

The Jobs I Preventive Intervention for Unemployed Individuals: Short- and Long-Term Effects on Reemployment and Mental Health

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Because the fundamental causes of unemployment are rooted in societal economic processes, remedies to the adverse social effects of unemployment must be sought in comprehensive economic and social policies. Although social and economic policies need to address the problems that result from unemployment, various community efforts can be undertaken to reduce the taxing impact of unemployment at the local level. The Jobs Project at the University of Michigan was designed by Caplan, Vinokur, Price, and van Ryn (1989) as a research and evaluation project to test a preventive intervention for unemployed individuals. The intervention goals were to prevent the deterioration in mental health that often results from unemployment and to promote high-quality reemployment. To achieve its goals, the intervention was designed to provide participants with social support and a promotive learning environment to acquire job-search skills and inoculate the participants from common setbacks that are part of the job-seeking process. We tested this intervention in a large-scale randomized experimental field study using a large heterogeneous sample of 1,087 unemployed individuals who were recruited from Michigan unemployment offices in the greater Detroit area.

Caplan et al. (1989) described theories that address the enhancement of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), inoculation against setbacks (Kanfer & Goldstein, 1991; Marlatt & Gordon, 1985; Meichenbaum, 1985), and vigilant coping (Janis, 1982) that were used to guide our model of the effects of the Jobs intervention project. Following Lazarus's (1966) theory of stress and adaptation, we view coping with job loss as a process that starts with primary and secondary appraisal that include diagnosis and motivation to respond in spe-

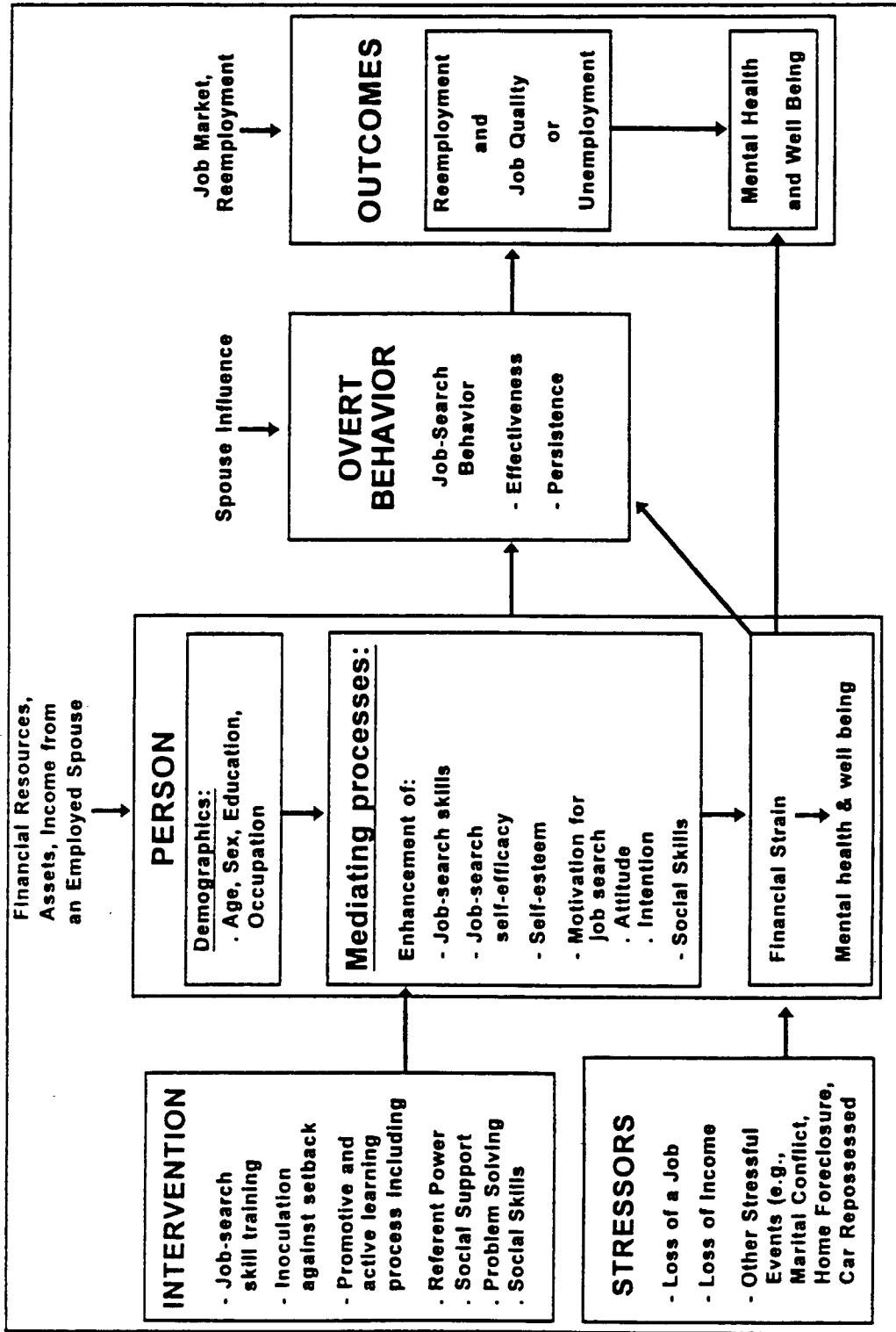


Figure 1. Effects of a self-efficacy-based job-search intervention for unemployed individuals on reemployment and well-being outcomes.

cific ways. Resultant coping may lead to reappraisals that the action is useful or, in the case of setbacks, that it is not. Such setbacks may undermine further use of the specific coping behavior. Consequently, to produce continued adherence to a new course of coping requires an additional intervention, referred to by Meichenbaum as "inoculation against setbacks." Such inoculation involves the acquisition of both cognitive and behavioral repertoires for continuing action despite temporary setbacks.

The quality of coping is assumed to be a multiplicative function of motivation to perform and skill. It follows that an adequate preventive intervention must provide substantive skills as well as the motivational concomitants (social reinforcement, inoculation against setbacks, increased self-esteem, and perceived competence). These motivational assets are associated with perceived control, or self-efficacy (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Bandura, 1977, 1986; Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972; Weiner, 1979). Unless job search self-efficacy is enhanced through the intervention, unemployed persons may restrict their information seeking, limit the alternatives they generate, and engage in less advanced contingency planning (Friedrich, 1987).

This rationale was used in our jobs search study to define the necessary elements of the preventive intervention for the recently unemployed (Price & Vinokur, in press) and to generate a set of reliable measures of the processes in that intervention. The model, as presented in Figure 1, also served to guide the analyses of our results.

Method

Research Design

The Jobs preventive intervention project was embedded in a field experiment with random assignment of the recently unemployed to an experimental (i.e., the intervention treatment) and a primary control condition. The participants in the primary control condition were sent self-instructional materials consisting of a brief booklet with extremely general descriptions on job seeking. The intervention was conducted and administered to a series of 15 groups between January and June 1986. The project has completed collection of one pretest and three posttests at 1, 4, and 32 months after the intervention. Figure 2 is a flow chart representing the design of the study and its waves of data collection.

The intervention delivery. To make the intervention truly preventive, only participants who had been unemployed for less than 4 months were selected. In groups of 16–20 individuals, participants took a training program delivered in eight 3-hr sessions covering a 2-week period. Three male–female pairs of trainers followed an extensively pretested 8- to 10-page protocol for each session. Each protocol incorporated the elements of the various theories that guided the construction of the intervention, such as enhancement of self-efficacy and inoculation against setbacks. Other elements intended to ensure

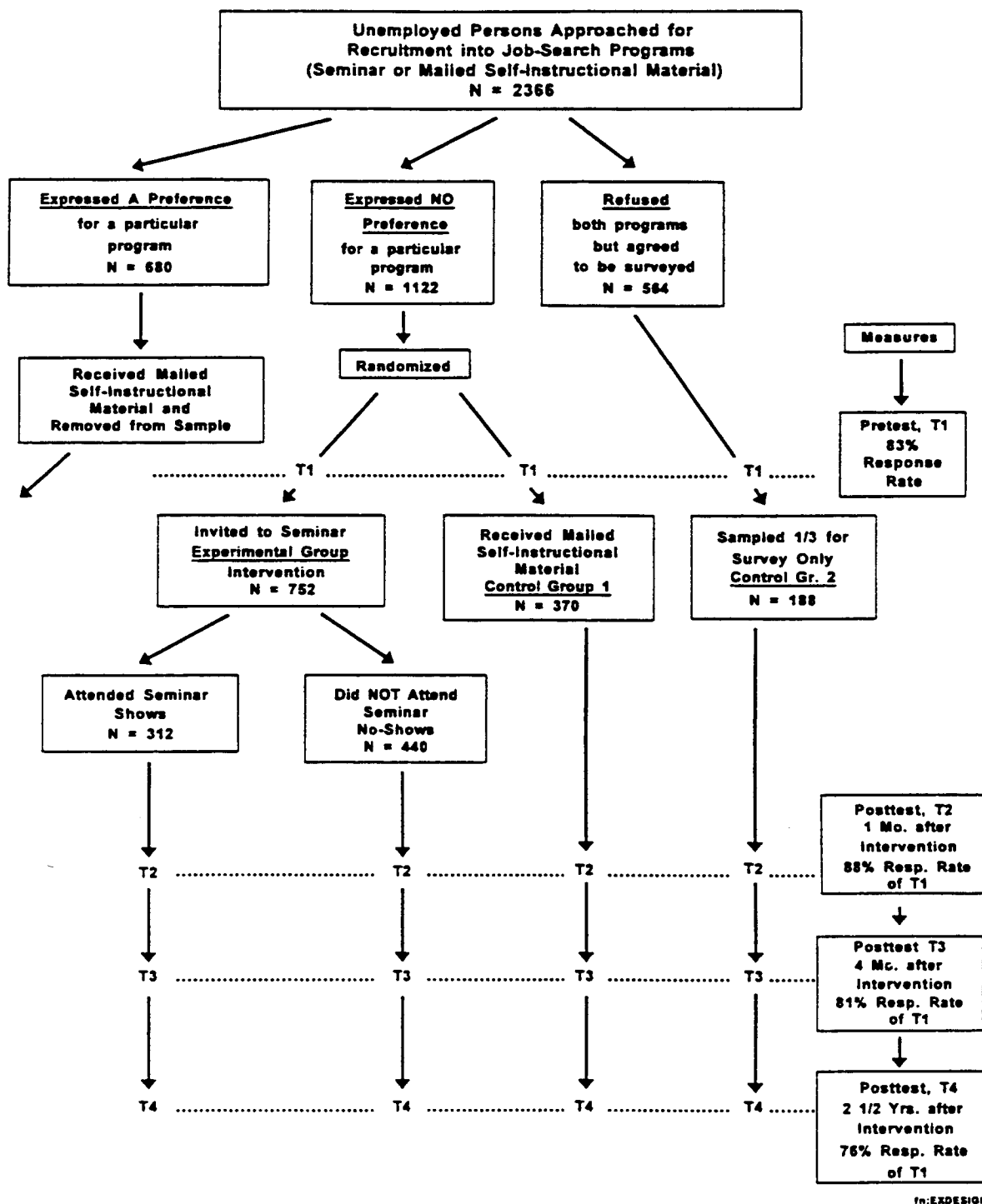


Figure 2. The design of the Jobs Project field experiment with an intervention program for unemployed individuals.

that the trainers established trust (referent power), established a base of expertise as trainers, and established positive expectancies that the intervention would lead the participants to achieve the desired outcomes.¹ The intervention included the following set of topics and activities: dealing with obstacles to reemployment, handling emotions related to unemployment and job seeking,

¹A comprehensive implementation manual that includes information on the selection and training of the trainers and detailed protocols of the intervention sessions is available on request.

thinking like an employer, identifying sources of job leads, finding job leads in social networks, contacting potential employers, completing the job application and preparing a résumé, conducting the information interview, practicing and rehearsing interviews, and evaluating a job offer.

Throughout the program, participants were encouraged to analyze their situation for problems or potential difficulties and to generate their own solutions. We hypothesized that a person who feels he or she owns the solution to a problem will be more committed to implementing the solution. The group setting was considered to be a crucial element in this process because even if the person cannot come up with a solution, he or she is exposed to people who can.

Theory-drawn preventive intervention. The Jobs project emphasizes a theory-driven approach to test some generic principles of intervention and methods of evaluation that could be more widely used in preventive interventions. Two such important principles of intervention are (a) the necessity of highly intensive training of the trainers before program delivery and (b) the importance of close monitoring of the intervention by observers during program delivery. Both of these elements help maintain a high-quality intervention.

Much of the intervention's rationale derives from research on vigilant coping that shows that people under pressure often narrow their search for solutions and tend to become prematurely invested in a certain course of action. Vigilance promotes the search for problem diagnosis and alternative solutions. Participants are therefore trained in diagnosing unemployment problems and generating alternatives for reemployment. Moreover, they receive inoculation against setbacks by anticipating potential setbacks and building up repertoires to cope with counterpressures.

The Jobs intervention project also derives from theory that emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy, the knowledge that one can succeed, as a motivational force for attempting difficult behaviors. The Jobs intervention project was designed to provide these conditions, and the research findings showed that enhancement in job search self-efficacy stimulated participants to engage in intensive job-search activities (van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992).

Finally, research and theory on social resources also drives the intervention. Skills, social support, and knowing how to cope with setbacks are all critical social resources that can have powerful preventive effects for people who would otherwise be vulnerable to the adversity of life transitions such as job loss.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited from the lines of the Michigan Employment Security Commission. Trained recruiters approached each person, asked a set of screening questions, and arranged for the person to enter the study if eligible. Those who stated that they had "no preference" for either the eight-session (experimental) or self-taught (control) program were then randomly assigned to the control or experimental condition. Individuals with a preference were

excluded from the study. Consequently, participants were randomized with regard to initial motivation to enter a particular condition. The control group respondents received in the mail self-instructional materials consisting of a booklet with information on successful job-search strategies. Because the follow-up evaluation period lasted for more than 28 months, it was not possible to invite the respondents in the control group to the intervention at the end of the study.

Outcome Measures and Variables

Pretest data collection included basic information about the past job and its quality, attitudes toward work and toward job seeking, job-seeking intentions, and behavior, job-search self-efficacy, mental health and well-being (the SCL-90), health status, social support and social undermining, and personality dispositions (self-esteem, locus of control, and assertiveness). During the intervention, process measures were administered. Follow-up measures included all of the pretest measures and additional information on reemployment outcomes, such as number of hours working, wage rate, and job quality. Measures are described in detail by Caplan et al. (1989), Vinokur, Price, and Caplan (1991), Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich, and Price (1991), and Price, van Ryn, and Vinokur (1992).

Results

Sample Characteristics

The recruitment process produced a sample of unemployed people whose demographic characteristics were highly similar to the U.S. unemployed population older than 16 years of age and to representative community samples of unemployed (Caplan et al., 1989; U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 1986). Men constituted 46% of the sample; 15% of the sample were Black. The average age was 35.9 years ($SD = 10.6$ years), and the average education was approximately 12.9 years ($SD = 1.9$ years). Finally, 53% of our respondents included those who were unmarried at the time (respondents who were divorced, separated, widowed, or never married). Nearly one third of the sample fell into each of the following three broad occupational classifications: professional and managerial (33%), service and clerical (28%), and blue-collar (38%). The participants in this study were, on the average, well into their careers; respondents reported being with their previous employer an average of 6 years ($SD = 6.3$ years). The average length of unemployment was 13 weeks ($SD = 9$ weeks).

Dropouts and Participants

Among those assigned to the experimental condition, 59% failed to show up for the intervention. This percentage varied only by about 5% over the course of recruiting 15 experimental groups in a 4-month period, during which successively recruited groups were entered into the experimental and control conditions. "Participants," by contrast, were defined as having completed at least six of the eight sessions.

Response Rate

Of the experimental and control group respondents who received a pretest questionnaire, 83% mailed it back. The response rates for those receiving the Time 2, Time 3, and Time 4 posttest questionnaires were 88%, 80%, and 76%, respectively. Most important, there were no significant interaction effects between respondent status (responders vs. nonresponders) and experimental condition (experimental vs. control) on any demographic, mental health, or job-search variables at pretest. Thus, differences in response rate (or dropout mortality) between the experimental and the control groups cannot provide plausible explanation for the findings on the basis of the follow-up data.

Analyses

Two basic types of analyses were conducted. The first type included analyses that were based on the complete randomized (true) experimental design. The experimental condition in these analyses included those who were originally assigned to the experimental condition, regardless of whether they showed up and participated in the intervention.

The second type of analysis focused on experimental respondents who actually participated in the intervention seminar and excluded those who did not show up. In these analyses, the participants' outcomes were compared with the outcomes of the subset of respondents in the control group who constituted their counterparts (i.e., those who would have participated in the intervention had they been invited). These analyses involved estimation procedures of those in the control group who would and those who would not show up to the intervention on the basis of the no-show group in the experimental group as suggested by Bloom (1984).

A special feature of this study was the process measures. At Sessions 1, 7, and 8, participants filled out detailed measures assessing the elements of the intervention that were based on self-efficacy theory (e.g., the establishment of referent power, inoculation against setbacks, and rehearsal of skills). Using these process measures, internal analyses within the experimental group of participants demonstrated that the various intervention elements were implemented and operated as designed.

Manipulation Checks, Integrity, and Strength of the Intervention

The measures of degree of participant engagement provided a close indication of the integrity and strength of the intervention. These measures were based on multi-item scales that assessed referent power, trainer and group attractiveness, practice of skills, and generation of alternatives for dealing with setbacks. The means of these measures ranged from 3.6 to 4.6 on the 5-point scales, with standard deviations ranging from 0.4 to 1.3. These means suggest that the experimental intervention was perceived by the participants as establishing trust and that the participants actively practiced skills and dealt with potential setbacks. Furthermore, natural variation in the delivery of these parameters was associated with predicted variation in immediate outcomes relating to job-search confidence and motivation as well as emotional well-being. The analyses showed that participants' level of engagement had beneficial effects on job-seeking attitudes, employment-related outcomes (e.g., number of hours of reemployment, pay, rates of reemployment), and emotional well-being 1 and 4 months after the intervention.

Effectiveness of Randomization

There were no significant differences at pretesting between the experimental and control groups on demographic variables, job-seeking motivation, mental health, or other dependent variables.

The intervention effects using the original randomized experimental design are displayed in Table 1. The strongest short-term effects emerged on the reemployment outcomes. The finding demonstrated that the experimental intervention yielded significantly greater percentages of reemployed individuals at both posttests, with the difference at Time 3 being a continuation of the advantage that appeared at Time 2.

Among the reemployed, at the 1-month posttest, there was a statistically nonsignificant trend for the experimental group to score higher than the control group on quality of working life. By the 4-month posttest, this difference had become statistically significant. Furthermore, the percentage of individuals who had found reemployment in what they characterized as their main occupation was higher for the experimental group at both Time 2 (82% vs. 64%) and Time 3 (88% vs. 77%). Among the reemployed, those in the experimental group also reported higher monthly earnings than did those in the control group (a \$359 difference) at Time 2. This difference almost disappeared at Time 3 and was no longer significant.

Finally, these findings also show that of those who remained unemployed, the respondents in the experimental condition has significantly higher levels of job-search self-efficacy than did the respondents in the control condition at both Time 2 and Time 3 follow-ups.

Table 1. Effects of Treatment on Quantity and Quality of Reemployment and Job-Seeking Attitudes at 1 (Time 2) and 4 (Time 3) Months Posttest

Variable	Experimental		Control		<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
All participants						
% Reemployed						
Time 2	33	0.47	26	0.44	1.74(608) ^a	.04
Time 3	59	0.49	51	0.50	2.00(623) ^a	.025
Monthly earnings						
Time 2	\$512	769	\$322	607	3.12(622)	.001
Time 3	\$853	923	\$723	977	1.65(664)	.05
Reemployed participants						
Quality of working life						
Time 2	5.02	1.02	4.81	1.07	1.23(175)	<i>ns</i>
Time 3	4.97	1.02	4.76	1.10	1.70(343)	.045
Monthly earnings						
Time 2	\$1,456	780	\$1,097	774	2.28(148)	.01
Time 3	\$1,467	857	\$1,407	1128	0.79(307)	<i>ns</i>
% in Main occupation						
Time 2	82	0.38	64	0.48	2.75(177) ^b	.004
Time 3	88	0.34	77	0.43	2.41(343) ^b	.008
Unemployed participants						
Self-efficacy in job-seeking ability						
Time 2	3.92	0.80	3.75	0.87	2.02(411)	.02
Time 3	3.94	0.79	3.72	0.87	2.09(255)	.02
Motivation to job seek						
Time 2	4.93	1.06	4.85	1.07	0.63(468)	<i>ns</i>
Time 3	4.64	1.24	4.38	1.24	0.62(304)	.06

Note. Adapted from Caplan, Vinokur, Price, and van Ryn (1989, Table 2). Copyright 1989 by the American Psychological Association.

^a*t* Tests were computed on means based on assigned scores of 1 or 0 for reemployed and unemployed, respectively.

^b*t* Tests were computed on means based on assigned scores of 1 or 0 for employed in main occupation or in other-than-main occupation, respectively.

Intervention Effects on Actual Participants

The effects of participation were estimated by comparing the means of the subgroup of actual participants with the means of the control group would-be participants on the basis of a procedure developed by Bloom (1984). Comparison of the effects of the intervention according to the original randomized assignment with the effects based on participation was discussed by Vinokur, Price, and Caplan (1991) using effect sizes (Cohen, 1977) as well as *t* tests for the difference between the means.

The results of the analysis that focused on the participating subgroup compared with their counterparts in the control group indicate that participation in the intervention yielded significantly greater percentages of reem-

ployed individuals at both posttests. At the Time 3 4-month follow-up, 53% of the experimental group participants were reemployed compared with 29% of their control group counterparts. This 24% difference appears to be a continuation of the 20% advantage for the experimental group participants over their control counterparts, which appeared at Time 2 4-week follow-up.

The comparison of the effect size and level of significance in the results of the two analyses, one based on the intact randomized design (cf. Table 1) and the other on actual participation, demonstrates clearly that the intervention effects were far more dramatic for the participants than might be inferred from the analyses that were based on the full experimental design. For example, regarding the percentage of reemployed, the effect sizes for the participants at Time 2 and Time 3 were .60 and .48, which is more than three times larger than the .15 and .17 for the full experimental design groups.

Among the reemployed, at the Time 2 1-month posttest, there was a significantly higher level of earnings in the full experimental than the control group. By the 4-month posttest, this difference was no longer significant because the proportion of reemployed in both groups increased sharply. Furthermore, the percentage of those who had found reemployment in what they characterized as their main occupation was significantly higher for the experimental group at both Time 2 (82% vs. 64%) and Time 3 (87% vs. 76%). The same results were found in the comparisons for the participants only with consistently larger effect sizes. Moreover, the comparisons for the participants were statistically significant only at both posttests with respect to two additional outcomes. Compared with their control counterparts, the reemployed participants enjoyed significantly better quality of life at work and were more likely to obtain jobs that were permanent rather than temporary.

Attitudes and behaviors of unemployed participants. Self-reports of posttest job-seeking behaviors were not significantly different between the experimental and control groups. At both posttests, however, the unemployed participants in the experimental group had higher perceived confidence, or self-efficacy, in their job-seeking ability. A similar but nonsignificant pattern also occurred for motivation to engage in job seeking. Once again, these same effects that appeared for the full design were far more pronounced in the comparisons for the participants with statistically significant effects for these variables at Time 3. The intervention had the effect of maintaining confidence and a sense of efficacy even in the face of setbacks.

Effects on mental health. Replicating other studies (e.g., Feather & O'Brien, 1986; Vinokur, Caplan, & Williams, 1987), we found that people who became reemployed scored significantly lower on anxiety, depression, and anger and higher on self-esteem and quality of life than those who remained unemployed. However, the comparisons that were based on the full experimental design did not yield any statistically significant results with respect to all these variables. By contrast, a number of significant differences on these variables, in particular on depression, were revealed in the analyses only for the participants. Depression was, for the unemployed participants, consistently lower at both

Table 2. Benefits and Costs of the Preventive Intervention for Unemployed Individuals Present-Value Terms per Person

Benefits and costs	Individual	Federal	State	Total
Benefits				
Gain in after-tax earning 32 months after program ^a	5,392	0	0	5,392
Gain in taxes paid	0	1,006	308	1,314
Total benefits	5,392	1,006	308	6,706
Total costs	0	286	0	286
Net total for 32 months	5,392	720	308	6,420
Net total for 5 years				
0% Discount rate	10,784	1,726	616	13,126
2.5% Discount rate	10,575	1,686	604	12,865
5% Discount rate	10,377	1,649	593	12,619
Net total until age 60				
0% Discount rate	58,913	10,705	3,370	72,988
2.5% Discount rate	49,290	8,909	2,819	61,018
5% Discount rate	38,944	6,979	2,228	48,151

Note. Adapted from Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich, and Price (1991, Table 3). Copyright 1991 by the American Psychological Association. Data were based on TOBIT estimates of predicted mean differences of \$239.50 between full experimental group and control group in earnings per month adjusted for age, sex, education, and family income at Time 1 using the LIMDEP Program. ^aGain occurred within last 28 month period as recorded by Time 4 data collection. During the first 4 months, most respondents were still looking for a job.

posttests. Surprisingly, the reemployed participants displayed a significantly higher level of depression and anxiety at Time 2 than did their counterpart controls. However, the direction of this difference was reversed at Time 3, with the reemployed participants showing significantly lower levels of depression.

Long-term effects on reemployment at the 32-month follow-up were found for the entire sample with respect to earnings per month. The experimental intervention group had statistically significant higher earnings than did the control group in each of the follow-ups. The mean difference was \$178 at the Time 2 4-week follow-up, \$227 at the Time 3 4-month follow-up, and \$239 at the Time 4 32-month follow-up.

The intervention was found to have additional effects on the respondents who reported earnings of at least \$1 per week. Compared with these respondents in the control group, the intervention group respondents were working a significantly greater percentage of the time and were having more stable work (fewer employers and job changes) during the proceeding 2.5 years. The results of our benefit-cost analyses are shown in Table 2. The intervention resulted in net benefits of \$6,420 per respondent at the end of the follow-up period and will result in a conservative projected net benefits of \$12,619 at the end of 5 years and \$48,151 by the time the respondents retire at an estimated age of 60 years.

Additional preventive effects on depressive episodes were found in more detailed analyses that identified high-risk respondents on the basis of their pretest combined score of depression, financial strain, and low social assertiveness. As shown in Figure 3, during the 2.5-year follow-up period, the in-

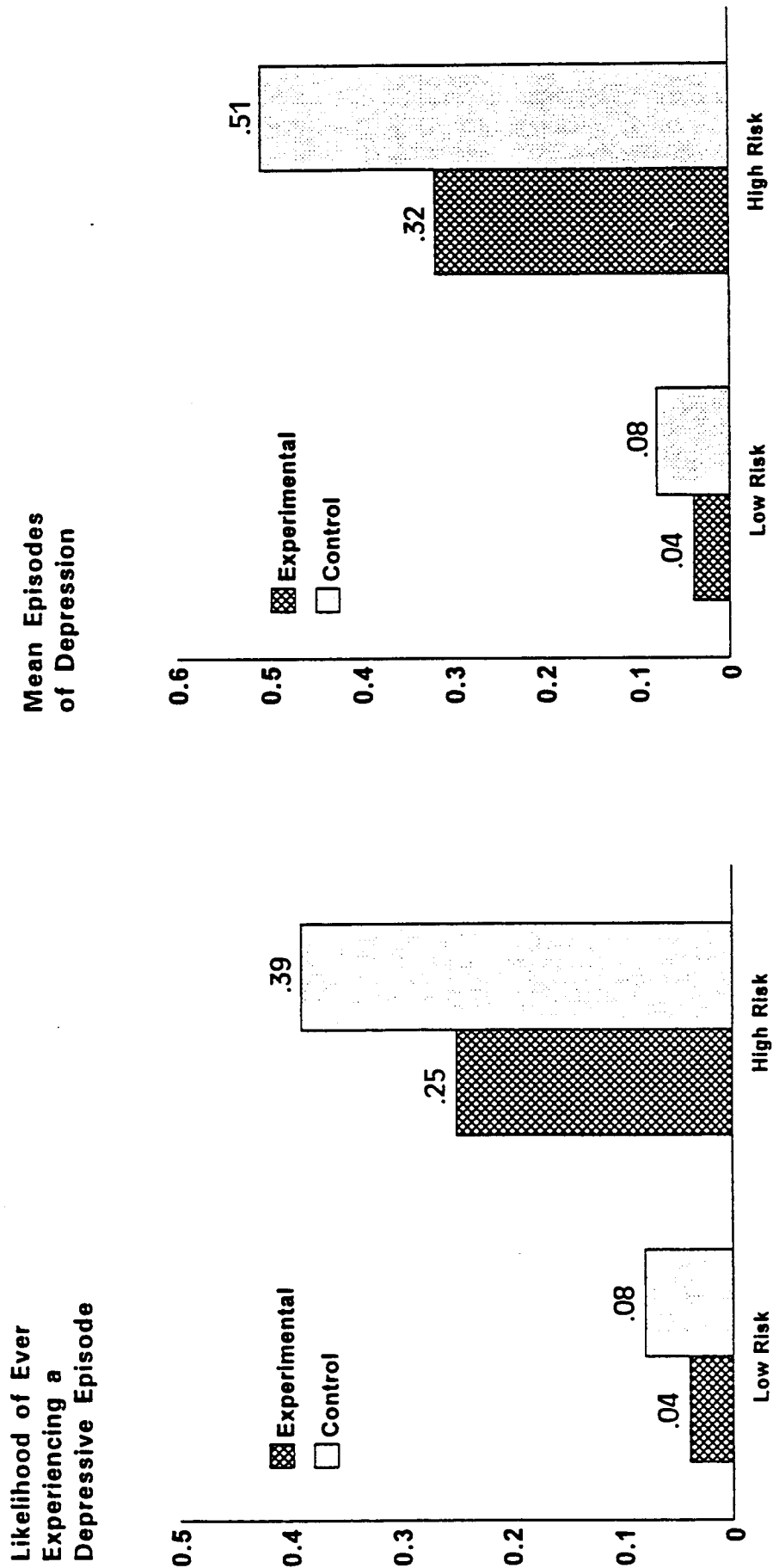


Figure 3. Impact of Jobs intervention project and risk status on likelihood of ever experiencing a depressive episode and number of depressive episodes (32-month follow-up).

tervention had a statistically significant preventive impact on both the incidence and prevalence of more severe depressive symptoms among the high-risk individuals (Price et al., 1992).

Discussion and Conclusions

These analyses provide strong evidence that the intervention accomplished its goals. Analyses of the 1- and 4-month follow-up data showed that the Jobs intervention project produced higher quality reemployment in terms of earnings and job satisfaction and higher motivation among those who remained unemployed. Furthermore, the long-term follow-up, 2.5 years later, demonstrated continued beneficial effects of the intervention on wage rate, monthly earnings, and fewer episodes of job changes. More detailed analyses identified the characteristics that placed unemployed individuals at higher risk for experiencing depressive symptoms and for remaining unemployed. The individuals at the highest risk for depression were found to have baseline depressive symptoms, financial hardship, and low social assertiveness. Our analyses showed that the intervention buffered the effects of these risk factors on depression. In other words, the intervention benefited more those who needed it most.

This randomized field experiment was designed to test hypotheses about the effect of providing social support and improving skills and cognitions relevant to coping with a major life stressor: loss of employment. The long-term effects of the Jobs intervention project embedded in this experiment demonstrated that it can be implemented as a cost-effective community program that provides net benefits to the unemployed participants as well as to society.

At the most general level, this field experiment has demonstrated that interventions that establish trust, engender skills and the motivation to use them, inoculate against setbacks, and provide social support are capable of helping people succeed in a difficult task in spite of setbacks and failures. The experiment was aimed specifically at providing job-search skills to those who had lost their jobs. Nevertheless, we believe that because the theoretical components of the intervention are derived from basic research on motivation and coping, they are potentially applicable to preventive interventions dealing with a wide range of difficult life tasks and decisions. For unemployed people, the foundations of the Jobs search intervention project can be used to design additional intervention components to help them cope with other tasks and stressors in their lives. For example, providing skills and knowledge of financial planning and management, loan restructuring, assistance programs, and so on, an intervention that addresses the financial hardship during the period of unemployment can help unemployed individuals cope with the strain of losing their income as a result of the job loss. Furthermore, with changing technologies and economic conditions, interventions that address the need for and stresses of a career change could help unemployed individuals make the occupational changes that will be required from a significant portion of the displaced workforce.

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