

## Rural Dislocated Women in Career Transition: The Importance of Supports and Strategies

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### **Abstract:**

Job loss researchers have focused on the physical and mental well being of White working and middle class men, their families, friends, and coworkers to with immediate reemployment as the outcome. This study focused on low-income rural women dislocated workers and their decision to enroll in community college for retraining or seek immediate reemployment. Participants were 125 women (86 white, 39 African American;  $x = 42$  years) who held a high school diploma or GED and who were laid off from manufacturing jobs within the last 2 years. Differences between two groups of women based on demographic variables and Transition Guide and Questionnaire-Modified (TGQ-M) scores were examined. The TGQ-M was developed to assess an individual's ability to cope with life transitions, based on Schlossberg's (1995) model of 4Ss (situation, self, supports, and strategies). One group enrolled in community college for retraining while the other group sought immediate reemployment. Findings revealed significant relationships between level of education and race/ethnicity and community college retraining. African-American women in this sample perceived themselves as having less support in coping with job loss. Women who chose community college had higher TGQ-M scores overall. Race/ethnicity and perception of support from others were the best predictors of community college retraining. Women, especially older women of color, have the hardest time finding quality employment after layoff. This study raised questions about the reasons why fewer African-American women in this sample enrolled in community college for retraining and had lower Supports scores than white women. Implications for counseling and future research are discussed.

### **Article:**

A prominent focus of career-related studies published over the last few decades has been on the mental and physical health of workers who have lost their jobs (e.g., Leana & Feldman 1992; Malen & Stroh, 1998; Vinokur & Schul, 2002; Webb, Glass, Metha, & Cobb, 2002). Although health, wellness, and stress-related illness are all very important topics, many researchers have not addressed the kinds of programs, services, and proactive responses that could be implemented to assist dislocated workers in coping with job loss by alleviating some of these stressors. Because it is understood that job loss can be very stressful and traumatic, now is the time to focus not only on coping, but also on taking a step forward to address the needs of dislocated workers and provide practical services to meet these needs. Practical services can include providing accurate and timely information about programs and services, including retraining. They can also include guidance about the availability of quality employment in the future.

Since the 1930s, most studies of job loss have examined the experiences of men and the impact of job loss on their wives and children (Malen & Stroh, 1998). This may be due to the fact that during most of the last century more men were employed fulltime than were women. In the last 50 years, however, women have become an increasingly important part of the workforce (Urban Institute 1995). In fact, women's participation in the workforce is predicted to continue to increase while men's participation decreases. More research needs to be conducted to understand women's individual experiences with job loss beyond their role of partners to husbands who have lost jobs.

Moreover, even fewer studies were found that examined low-income women and job loss (Bierema, 2001), and no studies were found that examined low-income women in rural areas who lost manufacturing jobs. This gap

in the literature is particularly critical because the majority of jobs lost in rural areas are in manufacturing (North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, 2002). A key purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of low-income women in rural areas who had lost their jobs due to plant closings and the work-related decisions (retraining or reemployment) they made afterwards.

What is known is that women who are older, minority, lower class, and less educated have the hardest time finding a comparable job once they are laid off (Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Malen & Stroh, 1998). Further, when there are lay offs, these women are the first to go (Bierema, 2001). The fact is that they likely never will recover financially from the loss, especially if they have children. Research results indicate that the next job they find will most likely pay less, provide no seniority, and offer fewer retirement benefits (Leana & Feldman, 1992). In addition, Malen and Stroh suggested that women more often than men may need help with networking and utilizing other resources in their job seeking process.

In terms of outcome variables, many studies published to date have been focused on immediate re-employment as the primary outcome variable (Ginexi, Howe, & Caplan, 2000; Gowan et al., 1999; Kinicki, Prussia, & McKee-Ryan, 2000; Malen & Stroh, 1998; Prussia, Fugate, & Kinicki, 2001; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). In other studies, researchers have examined levels of employment (e.g., unemployment, underemployment, and quality employment; Kinicki, et al., 2000; Prussia, et al., 2001; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). These authors suggested that other outcome variables should be considered, such as retirement or retraining (Vinokur & Schul).

The study reported in this paper focused on retraining and immediate reemployment for several reasons. First, there is evidence that distancing oneself from the job search process can actually be helpful for people experiencing distress after job loss (Gowan, et al., 1999). Enrolling in a retraining program can provide an opportunity to distance oneself from the reality of job loss for a short while. Second, when dislocated workers seek immediate reemployment, they are likely to get another manufacturing job (which also may be likely to terminate workers), or a lower-paid retail or service job (Shulman, 2003). Lower paying jobs can only add stress to lower class rural families that typically struggle to make ends meet. Finally, there are quality jobs available for those adults at midlife who choose retraining. For example, the health industry in North Carolina is seeking employees to fill assisted living, nursing, and related jobs (Campbell, 2003) that pay very well and offer benefits. The technology industry is one of the fastest growing sources of employment not only in North Carolina, but also in the nation (College Foundation of North Carolina, 2003). These are jobs that adults at midlife can be trained to do by local community colleges with little or no financial burden on the trainees. Given this fact, it is puzzling that relatively few (15-20%; Campbell) people take advantage of this opportunity.

In this study, two groups of women in rural areas who had experienced job loss were studied. One group was composed of participants who chose retraining at a community college, while the other group consisted of participants who chose reemployment. This study had three main purposes. First, factor analysis was used to determine the factor structure of a modified version of Schlossberg and Kay's (2003) Transition Guide and Questionnaire. Briefly, Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) believed that each individual brings certain assets and liabilities to a transition (i.e., the transition from employment to immediate reemployment or community college retraining). These assets and liabilities are categorized into four characteristics or the 4Ss: situation, self, supports, and strategies. The Transition Guide and Questionnaire was based on this theory and can be used by practitioners to assist clients in identifying and bolstering assets in the four areas. Since Schlossberg's theory and model are used widely, it was deemed important to provide empirical support for her theory.

Second, differences between those women who choose to enroll in community college (retraining) and those who choose re-employment were explored by differences in age, level of education, and race/ethnicity, as well as the concept of Schlossberg et al. (1995) of the 4Ss: situation, self, supports, and strategies. Third, this study examined rural women's decisions to choose retraining or reemployment based on age, level of education, and race/ethnicity as well as their individual situation, self, supports, and strategies profiles. This study also proposed that differing levels of the 4Ss for age, level of education, or race/ethnicity might predict whether

these women decide to enroll in community college or seek reemployment immediately after job loss. A smaller pilot study was conducted prior to this research study, and there are a few references to the initial study in the results and discussion section.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Overall, the sample consisted of 125 participants who ranged in age from 28 to 57 years old ( $x = 42$ ,  $SD = 7$ ). Nearly half (48%) of the women fell into the 38-to-47-year-old category. Of the women, 69% were White while 31% were African-American. All of the participants had at least a high school diploma or GED.

### *Instrumentation*

#### **The Transition Guide & Questionnaire-Modified (TGQ-M)**

Schlossberg and Kay (2003) developed the Transition Guide & Questionnaire (TGQ) as a counselor practitioner tool. It is based on Schlossberg's theory of adult transitions and the framework of the 4Ss: situation, self, supports, and strategies. The TGQ is a self-scoring questionnaire with 56 Likert-type items that allow the test taker to determine her own profile of assets and liabilities. The instrument requires about 10-15 minutes to complete. The test taker or practitioner can determine scores on each of the four scales (situation, self, supports, and strategies) by using the interpretation guide included with the instrument. Scores are determined for each scale by adding the points associated with each Likert-type scale response (e.g., 1-5), and individuals can score low, moderate, or high on each scale. These scores then can determine directions for counselor interventions. A manual associated with the TGQ is not included, and no reliability or validity information accompanies the instrument.

For this study, the researcher created a modified version of the Transition Guide and Questionnaire (TGQ-M) primarily for purposes of changing the reading level of the original instrument. The TGQ-M is a 50-item self-report measure adjusted to be at a 7th grade reading level by using the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Tool on Microsoft Word XP (2002). In addition to changing the reading level, 10 items were deleted and 4 items were added. Deleted items were considered to be not relevant, redundant, or easily misunderstood by the participants. Of the additional items 2 were related to perception of the level of support received from the local community college and the employment agency. Another item was broken into two parts to differentiate between two concepts.

Two testing experts reviewed the TGQ-M to determine the face validity of the instrument. The review examined item appropriateness to subscales and the overall purpose of the instrument. One reviewer was the coauthor of the TGQ (Kay), and the other was the associate director of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (Hagedorn). Kay stated the TGQ-M was "true to the original" and had "face value" (S. Kay, personal communication, October 20, 2003). The second reviewer suggested minor revisions to the instrument related to the instructions (L. Hagedorn, personal communication, October 24, 2003) and these revisions were incorporated in this study.

#### **Demographic Questionnaire**

A 13-item demographic questionnaire was developed by the researcher to collect descriptive information regarding participants' age, ethnicity, marital status, number of children living at home, and level of education. Additional questions were developed to ascertain participants' current employment or educational status (enrolled at a community college or employed full time) and knowledge of options related to community college. These questions were attached to the TGQ-M.

### *Procedures*

Participants for each group were recruited by contacting appropriate state agencies. For example, each community college in 23 rural North Carolina counties hardest hit by manufacturing layoffs in the Mountain Region and the Coastal Region was contacted by e-mail. Similarly, the researcher worked with representatives from the North Carolina Employment Security Commission (ESC) to obtain participants from the local offices near the community colleges in each targeted rural county.

Given the researcher's previous experience with obtaining participants in this area, a sample of convenience was used to maximize the number of participants. A contact person at each of the community colleges and employment agency sites solicited participants to participate in the study. In some cases, that contact provided names and telephone numbers for the researcher to call. Contact persons at each of the sites also were informed that participants must have a high school diploma or GED, must have recently (within the last 2 years) been laid off from a manufacturing job due to a plant closing, and be a woman ages 30-55. Participants were offered the possibility of winning a \$100 cash prize or a \$25 Wal-Mart gift certificate as incentives to participate in the study. The researcher contacted participants to coordinate a group test administration at either the community college campus or the Employment Security Commission office in each county.

On the day of data collection, participants were asked to sign a consent form. This was followed by the researcher administering the TGQ-M and demographic questionnaire. On average, the survey took participants about 15 minutes to complete. Participants were asked to give the test administrator feedback after testing regarding their level of understanding of the questions on the TGQ-M. Participants who completed the survey were entered into a drawing for the cash prize and gift certificate. The researcher entered participants' responses directly into SPSS (2002) for data analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

There is little psychometric data on the TGQ and TGQ-M. Therefore, a factor analysis was conducted to determine the factor structure of the TGQ-M and to confirm the existence of the four factors described by Schlossberg in her 4 S model. Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for each of the factors was: situation factor  $\alpha = .73$ ; self factor  $\alpha = .90$ ; supports factor  $\alpha = .87$ ; and, strategies factor  $\alpha = .91$ . The instrument as a whole had an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .95$ .

Descriptive statistics from the demographic questionnaire and each factor were calculated and reported to provide a profile of the participants, overall and by group. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square tests were used to determine differences in terms of age, level of education, and race/ethnicity by retraining. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine whether there were mean differences in age, level of education, and race on the TGQ-M subscales.

Logistic regression was used to make a prediction of outcome (retraining at a community college) for women based on age, level of education, and race/ethnicity. Internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were reported for the factors and for the instrument as a whole. Item analysis was performed to identify the probabilities of responding to certain items in similar or different ways. All statistical tests were conducted with an alpha level of .05.

## RESULTS

As a first step, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using SPSS (2002) to determine the factor structure of the TGQ-M. The exploratory factor analysis of the TGQ-M suggested that the survey measured one construct that corresponded to Schlossberg's conceptualization of strategies. Participants may have seen many of the items as strategies rather than supports, situational variables, or self characteristics. After an initial examination of the factor analysis, three items with loadings of less than .20 were deleted. Next, the researcher examined all items that loaded on more than one item or loaded on a different factor than was expected. Finally, another item was reverse scored after the researcher found that the wording made this item different in polarity from the others. Once the item was reverse scored, the item loaded on the strategies factor.

The pattern matrix with six items deleted and one item reverse scored produced the following results: (a) factor 1 explains 32.57% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 14.66 (the items loading on factor 1 were all items from Schlossberg's strategies subscale); (b) factor 2 (supports), factor 3 (situation) and factor 4 (self) revealed the following percent of variance explained and corresponding eigenvalues: 7.60%, 3.42; 5.35%, 2.41; 4.67%, 2.10; (c) The pattern structure revealed that, for the most part, the items loaded onto factors corresponding to Schlossberg's subscales.

Reliability estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for each of the factors were: strategies  $\alpha = .91$ , supports  $\alpha = .87$ , situation  $\alpha = .73$ , and self  $\alpha = .90$ . The instrument as a whole (45 items) had an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .95$ . It appears that a larger sample size and modifications to the Situation subscale increased its internal consistency (pilot study  $\alpha = .48$ ). The internal consistency of the TGQ-M with the larger sample is close to that of the pilot study ( $\alpha = .94$ ). This finding would suggest that the TGQ-M is a reliable instrument for this sample.

A one-way ANOVA was then performed with age as the dependent variable and choice of community college retraining or immediate reemployment as the independent variable. One group chose to enroll in community college immediately after lay off ( $n = 60$ ) and the other group sought immediate reemployment ( $n = 30$ ). Cases where women chose both community college retraining and employment were not used in this analysis. The ANOVA resulted in a statistically significant main effect,  $F(1, 90) = 4.6, p = .03, \eta^2 = .05$ . Observed power for this finding was .57. Mean age was higher in the immediate reemployment group.

A MANOVA was conducted to determine the mean differences and possible interaction effects of the three independent variables (age, level of education, and race/ethnicity) on the four factors (dependent variables) of the TGQ-M. The researcher predicted that there would be differences by age, level of education, and race/ethnicity in each category. There was one statistically significant main effect for race/ethnicity on the supports factor,  $F(1, 125) = 4.05, p = .05, \eta^2 = .04$ . Observed power for this finding was .51. This finding reflects lower scores on the supports factor for African-American women. Although there were no significant interaction effects, a statistically significant difference was found for the factors by group (community college retraining and immediate reemployment). There was a significant main effect for community college retraining on the supports factor,  $F(1, 125) = 6.26, p = .01, \eta^2 = .07$ . Observed power for this finding was .69. There was a marginal effect between groups on the Self factor,  $F(1, 125) = 2.81, p = .09, \eta^2 = .03$ .

Chi-square analysis was used to test the significance of the relationship between level of education and the choice women made about employment or retraining. The relationship was statistically significant:  $\chi^2(3, n = 90) = 87.33, p = .00$ . This finding represents a relationship between level of education and community college retraining and a greater proportion of women with some college who enrolled in community college for retraining. Using chi-square analysis, a statistically significant relationship between race/ethnicity and the choice women made (community college retraining or immediate reemployment) was found:  $\chi^2(1, n = 90) = 12.84, p = .00$ . This finding represents the greater proportion of White women enrolled in community colleges. The ratio of White women to African-American women surveyed in community colleges was 3.31:1, in ESC offices, it was 1.35:1.

Logistic regression analysis was used to predict the probability that women with higher scores on the TGQ-M would enroll in community college for retraining. In other words, the hypothesis was that a woman who had more positive feelings about her situation, her self, her supports, and implemented a variety of strategies would more likely enroll in community college for retraining. Logistic regression was used because the dependent variable was dichotomous. None of the tests yielded significant results, although the supports scale yielded marginal results,  $\chi^2(1, n = 90) = 3.051, p = .081$ . The model was able to correctly predict the number of women who chose to enroll in community college (approximately 93%).

Logistic regression analysis also was used to predict the probability that age, level of education, or race/ethnicity would influence a woman's decision to enroll in community college for retraining. The researcher predicted that White women between the ages of 38-47 with some college would more likely enroll in community college for retraining. Race/ethnicity was found to be the best predictor in the choice to seek retraining at a community college,  $\chi^2(1, n = 90) = 3.58, p < .06$ , although the finding was marginal. The model was able to correctly predict the number of women who chose to enroll in community college (approximately 73%). The odds ratio for race indicated that a White woman in this sample was 2.5 times more likely to enroll in community college for retraining than an African-American woman. Age likely plays a part in predicting

retraining as well,  $\chi^2(1, n = 90) = 1.69, p < .12$ , although the finding was not statistically significant. More women in the 38-47 age range chose retraining than the younger or older group.

An item analysis confirmed the reliability statistics mentioned earlier in the data analysis section. For the most part, items appeared to be normally distributed. In viewing individual items in terms of high and low scores, some questions seem to stand out. For example, the mean score for question 3 (“I see what is happening with my job loss as,” Likert scale from 1 “totally out of my control,” to 5 “totally within my control”) was 1.90, lower than any of the others on the situation factor ( $n = 6$ ). This finding would indicate that most women view this situation (loss of job) as “totally out of their control.”

On the self factor ( $n = 13$ ), the highest score was on question 14, “I feel that I know myself.” Most women reported that they knew themselves “very well.” Likewise, on the supports factor ( $n = 9$ ), the item with the highest score was on item 25 related to the amount of beneficial support they received from the local community college. The strategies factor contained the most items ( $n = 17$ ). The highest scoring item was question 43 “having faith (relying on prayer and relationship with a higher power).” This finding may correspond with the importance of church and religion in rural women's lives.

Major findings were that there was a statistically significant difference between groups in age, and there was a statistically significant difference by race/ethnicity on the supports subscale. Marginal findings of race/ethnicity and supports as predictors of retraining are important to mention. Other findings reveal that women who chose community college retraining scored higher on the TGQ-M overall. Most women scored in the medium range on supports and strategies, in the low range on Situation, and in the high range on self. All of the participants who chose community college scored higher overall than the women who chose immediate reemployment after job loss.

## DISCUSSION

In analyzing the mean differences in age for women choosing community college retraining versus immediate reemployment, a significant difference by age was found. In terms of level of education and race/ethnicity for those choosing retraining or reemployment, both analyses yielded significant findings. This finding reflects the greater ratio of Caucasian women with some college who are enrolling in community college after layoff rather than seeking immediate employment. The pilot study yielded similar results. Although more white women in this study had a high school diploma, GED, or some college, African-American participants reported having more associate's degrees ( $n = 5$ ) and bachelor's degrees ( $n = 1$ ).

In terms of mean differences on the four transition factors by age, level of education, and race/ethnicity, a significant difference between African-American and white women was found on the supports factor. White women in this sample who enrolled in community college were found to have higher scores on the supports factor. The pilot study indicated a trend in this direction for the supports subscale in particular, so it was interesting to see movement in this direction in the larger study. These findings would indicate that white women who perceive themselves as having support (i.e., from friends, family, or community college) are more often enrolling in community college for retraining.

A significant main effect was found between groups on the supports factor. Since women who enrolled in community college for retraining had higher mean supports scores than women who sought immediate reemployment, this finding may indicate a difference in that direction. There were marginal findings between groups (retraining and reemployment) on both the situation and self factors. Because women in the community college setting may perceive greater support, they also may rate their situation and self more highly.

In terms of predictors for choosing community college retraining, the only factor on the TGQ-M that came close to being statistically significant was supports. It is mentioned only because supports seems to be an important factor in community college retraining according to other research results. This finding reflects some of the comments women made in the original focus groups and after taking the TGQ-M. Some mentioned institutional

supports while others mentioned support from family or a spouse. One woman who brought her kids with her to take the survey remarked, "You can see I can't get my homework done." Others remarked how helpful the community college or employment agency had been.

Race was a good predictor of community college retraining, while age was marginal and level of education was not significant. The probability that a white woman would enroll in community college was 2.5 greater than an African-American woman. This is important because women of color have the hardest time finding comparable employment after layoff. Without retraining at a community college, African-American women may remain unemployed or underemployed for longer periods of time. Previous research has revealed that women, especially older women of color, have the hardest time finding quality employment after layoff (Gowan, et al., 1999; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Malen & Stroh, 1998).

Some of the reasons that women listed as barriers to college were not having money or time to attend college or not being able to work and go to school. In talking with many of these women after completing the survey, however, there also seemed to be some hesitancy in enrolling in college. This caution may be related to something beyond finances or time issues; it may be more of an issue about values around education. It would be interesting to administer an attitudes-toward-college scale in a future research study to determine if there are other reasons that women do not choose retraining in a community college, even when they are not working.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research study raises several questions. Most importantly, there seems to be a difference between African-American and white women in two areas. First, African-American women in this study were less likely to enroll in community college. At the present time it is difficult to say with certainty why this was the case. The written comments that women made on their surveys did not reveal one overarching theme. Future researchers may want to focus on these differences. In addition, future researchers may want to include a qualitative component, interview a stratified sample (e.g., women who did not choose community college), and include other ethnic groups (e.g., Latinas).

African-American women in this study scored lower on the supports subscale of the survey. Although the difference was too small to be statistically significant, African-American women scored higher than white women on the other three subscales. It would be important to analyze the individual items to note any differences among supports (i.e., spousal versus friend support), since the kinds of supports valued by one group may not be as important to another. This finding also is interesting since many African-American families are known for tightly knit extended families that often include nonblood relatives or fictive kin. A larger sample size may make any distinctions between the two groups more obvious. As was mentioned earlier, including other racial or ethnic groups would be important to examine possible differences between groups on individual support items. In addition, it may be useful to use another measure of support to compare to scores on the TGQ-M supports subscale.

Future studies should examine more closely the reasons that some women choose not to attend community college while some women do chose retraining. Further exploration of the reasons that the community college group scored higher on the TGQ-M also is indicated. Also, additional analyses using data from the current study could shed light on racial or other differences. These could include the impact of being a single parent or differences in TGQ-M scores based on length of time dislocated, unemployed, or both.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH RURAL, DISLOCATED WOMEN

A major concern for rural women, especially in the community college setting, was the job market after they graduated. One woman remarked that "there are going to be a whole lot of well-educated unemployed people in this county." Many women were concerned that they would not be able to find work in their hometowns and were reluctant to think about moving. This is a valid concern since manufacturing plants seem to be closing at a rate faster than new businesses and jobs are being created. To help address these concerns, community colleges can take a more proactive stance to create linkages with companies that may close in the near future.

Community college representatives could go out to these companies and talk to employees about college, the job market, and the transition as a whole. Community colleges also could create brochures or newsletters that discuss what the transition will be like. Such materials could include information from the Employment Security Commission, and discuss issues such as grief and loss. In addition, community colleges should reach out to women of color who otherwise may continue to look for work and remain unemployed for longer periods of time.

Several women indicated that they would be interested in a free support group to talk with other women about their transition. One woman said she did not need support herself since she had been out of work for over a year, but that she would like to be a mentor or a support group leader. Groups like these have been successful at some community colleges (e.g., Surry Community College in North Carolina), and these women seem to have a lot to talk about and share. More than one woman stayed after the survey administration to talk to the researcher (and other survey participants) about job loss. In cases where groups are not feasible, peer mentors could be in place at a special orientation for dislocated workers.

In conversations with counselors in community college settings—and through an informal survey via e-mail—counselors have expressed an interest in helping dislocated workers, many of whom are women. Some of the things these community college counselors wanted to know more about include: how to make connections with companies before they shut down; what kinds of services or supports students who are dislocated workers need on and off campus; what funding opportunities are available for dislocated workers besides traditional financial aid; and, what jobs are available for older adults when they finish college. These questions all seem to point to a need for improved communication between the community colleges and (a) local businesses (those that are closing and others with available jobs), (b) dislocated workers (including tracking new students), and (c) the local Employment Security Commission office.

Many of the rural women who have lost their jobs have noted that there is not one place to go to get all the information necessary to make this transition. Students have said that they hear one thing at the community college and something completely different at the local Employment Security Commission office. Sometimes women mentioned hearing different things within the same institution or agency. Varying degrees of helpfulness were reported at the community colleges and employment agency sites. Most complaints were about the local Employment Security Commission sites. Several women in one county at a community college site said that the local ESC “didn't care about them” or “blamed them for losing their jobs.” Some students were told by ESC staff to wait to enroll in community college and later (after waiting) realized that the “clock had already started ticking” on their educational benefits. In other words, financial assistance would run out before their 2-year program of study could be completed. In 2002, federal legislation was passed to provide funding for 2-year programs (prior to 2002 funding was available about a year and a half). Many students, however, have to take developmental courses that do not count toward a 2-year degree; so, in actuality, they must attend for 3 years to get a 2-year degree. This presents problems for women who do not have family support to attend college or the means to invest in that last year of school. Some of the women students have to “stop out” of college and may not return. Many women are afraid to take out student loans because they are not sure they will be employed in the future and able to pay them back after graduation.

In addition, community colleges and employment agencies need to keep in mind that dislocated workers often have to choose between paying bills and buying health insurance. More work needs to be done in this area to make sure that unemployed and underemployed people have adequate health care. The stresses associated with job loss can make people even more vulnerable to illnesses. In fact, some people actually lose their jobs because they miss too many workdays due to stress related illness.

Community colleges, employment agencies, and local community members need to become more knowledgeable about companies that are hiring and what jobs are available for women at midlife (35-65). Older women appear to need more support and assistance than younger women seeking education and career change. Community college counselors could create a list of jobs by program area, availability of jobs in the

surrounding areas, and how much they pay. Rural communities will need to be creative in developing new businesses that can use dislocated workers' transferable skills (e.g., biotechnology, research, etc.) and attract more highly skilled positions for community college graduates. It is not enough to simply say that dislocated workers need retraining, even though they frequently do need retraining in order to obtain comparable jobs. There also must be jobs available for them when they graduate. Importantly, more work needs to be done for women of color in recruiting them into community colleges and providing services for them (i.e., childcare) so that everyone who wants to attend college has the opportunity to do so.

As mentioned previously, low-income rural women are an understudied population. Even less is known about women of color in rural areas. Women of color often have additional responsibilities as heads of households, caregivers to extended family, and the financial expenses that go along with their families. In addition, women of color may be actively involved in the community. These women may not receive financial or emotional support from family or the community to attend college. Importantly, these women may feel that they must choose between providing for the family financially or going to college. All of these issues certainly play a part in the decision-making process of women of color in rural areas.

Findings of this study underscore the importance of understanding the intersection of race, support, and coping strategies in terms of community college retraining. Future study should focus on attitudes toward college as well as some of the other reasons women mentioned for not enrolling in community college. Community college administrators need to broaden recruitment efforts to include women of color who are interested in retraining. Community college counselors and community counselors could work with women of color to increase the number of positive supports and strategies they use in seeking retraining, finding a job, or both. For example, support groups with African-American facilitators would be appropriate for African-American women who are interested in talking with others experiencing the same issues.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although findings from this study can be valuable to counselors in community college settings, employment counselors, community counselors, and policy makers, there are some limitations of the study that must be addressed. First, there are limits to generalizability due to lack of random sampling since this study used a convenience sample from two regions of North Carolina. Second, participants for the study were volunteers who were offered the possibility of a cash prize or gift certificate as an incentive to participate in the study. These volunteers may differ from other dislocated women who enroll in community college or seek reemployment immediately after job loss but who chose not to volunteer to participate in this study. Finally, it is challenging to determine response rate because dislocated workers are not always tracked at community colleges, and there is considerable fluidity of workers filing for claims through the Employment Security Commission. In other words, community colleges do not always know which students are “dislocated,” and beneficiaries of the ESC may find employment or lose employment on a regular basis. Also, in most cases, dislocated workers were responding to solicitation by an employee of the college or ESC or to a sign advertising the survey. It is nearly impossible to determine how many people actually were contacted or learned about the study and how many of those actually participated. When the researcher contacted dislocated workers by phone, however, about 50% agreed to participate and about 30% actually participated in the study.

#### SUMMARY

When reviewing scores on the four TGQ-M subscales by differences in age, levels of education, race/ethnicity, and by group (retraining or reemployment) the supports and strategies factors seemed to be particularly salient. In other words, women in the immediate reemployment group may perceive themselves as having less support and may use fewer strategies in coping with their job-loss transition. Race/ethnicity seemed to be the best predictor of retraining in a community college, with African-American women in this study seeking retraining less often than White women. Results of this study suggest that support from friends, family, and spouses—as well as community colleges and employment agencies—is important for women who lose their jobs. Age is an important factor to consider as well, since younger women in this study were more likely to seek retraining.

This study has implications for both community colleges and employment agencies. First, community colleges and employment agencies need to work together to understand the process of job loss and the means to help workers navigate it successfully. Additional research must be conducted to more fully examine the reasons that some women do not seek retraining. Community counselors could work with all women to improve their perceptions of the situation, themselves, their supports, and their strategies used to make this transition. African-American women may especially need support with these areas, in particular obtaining support to cope with job loss.

Finally, future researchers should seek to understand the reasons that African-American women may be less likely to enroll in community college for retraining after job loss than white women. Manufacturing workers have been the backbone of our economy for decades and deserve to have every opportunity to succeed in this new economy. Clearly, more work needs to be done by community colleges, employment agencies, community leaders, policy makers, and other important stakeholders to facilitate dislocated workers' success.

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