

An Exploration of Life Crisis Experiences of Employed and Unemployed Early Adults

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This study aimed to explore the life crises prevalence of both employed and unemployed early adults in Windhoek, Namibia, by comparing differences in life crisis reporting between them. The study also aimed to determine gender differences in life crisis experiences of early adults, if any, and also the areas in which life crisis was most experienced. Guided by a quantitative approach, an Adult Crisis Episode Retrospective Self-Assessment Tool (ACERSAT) was used to collect the data. Snowball sampling and simple random sampling methods were used to select the employed and unemployed participants respectively. A total sample of 186 early adults participated, of which ninety-five (95) were officially employed and ninety-one (91) were unemployed. The data obtained were analysed through SPSS version 25.0 using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. A Chi-Square test of Independence was also conducted to determine if there was any significant relationship between life crisis reporting, occupation status, and gender. Overall, 82.8% of the sample conceded to experiencing an early adult life crisis. The employed participants reported more life crisis than the unemployed participants by 7.2%. Males reported a greater incidence of life crisis than females by 5.7% and most life crises reported were related to the career and/or family categories. No significant association was found between life crisis, occupation status and gender. Therefore it is recommended for secondary and tertiary level life skills education to include developmental psychology to better prepare early adults for prospective life crisis experiences.

Keywords: Early adulthood, Life crisis, Labour force, Developing country

A life crisis is a fairly new area of research in developmental psychology that explores the tension of change from one life stage to another (Robinson & Wright, 2013). It further explores the tension of change brought about by a sudden stressful life event, such as losing a loved one that has not been well adjusted to. It is suggested that early adults are most susceptible to recognizing recent life events as distressing and tense, and are more likely to report difficulty in adjustment (Robinson & Wright, 2013). Early adults are oftentimes the majority of the economically active population of a country. There exists limited research on their life crisis experiences,

more so within a developing country sample. Therefore the current study aspires to reduce this knowledge gap by focusing on life crisis experiences across employed and unemployed early adults of Namibia. Before describing the methodology in detail, we briefly provide a review of existing literature on early adulthood, defining life crises and the prevalence thereof, and the general life of early adults in Namibia.

Early Adulthood

Adulthood is an inevitable phase within the human lifespan that hosts various developments and challenges. It begins from about age 20 and continues until death (Aktu

& Ýlhan, 2017). In developmental psychology, we observe how multiple theorists have divided adulthood into more specific stages based on common life experiences that are related to developmental targets, needs, challenges and accomplishments (Aktu & Ýlhan, 2017; Robinson, 2015). Adulthood is therefore generally apportioned into early, middle and late adulthood stages. Early adulthood is the initial stage of adulthood following the adolescent stage up until age 40 (Robinson & Wright, 2013). Individuals at the beginning of this stage are generally entering into tertiary education or starting a career.

Within each stage of adulthood, Erikson and Levinson pinpoint periods of stability and those of transition (Aktu & Ilhan, 2017; Robinson, 2015). According to Aktu and Ilhan (2017), during the periods of stability there occurs an establishment of life structures including goals, expectations and self-investments. During transition periods however, these life structures are revisited, and when they are not deemed satisfactory, in-congruency of the self may develop (Aktu & Ilhan, 2017). It is during these periods of transition where challenges and developments may be most evident in one's adult life. According to Robinson (2015) these periods are observed to be stressful, unstable and containing more turmoil in the various stages of adulthood. Nonetheless, they are deemed necessary for mental health and to gain a stronger sense of equilibrium and resilience in one's life. Forer (1963) posits that these challenging periods encountered by individuals and groups are inevitable and they are mandatory for growth.

Robinson and Smith (2010) propose that early adults are challenged with achieving developmental tasks regarding developing and establishing a self-supported life structure relating to their career, financial autonomy and finding a spouse. Erikson (in

Murphy, 2011) suggests the value of life crisis experiences as contributing to the achievement of such developmental tasks. A life crisis experience is therefore defined as, "a period of life that is characterized by difficulty, stress and negative emotion, which is in retrospect viewed as a turning point or bifurcation point in the life story" (Robinson & Wright, 2013, p.407). These include the tension of change from one life stage to another or sudden life events whereby an individual is unable to cope.

Daniel Levinson's theory of life structure recognizes early adulthood as one of the seasons in the life cycle likely to encounter life crisis experiences (Aktu & Ilhan, 2017). Namibia's most economically active population (employed and unemployed individuals also referred to as the labour force of the country) are part of this group (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017). They are essential to the development of society and looking out for their holistic wellbeing is crucial in maintaining and improving overall development and growth. Therefore, it is important to understand the extent at which they are impacted by experienced life crisis.

Moreover, this age group faces multiple transition periods such as the early adult-transition and the Age Thirty Transition (Robinson and Wright, 2013), which carry high levels of stress and potential for life crisis experiences. These may lead to development however they also carry the risk of developing a mental illness especially amongst early adults, if appropriate coping methods are not engaged (Robinson, 2012 as cited by Robinson, Wright, & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Wright, 2013).

Defining Life Crisis

The understanding of life crisis is often times interchanged with the understanding of stress, although there are clear distinctions between them. Stress is defined

by Yeager and Roberts (2003, p. 4) as “any stimulus, internal state, situation, or event with an observable individual reaction, usually in the form of positively adapting to a new or different situation in one’s environment”. Certain amounts of stress in daily life are healthy and can promote efficiency. An increased amount of stress however may lead to impaired functioning, life crisis and even the onset of mental illnesses (Yeager & Roberts, 2003). Therefore, life crisis is more a result of accumulative stress in one or more areas of life in which an individual fails to cope.

Gerald Caplan’s description of life crisis provides a valuable understanding of this concept. Caplan asserts that an individual develops a life crisis when previous coping strategies are threatened and exceeded by a current stressful event or period (Greer, 1980). The individual is therefore unable to address the current stress with those strategies which then leads to a rise in tension within the individual. As a result, the individual either experiences an increase in their coping strategy repertoire and therefore overall growth by adapting, or consequently deteriorates if they are unable to adjust (Greer, 1980). This is dependent upon the individual’s internal and external resources and their appraisal of the stressful event or period (Greer, 1980).

Prevalence of Life Crisis

Multiple prevalence studies on life crisis experiences in adulthood have been conducted. Robinson and Wright (2013) state Wethington’s analysis of interview data from the MIDUS (Midlife in the United States) which reported that 34% of men and 36% of women over the age of fifty, conceded to a midlife crisis. Furthermore, it was found that women identified life crisis experiences related more to problems with family and relationships, while men reported life crises related more to work and career problems.

Comparably, Robinson and Wright’s (2013) life crisis prevalence study reported crisis experiences of men and women within age categories of 20 to 29, 30 to 39 and 40 to 49. As in Wethington’s (as cited by Robinson & Wright, 2013) study, women reported a higher prevalence of crises than men in all age cohorts. Moreover, certain crisis categories were more common amongst one gender than the other. Across all age cohorts and gender, relationship breakup and financial difficulties were the most reported. Correspondingly a study on the current occurrence of a major life crisis conducted in a United Kingdom sample reported that 20% of that sample was definitely experiencing a major life crisis at the time (Robinson, 2018). Additionally, 35% reported that they might be experiencing a major life crisis and 45% reported that they were not experiencing one (Robinson, 2018, p.2). Therefore, according to Robinson (2018) at some point in time majority of adults, or at least some, are in a life crisis.

The above studies yield similar results across different adulthood populations and the two genders being investigated. Nevertheless, they lack comparison with developing country samples. Moreover, they have not explored differentiating aspects of these populations, such as occupation status, but have rather provided general prevalence data.

Sprang and Secret (1999) conducted a study on the occupational functioning of employees that have experienced or are experiencing a life crisis. A high occurrence of personal crisis was found among employees and 20 to 39% of them acknowledged some level of job disruption as a result. Employees had reported that the most distressing life crisis experience for them was the death of a loved one (Sprang & Secret, 1999). Sprang and Secret (1999) further concurred that distressing life events

tend to cause a bio-psychosocial impact of life crisis that disintegrates the stability of an individual. Employees in their study reported that emotional support from their workplace would have been helpful in improving post-crisis situation. Sprang and Secret (1999) highlighted Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) in many organizations that aim to provide support and assistance to employees in a life crisis. However, it has been found that many employees in a life crisis are only referred once their personal life crisis adversely impacts their productivity at work and the work environment. Therefore, the attempts of EAP's may be more curative in nature at this stage than preventative.

Robinson's (2018) mixed methods case study on Quarter-Life crisis during the post-university transition reported two life crisis episodes in early adulthood, resulting from failures to find work and staying in a job despite having a difficult boss. Despite other adverse life experiences encountered by the case study sample during the research, their two reported life crisis episodes were attributed to unemployment and difficulties within employment respectively.

Frasquilho, Matos, Santos, Gaspar, and Almeida (2016) suggested that unemployment increases the risk of developing a mental illness. It was further noted by Jahoda (as cited in Frasilho et al., 2016) that unemployment was often related to depressive symptoms and an overall deterioration of an individual's life. Furthermore, Economou, Souliotis, Peppou, Agapidaki, Tzavara, and Stefanis (2017) in their study of major depression in Cyprus amid financial crisis reported a prevalence of depression due to difficulties in maintaining basic household needs.

The above substantiates the impact that unemployment and the stressors thereof can have on one's mental wellbeing. This in itself may contribute to the development of a life

crisis. In addition, the studies are suggestive that employed and unemployed populations may experience multiple adverse experiences external to those related to their work or lack thereof, increasing their vulnerability to experiencing a life crisis. Nonetheless, more quantitative data is required for these populations, especially within developing countries.

The general life of early adults in Namibia and vulnerability to Life Crisis

Namibia is classified as a higher middle income country but with increasing gross inequality (BTI 2018: Namibia Country Report, 2018). It has been documented that almost two-thirds of the Namibian population lives within circumstances resembling multidimensional poverty, and the efforts made in reducing poverty have not shown much progress (BTI 2018: Namibia Country Report, 2018). Additionally, despite the country having a large population of young people that could contribute to economic growth, there remains insufficient job prospects and opportunities (Mulama & Nambinga, 2016). In terms of welfare, the country's public health care system and civil services are deteriorating (BTI 2018: Namibia Country Report, 2018). Quality services are privatized and are often inaccessible to most Namibians, especially those within rural areas. These factors are causing citizens to experience multiple stressors as they affect their wellbeing. Additionally, as there currently lacks psychological knowledge within school curriculums and research, many early adults may be more vulnerable to developing a life crisis. Quality wellness programmes are often only available to those who can afford them, leaving the majority of the country at a disadvantage and increased stress levels. Therefore Namibia, more so the early adults, remain vulnerable to the adverse impact of life crisis experiences.

The study aimed to identify and compare life crisis prevalence amongst the employed and unemployed early adults in Windhoek, Namibia. It further wanted to determine the areas in which most life crises are experienced by the above mentioned group, and also to explore their gender differences, if any, in reporting life crisis experiences.

Method

Since the objectives of this study involve the identification of life crisis experiences and an exploration of their significant features among the sample, a quantitative approach was employed; more specifically, a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design.

Participants

The target population for this study was employed and unemployed male and female early and middle-aged adults ranging between the ages of 20 to 50 years, residing in Windhoek. Occupation status was provided by the participants in accordance with the provided Namibia Statistics Agency (2017) employment and unemployment definitions. Homemakers and full-time students within this age group were not included in the study because they are defined as economically inactive (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017).

A total sample of 186 participants was selected for this study through two sampling methods, namely, snowball sampling for the employed participants and simple random sampling for the unemployed participants. Ninety-five participants were employed males and females from various organizations, companies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Windhoek, the other ninety-one participants were unemployed males and females drawn from the unemployed registry at the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation. The sampling approaches mentioned are described within the

procedures section below. For both groups, participants were qualified to participate by meeting the following criteria:

- a) Between the ages of 20 to 50 years;
- b) Officially employed or unemployed according to the provided definitions and,
- c) Currently residing in Windhoek, Namibia.

Research Instrument

This study utilised a self-reporting questionnaire, the Adult Crisis Episode Retrospective Self-Assessment Tool (ACERSAT) developed by Robinson and Wright (2013), to document life crisis experiences of the participants. The ACERSAT provided data on 1) the occurrence and timing of crisis or lack thereof, 2) the events within crisis episodes (Robinson & Wright, 2013). To determine the occurrence and timing of a life crisis, participants were provided with a simple definition of a life crisis:

“A crisis episode is any period in an adult life that is noticeably more difficult, stressful and unstable than normal, and is an important turning point in your life, due to changes that occur in that time period. Crisis episodes typically last for one to two years, but may be shorter or longer.”

For each age group of reported crises, participants were provided with 23 crisis event options presented within these domains – Career, Relationship, Family, Sexuality & worldview, and Health (Robinson & Wright, 2013). These crisis event options were developed by Robinson & Wright (2013) based on an extensive review of literature on the contents of adult life crisis and types of stressful life transitions. They aimed to hypothetically involve challenging and adverse events within the aforementioned domains.

The development of the ACERSAT was informed by retrospective assessment techniques used in psychiatric epidemiology, such as the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (McMarnus & Bebbington, 2009, as cited by Robinson & Wright, 2013, p. 409). It is a structured questionnaire utilised to obtain autobiographical memories, and the data it elicits corresponds with theories about the lifespan and autobiographical memory (Robinson & Wright, 2013). Converse and Presser (cited in Pretesting and Pilot Testing, 2016) state that pretesting is essential in establishing whether a selected survey is indeed a valid and reliable research tool within social sciences. Hence a pilot study of the ACERSAT was conducted for this reason, and to make it more compatible with the African context.

Procedure

After receiving ethical clearance from the relevant authorities, the researcher conveniently selected several known employees from various companies and made contact. Interested individuals were provided access to the online survey where they could participate. After completion, these individuals were requested to recommend other employed individuals from the same or other companies or NGO's, meeting the basic criteria of the study. For the unemployed sample, the researcher additionally sought permission from the Executive Director of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation. Access was granted by an employment officer, who provided the researcher with a list of currently registered unemployed individuals meeting the basic criteria of the study. The researcher was then able to randomly select a sample from that list to participate by completing the survey online. Some individuals who did not have online access completed the survey manually.

Data Analysis

The data obtained were analysed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 25.0. This version of SPSS is the latest (at the time when the data was analysed) and provides valid and reliable results for the data collected. As this was an explorative study, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used in SPSS to elicit results. Furthermore, a Chi-Square test of Independence was used to determine possible relationships between variables.

Results

One hundred and eighty-six individuals participated in the study, of which 91 were males and 95 were females. Most individuals that were sampled were between the ages of 20 to 30 years old constituting 71.0% of the total sample, followed by individuals within ages 31 to 40 years old (22.0%) and then 41 to 50 years old (7.0%) respectively. The majority of the sample (68.3%) had obtained at least an undergraduate education qualification. From the total sample, 51.1% were employed while the remaining 48.9% were unemployed.

Prevalence of Early Adult Life Crisis Experiences among the Employed and Unemployed

The first objective of this study was to identify and compare life crisis prevalence of employed and unemployed early adults in Windhoek. The findings showed that 154 (82.8%) participants responded "Yes" to experiencing a life crisis within early adulthood, while the remaining 32 participants (17.2%) selected "No". Additionally, it was found that the employed participants reported more life crises (86.3%) than the unemployed (79.1%) within the total sample as shown in Figure 1.

Furthermore, within the two early adulthood age groups in which life crises was

to be reported by participants, more crises were experienced during the ages of 20 to 30 years (80.5%) than the 31 to 40 years (11.0%). Only 7% of participants indicated experiencing a life crisis within both age groups.

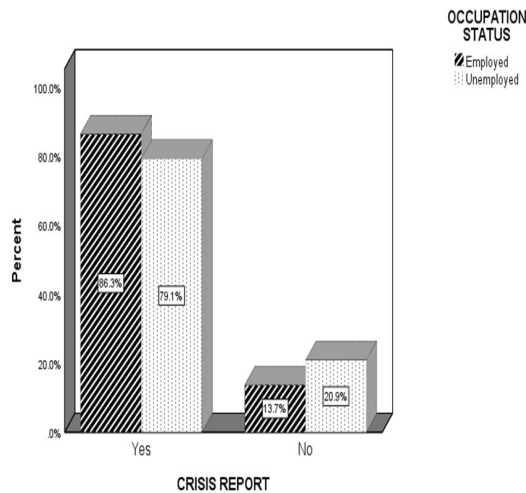


Fig 1 Crisis reporting of employed & unemployed participants

Crisis Categories in which Life Crisis is most experienced by Early Adults

The second objective of the study was to determine the areas in which employed and unemployed early adults in Windhoek experienced the most life crisis. Table 1 indicates that Career and Family categories were the most reported areas of life crisis occurrence, with 79.0% and 57.5% respectively, followed by the Health category (36.7%).

Table 1. Life Crisis category report of total sample

Crisis Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Career	147	79.0
Relationship	56	30.1
Family	107	57.5
Sexuality and Worldview	30	16.1
Health	70	36.7

Additionally, the employed participants reported more crises in the Career category (81.1%) than the unemployed participants as shown by Table 2. The unemployed participants of this study rated all the categories besides 'Career' higher than the employed participants.

Table 2: Employed and unemployed participant's crisis category report

Crisis Categories	Employed%	Unemployed%
Career	81.1	76.9
Relationship	27.4	33.0
Family	56.8	58.2
Sexuality and Worldview	14.7	17.6
Health	36.8	38.5

Markedly within the Career category, the employed participants reported most life crisis related to feeling trapped in a job they didn't want to be in anymore (73.6%), while the unemployed reported most life crisis due to unemployment (59.6%) as shown in Table 3. Regarding Family, the employed participants reported more life crisis due to difficulties with child's behaviour (60.0%), while the unemployed reported more life crisis due to the death of a loved one (55.0%)

Table 3. Employed and unemployed participant's crisis event report

Categories/ Crisis Events	Employed %	Unemployed %
Career		
Feeling trapped in job	73.6	26.4
High level of stress in job	73.1	26.9
Resigning/Being fired from a job	43.8	56.3
Difficulties in your studies	47.8	52.2
Unemployment	40.8	59.6
Change of career	60.0	40.0

Debt/financial difficulties	46.6	53.4
Relationship		
Locked in a relationship	47.8	52.2
Being in an abusive relationship	64.3	35.7
Divorce/relationship break up	46.9	53.1
Family		
Death of a person close to you	45.0	55.0
Birth of a child	45.5	54.5
Difficulties with child's behaviour	60.0	40.0
Family conflict/dispute	59.6	40.4
Sexuality and Worldview		
Confusion over sexual preference	40.0	60.0
Coming out: making sexual preference known to loved ones	66.7	33.3
Uncertainty/confusion in your own beliefs	47.8	52.2
Health		
Alcohol/substance abuse/addiction	53.3	46.7
Physical illness/injury to yourself	60.9	39.1
Physical illness/injury to a loved one	57.1	42.9
Caring for an ill/disabled loved one	54.2	45.8
Being diagnosed with a mental illness	33.3	66.7
A loved one being diagnosed with a mental illness	38.9	61.1

Gender Differences in reporting Early Adult Life Crisis

The third objective of the study was to explore gender differences in reporting life crisis experiences of employed and unemployed early adults in Windhoek. Generally speaking, it was found that males reported greater life crisis (85.7%) than females (80.0%) as shown in Figure 2.

Females reported more life crisis related to Family (57.9%) and Sexuality and

Worldview (17.9%) than males. In all other crisis categories (Career, Relationship and Health), males still report more life crisis experiences.

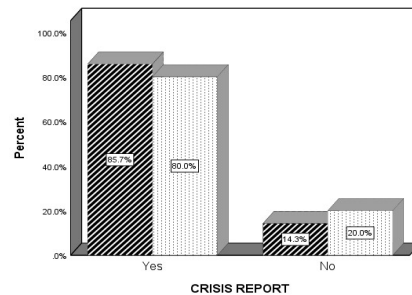


Fig. 2 Life Crisis reporting across genders of the total sample

Table 4: Life Crisis category reporting across genders

Crisis Categories	Males%	Females%
Career	80.2	77.9
Relationship	31.9	28.4
Family	57.1	57.9
Sexuality and Worldview	14.3	17.9
Health	41.8	33.7

Moreover, within Career, males reported the most life crises related to *changes in career* (70.0%), while females reported most life crises due to *experiencing high levels of stress and pressure in the job* (57.7%). Regarding Family, males reported more life crisis due to the *death of a loved one* (56.7%), whilst females reported life crisis due to *difficulties with child's behaviour* (80.0%) to a greater extent.

In observing gender differences of crisis reporting within the employed participants, females reported more life crisis in Career (51.9%) and Family (53.7%) categories than the males as indicated in Table 6. Males reported more crisis instances within the Relationship and Health categories, and both

genders reported equally on Sexuality and Worldview.

Table 5. Life Crisis event reporting across genders

Categories /Crisis Events	Males %	Females %
Career		
Feeling trapped in job	43.4	56.6
High level of stress in job	42.3	57.7
Resigning/Being fired from a job	56.3	43.8
Difficulties in your studies	47.8	52.2
Unemployment	53.2	46.8
Change of career	70.0	30.0
Debt/financial difficulties	47.9	52.1
Relationship		
Locked in a relationship	56.5	43.5
Being in an abusive relationship	50.0	50.0
Divorce/relationship break up	50.0	50.0
Family Death of a person close to you	56.7	43.3
Birth of a child	31.8	68.2
Difficulties with child's behaviour	20.0	80.0
Family conflict/dispute	46.2	53.8
Sexuality and Worldview		
Confusion over sexual preference	80.0	20.0
Coming out: making sexual preference known to loved ones	66.7	33.3
Uncertainty/confusion in your own beliefs	34.8	65.2
Health		
Alcohol/substance abuse/addiction	73.3	26.7
Physical illness/injury to yourself	43.5	56.5
Physical illness/injury to a loved one	64.3	35.7
Caring for an ill/disabled loved one	58.3	41.7
Being diagnosed with a mental illness	66.7	33.3
A loved one being diagnosed with a mental illness	55.6	44.4

Table 6. Life crisis category reporting across genders among employed and unemployed participants

Categories	Career %	Relationship %	Family %	Sexuality and World view %	Health %
EMPLOYED					
Males	48.1	53.8	46.3	50.0	57.1
Females	51.9	46.2	53.7	50.0	42.9
UNEMPLOYED					
Males	51.4	50.0	50.9	37.5	51.4
Females	48.6	50.0	49.1	62.5	48.6

On the whole, amongst the unemployed participants, males reported more life crises related to Career (51.4%), Family (50.9%) and Health (51.4%). Females reported more life crises within Sexuality and Worldview (61.7%) and equally with males on Relationship.

Test of association

A Chi-Square test of Independence was also conducted to determine if there was any significant association between life crisis reporting and gender, and life crisis reporting and occupation status.

Table 7: Test of association between life crisis & gender and life crisis & occupation status

	Chi-Square Value	df	P-Value
Crisis & Gender	1.065	1	.302
Crisis & Occupation Status	1.689	1	.194

Conclusively, there was no significant association found between life crisis reporting and gender (chi-square = 1.065, df = 1, p = .302). On life crisis reporting and occupation status, there was also no significant association found (chi-square = 1.689, df = 1, p = .194). The Chi-square test of Independence could not be done for life

crisis reporting and education level because there was one cell which had expected counts less than 5, hence violating the rule for this test.

Discussion

The current study aimed to identify the prevalence of early adult life crisis experiences and found that 82.8% of the sampled early adulthood population in Windhoek conceded to experiencing a life crisis. These results are indicative of an overall prevalence of this phenomenon, similar to those reported by Robinson and Wright (2013) as well as Wethington (as cited by Robinson & Wright, 2013). Therefore, it may be deduced that early adult life crisis experiences are generally common although the nature in which they are reported may vary across different populations in the world.

This study also aimed to shed light on possible differences between employed and unemployed early adults and their life crisis experiences. It was uncovered that employed participants reported a higher prevalence of early adult life crisis occurrence than the unemployed participants by 7.2%. These results are similar to those described by Sprang and Secret (1999) where they reported a high occurrence of personal crisis among employees that were sampled. Additionally, though there is scant literature on the differences in occupation status in reporting life crisis, the documented life crises in Robinson's (2018) case study were attributed to both employment and unemployment challenges such as *staying in a job despite a difficult boss* and *failure to find work*. Although the employed participants in the current study accounted for slightly more of the total sample than the unemployed by 2.2%, the higher prevalence reported seems better attributed to possible challenges that they experience. The employed population of Namibia is often times depended upon heavily by the economically

inactive population of the country (children under 15 years and adults 65 years and older, students and homemakers) as well as the unemployed individuals within the labour force (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019, p.28). In Namibia, this dependency ratio is quite significant because the 15 year and younger population is growing, thereby increasing the financial dependency on the employed populations (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019, p.29). Moreover, the unemployment rate is also increasing within the labour force due to insufficient job prospects, which further elevates the dependency upon the employed population (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019, p. 60). Furthermore, the employed population are faced with career related stressors such as work pressure, difficult bosses and/ or co-workers, and challenging working environments. Therefore, it is understandable as to why life crisis experiences may be more commonly reported amongst them than the unemployed population.

Levinson's life structure theory identifies psycho-social domains in early adulthood in which developmental tasks are to be achieved: development of self, emotional development, marriage and family life, social relationships, professional life, and career organisation (Aktu & Ilhan, 2017). Aside from the previously discussed external pressure experienced by employed individuals, they may also experience intrinsic tension within these psycho-social domains in an attempt to complete developmental tasks, making them more vulnerable to life crisis experiences.

Additionally, this study wanted to explore the areas in which life crisis experiences were commonly reported. Robinson and Wright's (2013) study indicated that most life crisis reports by their sample were related to Career and Relationship. Similarly, the current study found that most reports of life crises of the total sample were within the

Career category (79.0%), and closely followed by the Family category (57.5%). Erikson and Levinson described that early adults are faced with diverse challenges related to developing and establishing a self-supported life structure relating to career, financial autonomy and finding a spouse (Robinson & Smith, 2010b). The current study provides similar results with the greatest life crisis experiences being reported in the categories contributing to a self-supported life structure.

Such developmental tasks may induce distress if early adults are unable to cope with the related challenges which may then result in a life crisis. Furthermore, the employed participants of the current study reported more life crises related to Career than the unemployed participants by 4.2%. These participants mostly indicated "*feeling trapped in a job that you don't want to be in anymore*" as the event within the Career category that contributed the greatest to their life crisis experience. This finding seems supportive of the existential dimension of life crises mentioned by Gullslett, Kim, Anderson, and Borg (2016) and also the contemplation of prior life structures established. Although there is growth of career counselling in Namibia, many people tend to select jobs that offer good salaries, instead of those that may be personally fulfilling. This is often influenced by financial pressure from family members.

On the other hand, these results differed from Sprang and Secret's (1999) study in this regard as they found that most employees in their study attributed their most distressing crisis event to "*the death of a loved one.*"

Within the unemployed participants, life crisis reporting in the career category was also higher than the other categories, especially due to "*unemployment*". This statistic recognizes the impact of unemployment on the wellbeing of early

adults, as it challenges their ability to develop and establish their self-supported life structure and to attain developmental tasks in the psycho-social domains described above.

The current study was further interested in exploring gender differences in reporting life crisis experiences of employed and unemployed early adults. Robinson and Wright (2013) identified females as reporting a higher prevalence than males across all age cohorts that they examined. The current study however yielded different results in that males reported an above all higher prevalence of early adult life crisis experience than females by 5.7%. This was interesting to note considering that the latter studies were conducted within developed country populations (United Kingdom and United States of America) and the current study within a developing country (Namibia). The gender variation in comparison of prevalence observed may be ascribed to cultural dynamics and norms concerning gender roles within Namibia. As much as Namibia is perceived to be developing in gender equality, most households are still headed up by men (Legal Assistance Centre, 2017, p.5). Therefore, they may report more life crises as observed.

Additionally, within the Career and Family categories, most males attributed their life crisis to a "*change of career*" and "*death of a person close to you*" respectively, which once again points to the impact on psychosocial domains, perhaps more evidently amongst males. On the other hand, females attributed crises in Career and Family to "*high levels of stress and pressure in the job*" and "*difficulties with child's behaviour*" respectively, which brings out the dual roles that working women tend to encounter.

Within the employed participants, females reported more crises related to Career (51.9%) and Family (48.1%) than the males. This may be attributed to the dual responsibilities that these women tend to juggle: working full time/part-time whilst bearing the responsibility of looking after their family and the home more so prevalent in single-parent homes. Therefore, they are more likely to experience pressure in both regards which may then translate into a life crisis. On the other hand, within the unemployed participants the opposite was true: Males reported more crises related to Career and Family than females. Perhaps this may be due to the expectation in the Namibian society that men should provide for the household which then creates more pressure on unemployed men more so prevalent in single-parent homes. The inability to achieve these expectations may cause distress possibly resulting in changes in one's identity and concept of self as described by Robbins and Wilner (cite in Rossi & Merbet, 2011, p. 6) and in end, a life crisis.

Finally, the current study wanted to explore if there were any significant relationships between life crisis experiences and gender, and also being employed or unemployed. However, though an association seemed present, it was not found to be significant through Chi-Square test of Independence analysis. This may however be influenced by the sample size.

Limitations

The current study encountered some limitations that are expressed below. The sample size obtained was not optimal to generalise the findings to the global early adulthood population. However, it could provide useful inferences into experiences especially within a developing country. This study did not report life crisis experiences specific to the early adult transition periods

as identified by Daniel Levinson e.g. Quarter Life Crisis during the early adult transition and then the Age Thirty Transition. It rather provided an overall reporting of life crisis experiences within early adulthood. In addition, the study utilised a retrospective autobiographical memory survey which has been found to be subjective and prone to memory bias (Pasupathi, 2001 as cited by Robinson & Wright, 2013). Subjectivity in reporting may have been further elevated for participants that were encountering a life crisis when they completed the questionnaire. Nonetheless, the specified crisis event options offered in the questionnaire may have aided in recalling experienced crises more accurately, and limited subjectivity. Moreover, the crisis event options utilized in this study may have left out culturally exclusive events which may also induce life crisis experiences such as rites of passage rituals and expectations. Lastly, the recency of life crisis occurrence and emotional state at the time of completing the survey may have influenced participant's recall.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the life crisis experiences of early adults in Windhoek, Namibia with a specific focus on the differences between employed and unemployed early adults. Gender differences in reporting these experiences were also investigated, including possible associations. The Adult Crisis Episode Retrospective Self-Assessment Tool (ACERSAT) was used to collect data on the events that contributed to the life crisis experiences of the participants. It was therefore observed that life crisis experiences were generally common across early adulthood, more so reported by the employed group than the unemployed. This was mainly attributed to the economic dependency that this group encounters from the economically inactive population and unemployed adults of the country.

Additionally, it was observed that most reported life crisis experiences were related to Career and Family challenges encountered. This was accredited to the developmental challenge that early adults face in attempting to establish a self-supported life structure involving financial autonomy, finding a spouse and starting a family. Lastly, it was found that males reported an overall higher prevalence of life crisis experiences than females in this population, which may possibly be influenced by gender roles and expectations of men within the African context. Therefore, though there is limited literature on life crisis experiences, it is clear from the above results and other research (e.g., Robinson, 2018; Robinson & Wright, 2013) that this phenomenon is real and carries a significant impact on an individual and at a community level.

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