies in the shared psychological mechanisms—motivation, emotional regulation, identity formation, relational support, and structured behavior—that shape human functioning across diverse environments. Evidence from leadership studies consistently demonstrates the importance of stability, purpose, and supportive structures in fostering well-being (Zhu, 2025), and similar patterns appear in the coping strategies used by unemployed individuals who must recreate these elements independently.

The first major theme—emotional coping mechanisms—highlights how individuals rely on internal regulatory strategies to manage anxiety, shame, and depression associated with prolonged joblessness. Participants described techniques such as cognitive reframing, intentional emotional distancing, and seeking social reassurance. These findings correspond to research in organizational and leadership contexts showing that emotionally supportive and transformative leadership environments promote well-being, reduce stress, and strengthen internal resources among employees (Aldossari & Alanizan, 2025; Sharma, 2025). While unemployed individuals do not benefit from formal leadership, their coping approaches mirror the emotional resilience observed in environments characterized by transformational or servant leadership. For example, studies demonstrate that leaders who cultivate purpose, trust, and empathy enhance employees’ emotional stability and engagement (Guzman et al., 2025; Qureshi et al., 2024). This parallels the way participants in this study sought emotional support from

friends, family, and online communities, effectively compensating for the lack of structured workplace support.

The sense of shame and stigma that emerged among participants also resonates with findings from studies on organizational culture and workplace affect. Research suggests that environments lacking psychological safety or supportive leadership contribute to feelings of inadequacy and emotional withdrawal (Deepalakshmi, 2025; Sahoo et al., 2025). In unemployment contexts, the absence of structural affirmation and continuous exposure to social expectations amplify similar emotional vulnerabilities. Participants described avoiding social gatherings, minimizing disclosure about their job status, and experiencing internalized failure. The relationship between emotional support and well-being highlighted in leadership literature thus offers strong conceptual alignment with the emotional coping patterns revealed in this study.

The second major theme of the study—behavioral and cognitive adaptation strategies—further supports these parallels. Many participants reported creating structured job-search schedules, developing daily routines, and engaging in skill development. These strategies reflect the psychological need for structure, competence, and purpose, which is heavily emphasized in research on leadership and employee engagement. For example, transformational leadership has been shown to encourage motivation, productivity, and goal-oriented behavior among employees (Anggita, 2025; Purwanti & Sari, 2024). Similarly, studies in IT and hybrid work settings demonstrate that leadership styles influence self-regulation, initiative, and performance (Ankitha et al., 2025; Maindola et al., 2025). Unemployed individuals must self-generate these motivational and structural cues, engaging in behaviors usually stimulated by formal leaders. The finding that participants relied heavily on self-directed learning—including online courses and skill-building—aligns with literature demonstrating that motivational climates and knowledge-supportive environments enhance engagement and competence (Ramlan et al., 2025; Rusilowati et al., 2025).

Cognitive reframing emerged as a crucial psychological resource in this study, enabling participants to reinterpret their unemployment as temporary or manageable. This process parallels findings from studies showing that leadership styles promoting ethical, supportive, and empowering environments strengthen employees' cognitive resilience and positive appraisal of challenges (Rao, 2025; Sharma & Patel, 2025). Participants' efforts to reframe obstacles, set incremental goals, and maintain engagement

in productive activities reflect internalization of these adaptive cognitive traits. They may be understood as self-leadership processes, wherein individuals actively regulate their thoughts and actions in the absence of formal workplace structures.

Financial adjustment strategies also formed a prominent subtheme under behavioral adaptation, emphasizing the economic strain and daily disruptions caused by unemployment. Research in leadership and performance contexts similarly shows that individuals in high-stress environments rely on structured planning, resource prioritization, and problem-solving frameworks to maintain stability (Kawimbe & M., 2024; Mukhaini et al., 2025). Participants' emphasis on budgeting, reducing expenses, seeking temporary work, and accessing community support parallels these organizational findings, demonstrating the universality of problem-solving behaviors in response to environmental stressors.

Engagement in alternative activities—such as volunteering, physical exercise, community involvement, or creative pursuits—also aligns with literature highlighting the role of psychological engagement in fostering well-being and meaning. Transformational leadership studies consistently show that engagement buffers against emotional strain, strengthens motivation, and contributes to personal growth (Sam et al., 2024; Santiago, 2024). Participants' involvement in meaningful non-work activities reflects a similar mechanism of sustaining purpose and emotional balance.

The third theme—social and identity-related coping processes—captures the profound impact of prolonged unemployment on individuals' sense of self, social belonging, and relational dynamics. Participants frequently described losing their professional identity, struggling with societal expectations, and experiencing social withdrawal. These findings strongly align with research showing how leadership and workplace environments shape identity construction, belonging, and relational well-being. Studies emphasize that supportive leadership enhances employees' identification with their roles and organizations (Hartono et al., 2024; Shafiq et al., 2025), while negative or unsupportive contexts can weaken identity ties. During unemployment, individuals lose these identity anchors, necessitating new ways of understanding their self-worth. The search for meaning and reconstruction of identity observed in participants reflects the broader psychological processes described in leadership and engagement literature.

Participants' responses regarding family dynamics further support this connection. Many noted increased relational tension, shifting household responsibilities, and conflict arising from financial strain. These patterns parallel findings from studies highlighting how leadership and organizational culture influence relational cohesion and emotional climate (Appah, 2025; Sahoo et al., 2025). The absence of formal support structures in unemployment intensifies relational challenges, requiring individuals to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics with limited resources.

Social withdrawal, another subtheme within this theme, resonates with findings showing that inadequate support, weak leadership, or negative work environments lead to disengagement and isolation among employees (Handaya, 2025; Sharma, 2024). The emergence of online communities and peer support groups as important sources of connection underscores the human need for belonging and relational affirmation. This mirrors findings from servant and inclusive leadership research, where relational warmth and community building strengthen engagement and well-being (Citta et al., 2025; Deepalakshmi, 2025).

Finally, participants' attempts to reconstruct their social identity—by redefining success, identifying new roles, or shifting life priorities—echo broader organizational findings on the transformative effects of supportive leadership, empowerment, and self-direction (K. & Lalwani, 2025; Zhu, 2025). These parallels underscore the universality of psychological adaptation processes across both employment and unemployment contexts.

Overall, the study's findings reveal that coping with long-term unemployment involves a multilayered set of emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social strategies that closely resemble the psychological mechanisms observed in leadership and organizational behavior scholarship. These insights highlight the broader applicability of leadership theories to non-work contexts and underscore the need for interventions that support emotional resilience, cognitive flexibility, social belonging, and adaptive behavior among the unemployed.

This study is limited by its relatively small sample size and reliance on participants from a single country, which may restrict the transferability of findings to other cultural or economic contexts. Data were collected solely through semi-structured interviews, and although theoretical saturation was achieved, the depth of insight may still reflect the subjective nature of self-reported experiences. Additionally, participants were primarily recruited through

online platforms, which may have excluded individuals without reliable digital access or those experiencing more severe socioeconomic hardship. The qualitative design also does not allow for causal inferences, and future quantitative or mixed-methods studies may further expand on these patterns.

Future research could explore coping experiences among unemployed individuals across different cultural or socioeconomic environments to examine how contextual factors influence psychological adaptation. Comparative studies between short-term and long-term unemployed individuals may also provide valuable insights into how coping strategies evolve over time. Additionally, integrating mixed-methods approaches could allow for deeper examination of the relationship between emotional, behavioral, and social coping processes and broader structural conditions such as social welfare systems or labor market changes. Longitudinal research would also be beneficial in capturing the dynamic nature of coping as individuals transition into or out of unemployment.

Practitioners working with unemployed individuals should emphasize interventions that strengthen emotional regulation, build cognitive resilience, and foster social support systems. Career counselors and workforce development professionals may consider incorporating structured routines, skill-building pathways, and online community engagement into their support strategies. Programs that normalize emotional responses, reduce stigma, and provide opportunities for meaning-making may further enhance coping capacities. Community organizations and policymakers should also prioritize accessible resources that address financial strain, promote psychological well-being, and help individuals maintain a sense of identity and purpose during periods of unemployment.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

References

- Aldossari, F., & Alanizan, S. (2025). The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(6), 609-625. <https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v9i6.7860>
- Almaqableha, A., & Omar, K. (2024). Nexus of Leadership Style, Organizational Climate, Motivation and OCB in Jordanian Telecommunications. *Revista De Gestão Social E Ambiental*, 18(5), e05594. <https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n5-071>
- Aman, S. (2025). The Leadership Styles and the Employees' Performance: An Investigation of Public Sector Organization by Considering Employee's Motivation, Behavior & Amp; Role of Training. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(2), 166-172. <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.vi-ii.25371>
- Anggita, F. R. (2025). The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Employee Engagement in the Hybrid Work Era. *International Journal Management and Economic*, 4(2), 84-88. <https://doi.org/10.56127/ijme.v4i2.2161>
- Ankitha, C., Ramesha, H. H., & B, N. (2025). Transformational and Transactional Leadership: Effects on Workplace Culture and Productivity in IT Organizations. *Interantional Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management*, 09(08), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.55041/ijsem.v9i8.2161>
- Appah, W. W. (2025). The Effects of Leadership Style on Employee Motivation and Satisfaction (Evidence From Selected Healthcare Institutions in Rivers State). *dbbj.com*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.60089/dbbj.2025.5.2.04>
- Bakri, M. K. B. (2024). Applying Organizational Psychology Principles for Positive Workplace Outcomes. *Ahrmr*, 2(1), 36-49. <https://doi.org/10.60079/ahrmr.v2i1.258>
- Citta, A. B., Putro, G. S., Arfiany, A., & Syam, A. (2025). The Effect of Servant Leadership and Compensation on Employee Engagement Makassar City Tourism Office. *Marginal Journal of Management Accounting General Finance and International Economic Issues*, 4(2), 252-262. <https://doi.org/10.55047/marginal.v4i2.1582>
- Deepalakshmi, N. (2025). The Role of Inclusive Leadership in Enhancing Employee Engagement. *Journal of Information Systems Engineering & Management*, 10(35s), 1062-1074. <https://doi.org/10.52783/jisem.v10i35s.6190>
- Guzman, R., Ayban, J. A. R., & Tan, K. E. (2025). Leadership Styles and Its Influence on Employee Motivation and Organizational Commitment in Academic Institutions. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, IX(V), 5701-5732. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2025.905000440>
- Handaya, L. K. (2025). Peran Gaya Kepemimpinan Terhadap Intention to Leave: Literature Review. *Value Jurnal Manajemen Dan Akuntansi*, 20(2), 406-414. <https://doi.org/10.32534/jv.v20i2.7251>
- Hartono, H., Salju, S., & Qamaruddin, M. Y. (2024). Implementation of Transformational Leadership in Increasing the Organizational Commitment of Civil Servants. *Jppi (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia)*, 10(3), 84. <https://doi.org/10.29210/020243250>
- K., P. P., & Lalwani, N. (2025). The Impact of Leadership Styles on Employee Engagement in Modern Organizations. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(4). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i04.51300>
- Kawimbe, S., & M., P. (2024). An Evaluation of the Impact of Leadership Styles on the Performance of SMEs in Zambia: A Conceptual Perspective. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i03.19005>
- Maindola, S., Giri, S., & Kumar, S. (2025). The Role of Leadership Styles in Enhancing Employee Engagement: An Empirical Study in the Information Technology Industry. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(5). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i05.56891>
- Manoharan, S., Mohanty, A. K., Sengupta, P. D., Yn, R., Tr, K. L., Homavazir, Z., Traisa, R., & Ghumman, S. (2025). The Impact of Leadership Effectiveness on Employee Commitment and Engagement Within Corporate Workplaces. *Management (Montevideo)*, 3, 175. <https://doi.org/10.62486/agma2025175>
- Mukhaini, S. A. A., Uraimi, S. M. A., & Farsi, T. S. A. (2025). The Effect of Leadership Style on Organizational Performance in Oman. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, IX(1), 911-930. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2025.9010075>
- Purwanti, G. A., & Sari, M. (2024). The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Team Performance in the Work Environment. *M.Journal*, 1(3), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.70076/simj.v1i3.41>
- Qureshi, E., Shehri, F. A., Malik, A., & Saif, O. B. (2024). Unravelling the Interplay of Servant Leadership, Cognitive Trust, and Employee Wellbeing: A Cae of an Emerging Economy. *Abgmce*, 4(1), 154-162. <https://doi.org/10.62019/abgmce.v4i1.70>
- Ramlan, M., Akob, M., & Jumady, E. (2025). The Role of Leadership in Fostering Employee Engagement: A Literature Analysis. *Golden Ratio of Human Resource Management*, 5(2), 360-373. <https://doi.org/10.52970/grhrm.v5i2.864>
- Rao, S. (2025). Servant Leadership: A Pathway to Ethical and Effective Organizational Leadership. *Innovapath*, 1(3), 5. <https://doi.org/10.63501/v0gje26>
- Rusilowati, U., Bangun, C. S., & Bennet, D. (2025). Impact of Leadership Styles on Employee Engagement and Organizational Growth. *Aptisi Transactions on Management (Atm)*, 9(2), 197-209. <https://doi.org/10.33050/atm.v9i2.2441>

- Sahoo, A., Sood, S., Sohal, J., Goyal, N., Bawa, R. K., & Rajitha, R. (2025). Exploring the Influence of Organizational Culture on Employee Performance and Organizational Success. *Multidisciplinary Science Journal*, 7, 2025ss0211. <https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2025ss0211>
- Sam, T. H., Isa, K., Siqui, P., Palpanadan, S. T., Hong, H. C., & Luan, N. M. (2024). Leadership Styles and Their Effects on Employee Satisfaction in Empowering Happiness at Workplace. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 3(8). <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i8.5091>
- Santiago, J. (2024). Rethinking Transformational Leadership and Workforce Dynamics for the Human -Centric Tech Era: Insights Into Employee Engagement, Satisfaction and Job Performance. *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 16(4), 42-94. <https://doi.org/10.2478/joim-2024-0014>
- Shafiq, S., Kiren, A., Aslam, S., & Awan, A. E. (2025). Impact of Servant Leadership on Job Performance and Work Engagement of University Employees: The Mediating Role of Organizational Identification. *Aijss*, 4(3), 5885-5896. <https://doi.org/10.63056/acad.004.03.0852>
- Sharma, A., & Patel, P. (2025). Role of Leadership in Shaping Positive Work Culture Psychology. *International Journal of Information Technology and Management*, 20(2), 33-42. <https://doi.org/10.29070/xm8bg421>
- Sharma, D. B. (2025). A Leadership Approach and Its Efficacy on Employees. *International Scientific Journal of Engineering and Management*, 04(05), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.55041/isjem03697>
- Sharma, R. (2024). Leadership Styles and Employee Motivation: A Comparative Study in the Modern Workplace. *J. Adv. Mgmt. Stu.*, 1(2), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.36676/jams.v1.i2.7>
- Usman, A., Hanif, M. Z., & Majeed, P. (2024). Servant Leadership as a Driver of Work Engagement: Unveiling the Mediating Role of Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction. *Jssa*, 2(2), 509-528. <https://doi.org/10.59075/jssa.v2i2.80>
- Zhu, Y. (2025). Leading With Purpose: The Transformative Impact of Servant, Authentic, and Spiritual Leadership on Workplace Well-Being and Ethics. *Icmrss*, 2(1), 15-24. <https://doi.org/10.33422/icmrss.v2i1.827>