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COUNTING THE COSTS

A Literature Review of the Social and Psychological Costs of Unemployment

Prepared by:
Barbara Sykes
Peter Faid
Henry Dembicki
for the
Edmonton Social Planning Council

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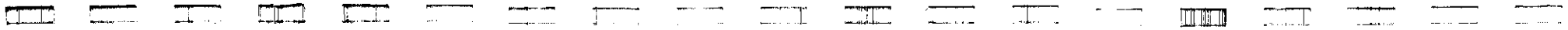

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Until recently there has been a tendency to view unemployment either as a purely economic phenomenon or as a manifestation of individual short-comings. With rising and prolonged levels of unemployment, increasing concern is now being expressed about the deleterious effects of joblessness on individuals, families and society.

The purpose of this study is to provide a review and analysis of the literature relating to the social and psychological costs of unemployment and, where possible, to relate the findings to the current unemployment picture in Alberta. In all, over 200 articles and studies, drawn from a variety of disciplines including medicine, occupational health, business, family studies, psychiatry, sociology and psychology, have been examined in detail. A bibliographical listing of all of the material that was reviewed is included with the study for further reference.

The study begins with a brief examination of unemployment in Alberta, with particular attention focused on the important changes that have occurred since 1981. These include the changing patterns of unemployment by age, the lengthening duration of unemployment and the increasing number of families who have been affected by unemployment.

The fact that unemployment cannot be examined in isolation from either the values of work or from employment is addressed in the second section of the study. The findings in the literature regarding the benefits that work provides (such as income, status, a sense of purpose and social contacts) and the generalized experiences of those who are jobless are briefly outlined. However, the research suggests that the unemployed are by no means homogenous in their

reactions to joblessness. Factors such as the length of unemployment, stage in life, skill level, health, alternate interests and the availability of a social support network will all be influential in how a person responds to being without work.

The study then systematically reviews the literature regarding the likely influence of unemployment on the family, on physical health, on mental health, on suicide and on crime. It is suggested that the instability of income that results from unemployment is particularly critical for a family and can be the cause of considerable stress and conflict especially if there are already weaknesses in the familial relationships. It is notable that the economic and psychological stress which accompany unemployment have been shown to be strongly related to the incidence of child abuse.

While a number of major studies provide strong evidence of a statistical linkage between unemployment and physical health, the existence of a causal relationship is still disputed. An examination of selected stress-related illnesses in Alberta suggests that older workers may have become more susceptible to these forms of ill health as the employment picture has deteriorated. As well, the number of unemployed clients using the services of AADAC has increased significantly since 1981.

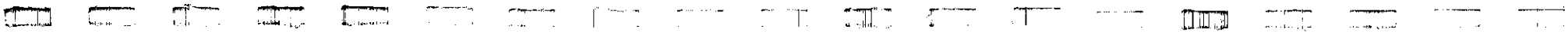
The research evidence to date strongly supports the notion that prolonged unemployment leads to a significant deterioration in the psychological health of those without work. In Alberta, an unemployed person is five times more likely to use the provincial mental health service than is a person who is presently employed.

Suicide, the ultimate reaction to depression and stress, has been shown through the research to be statistically related to rising levels of joblessness, although it is likely to occur a year or two after the increase in unemployment rates. This pattern has been shown to hold true with respect to unemployment

and overall suicide rates in Alberta. Research also indicates that the duration of unemployment is significantly related to increasing suicide rates.

Generally, the findings in the literature indicate that there is a positive, but not significant correlation between unemployment and crime. An examination of the Criminal Code Offence Rates for Alberta in fact, suggests a pattern of increasing crime during a period of low unemployment and a decrease since 1981 when levels of unemployment began to rise.

The research suggests therefore, that while individual responses to periods of unemployment may be quite different, there is sufficient evidence to justify the growing concern over the relationship between unemployment and the potentially damaging social and psychological consequences that can result. It is critical that further research be conducted in the province on this important issue during the coming few years.



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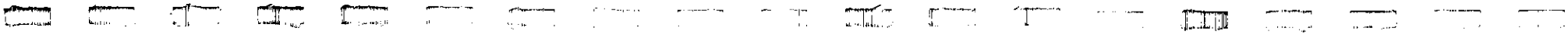
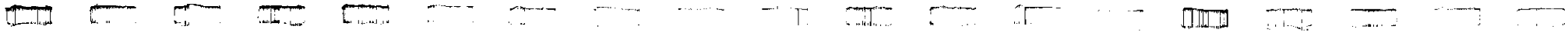


The consequences of prolonged unemployment are insidious. They strike at the heart of identity, personal confidence and self-esteem. They undermine the structure and security of the family unit, the respect of children for their parents and of parents for each other. They split society and destroy trust in the authority and goodwill of those who control or govern. And they sow seeds of apathy and discontent which will sap the optimism of youth and destroy the natural expectation of an association between effort and reward. This last contingency is, perhaps, the most damaging consequence of all, for a sense of meaning in life can only arise out of a reasonable expectation that plans will be fulfilled. We all need to discover a sense of fit - a place in the world in which our potential will be recognized. We need a sense of being 'on course', a trajectory on the basis of which we can anticipate, plan and hope.

Colin Murray Parks
in Fagin and Little
The Forsaken Families, 1984



INTRODUCTION

Few economic or social issues have generated such widespread attention and concern as has the recent unemployment crisis. Since 1981, jobless rates in Canada have risen dramatically, exceeding the levels reached during the depression of the 1930's and giving rise to grave apprehensions on the part of economists, politicians, social scientists and the general population. The most recent official figures place Canada's unemployment rate at 10.9% which represents an increase of 3.4% in the past five years. Alberta, which until 1981 enjoyed a boom economy, has particularly suffered from the current recession, reaching an unemployment rate of 11.2% in 1984.

Clearly, unemployment, with its attendant social ills, has become a problem of considerable magnitude in Canada and in other Western nations. Moreover, there appears to be little reason for optimism with regard to the future. Economists in this country and elsewhere are forecasting continuing high rates of unemployment and suggesting that widespread unemployment may in fact, "...become a permanent feature of Western society" (Hepworth, 1980, p. 139).

Until recently, there has been a tendency to view unemployment either as a purely economic phenomenon or as a manifestation of individual shortcomings. Little attention has been paid to the social and psychological costs. However, the rapidly increasing rates of unemployment, particularly prolonged unemployment, have led to an increasing emphasis on the deleterious effects of joblessness. Researchers are focusing to a greater extent on such questions as:

- What are the consequences of joblessness for the individual?
- How does unemployment affect families?; and,
- What are the impacts of widespread unemployment on communities and on society as a whole?

As a result of research into these issues, there is a growing body of literature documenting the links between unemployment and a multitude of social problems. Unemployment is so widespread in many parts of the country that few people remain untouched by it. Consequently, it has become a matter of vital public concern as indicated by the recent CBC opinion poll in which unemployment was identified by the Canadian public as the most important issue facing Canada today. Governments at all levels are being pressured to resolve the unemployment crisis. Politicians and bureaucrats alike are faced with a situation unprecedented in modern times, one for which solutions are insistently being demanded. Fagin and Little suggest that "...unemployment is the greatest problem that future governments will have to face, and the most important election issue" (1984, p.17).

Yet, if we are to believe that high unemployment has become an inevitable feature of modern life and that a return to full employment is no more than a pipe dream what is the point of studying the issue? Perhaps the time has come to search for new solutions, to renounce the traditional ways of dealing with unemployment and to look for innovative means of both reducing unemployment and dealing constructively with that which is inevitable. It is essential to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the effects of unemployment on individuals, families and society. Such an understanding has significant implications for the development of future policies and programs that are designed to mitigate the damaging effects of joblessness.

Methodology

This study provides a review and analysis of the theoretical, descriptive and empirical research into the social and psychological costs of unemployment. Material has been drawn from a wide variety of sources representing such diverse disciplines as sociology, occupational health, psychology, family studies, business, psychiatry, medicine, labour, nursing, political science and economics. Wherever possible, findings in the literature have been examined within the context of Alberta's recent period of rising unemployment.

The limitations of the research into the social and psychological costs of unemployment must of course be acknowledged. Notably, many of the studies have adopted a 'cross sectional' rather than a 'longitudinal' approach with the result that there is presently insufficient information on the long term implications of unemployment. It is also evident that the size of the sample used in some of the research has been particularly small and consequently, generalized conclusions often rest on rather limited evidence. On the other hand, some of the research that is based on time-series aggregated data could benefit from being linked to individually based information. However, the major criticism of the existing research into the social and psychological costs of unemployment is the lack of control for many of the significant intervening variables and the consequent difficulty in reaching firm 'cause and effect' conclusions.

The application of the research findings to the current pattern of unemployment in Alberta also presented some difficulties, although given the preliminary nature of the research and the limited intentions of the study these were to be expected. In particular, the fact that high levels of unemployment are a recent occurence in Alberta has meant that time-series information on such issues as physical and mental health is very limited and additional annual information will be required if any significant patterns and relationships are to be observed. As well, comparability was often difficult because of the variations in such items as age categories, the use of a fiscal year rather than a calendar year and the number of years covered by available statistics. It should also be appreciated that, with the number of people who have left the province during the past two years, it is impossible to study a "closed system". As a result, any comparisons with research based on national data needs to be treated with considerable care.

UNEMPLOYMENT - THE FACTS

Throughout the post World War II years and into the early 1970's, unemployment rates in Canada remained relatively low and generated little concern. In fact, the 1966 rate of 3.6% was thought to be so low that, "...we congratulated ourselves that this was practically full employment..." (McKay, 1984, p.1). During the 1970's however, rates began creeping up to worrisome levels, reaching a rate of 8.4% in 1978. Yet, it was not until the sudden upsurge of unemployment in 1982, which accompanied the beginning of the recession, that alarm about unemployment rates became widespread and an unemployment crisis was perceived. Unemployment rates had reached 11.0%, the highest level since 1939. Jobless rates in Canada have subsequently hovered around the 11% mark with no sign of significant decline.

The increase in unemployment experienced by Alberta was even more dramatic. Alberta's strong economy had successfully kept unemployment rates down to well below 5% until the economic downturn brought about a doubling of unemployment from 3.8% in 1981 to 7.7% in 1982. But, the worst was yet to come. Rates continued to rise in Alberta reaching a high of 11.2% in 1984.

While these rates of unemployment provide a necessary starting point, they fail to present a complete picture of the current situation in Canada and Alberta. To obtain such a picture, we need to look beyond these general statistics to discover the real extent of unemployment, to understand how the nature of unemployment in Canada has changed and to determine who is unemployed.

How Many are Unemployed?

There is widespread agreement that the official statistics generated by labor force surveys seriously underestimate the real numbers of unemployed

(C.M.H.A., 1983; Deaton, 1983; Fagin and Little, 1984; Krahn, Lowe and Tanner, 1985). In Canada, the official rates are based on a monthly survey of about 40,000 adults (age 15 and over) randomly selected from the population. Respondents who are not currently working but who have actively searched for a job during the four week reference period of the survey are deemed "unemployed". Clearly, the statistics exclude large numbers of people who fail to meet the criterion of having actively searched for work. These "hidden unemployed" include, among others, "discouraged workers": those who have given up seeking employment, often because they believe that none exists.

As well, the official unemployment statistics exclude many groups such as housewives who want to be employed, students who are in school because they are unable to find work, people on short-term job creation projects, the prematurely retired, the disabled and the many thousands of underemployed persons in part-time jobs or jobs for which they are noticably overskilled. As pointed out in the United Church Poverty Report,

> Another factor which cannot be overlooked ... is the hidden unemployment factor which pertains to people not actively seeking jobs at the moment, but who would prefer to be working if suitable jobs were readily available. Many of these people are young mothers who would enter the labor market if day care was more accessible, or transportation, or reasonably proximate work opportunities (C.M.H.A., 1983, p.viii).

It has been suggested that, if all of these individuals who constitute the hidden unemployed were defined as officially unemployed, the rates would increase by as much as 100% in some areas and among certain groups (C.M.H.A., 1983; Krahn, Lowe and Tanner, 1984). Borrero for example, in discussing the disproportionately high unemployment rates among minority groups, the young, the elderly and women, comments that, "It is ... common knowledge that the actual unemployment rate of these groups is double and triple that of the official reported figures" (1981, p.128). Clearly, in dealing with the effects of

unemployment, recognition must be given to the fact that real unemployment far exceeds the levels suggested by the official figures.

How Unemployment has Changed

While there is much to be learned by studying unemployment and its effects in the 1930's or in the 1950's and '60's, it is important to recognize that both the essential nature of unemployment and the social context in which it occurs have changed substantially and hence, the current situation must be examined as a unique phenomenon. Present circumstances differ markedly from those of the depression years in that a more comprehensive safety net is now in place to assist the poor and the unemployed. There is reason to believe that economic deprivation accompanying unemployment may have diminished because of the wider availability of unemployment insurance and social assistance and the increase in two-earner families. Some writers suggest that the erosion of the work ethic mediates, to some extent, the negative effects of unemployment in that work is not viewed as being so salient as it once was (Thomas et al., 1980). On the other hand, the increased mobility and a decline in sense of community which characterize modern society affect the existence of informal support systems.

During the 1950's and '60's, unemployment rates remained relatively low and there was a tendency to view the jobless either as being unemployable or as not really wanting to work. Whether or not this was the case, there can be no doubt that today, the vast majority of unemployed persons in Canada are both employable and eager to find jobs. Furthermore, the proportions of highly skilled, professional and managerial workers joining the ranks of the unemployed have increased dramatically during the current recession. There has also been a shift in the age-related patterns of unemployment as larger numbers of youth and older workers find themselves jobless. Perhaps the most ominous change has been in the duration of unemployment which has increased significantly in the past few years. These trends will be discussed in more detail below.

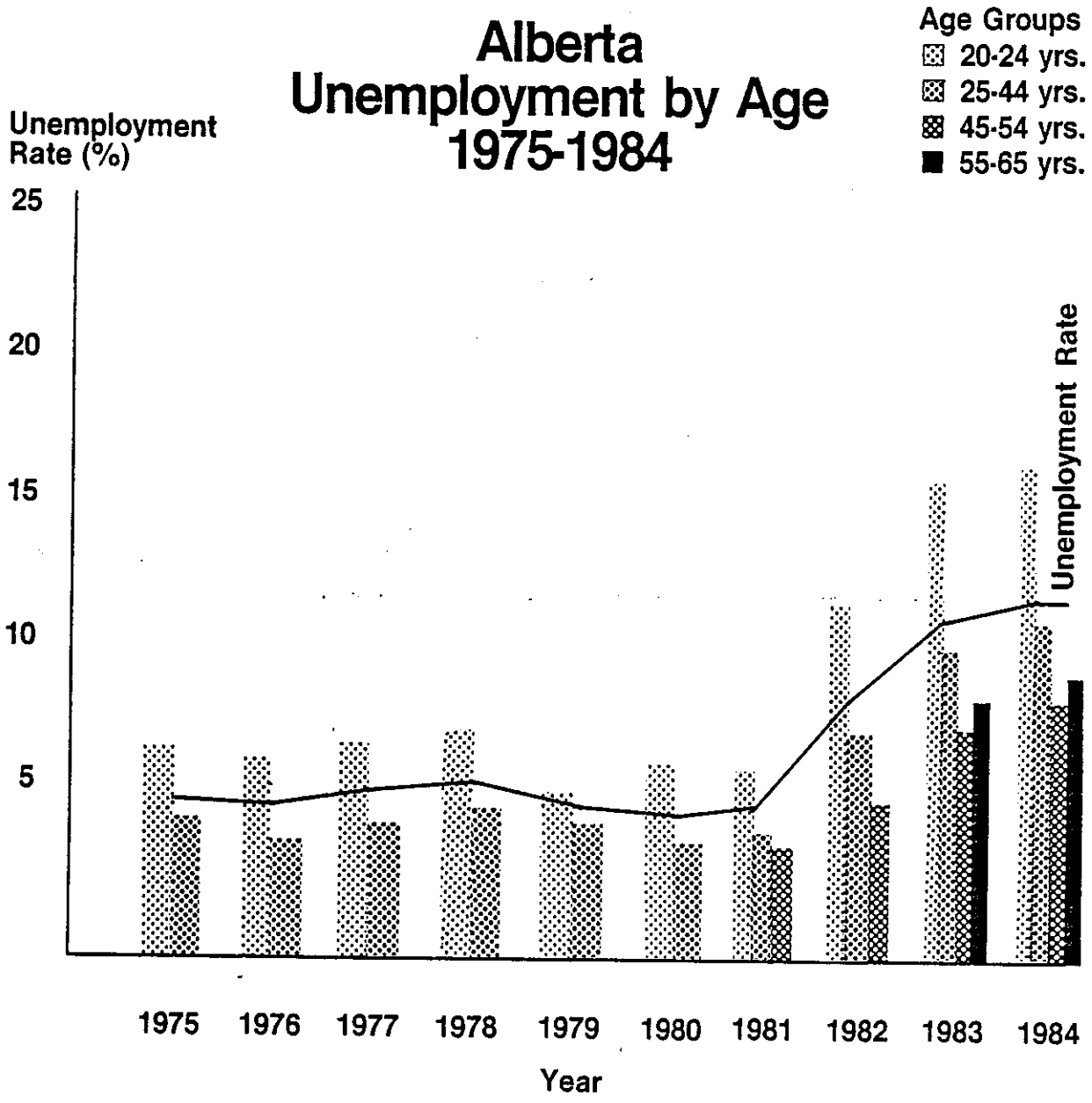
Who is Unemployed?

The provincial unemployment rate is one useful indicator of the economic situation in Alberta, but in itself tells very little about the people who are unemployed. The unemployed are not a homogeneous group. Neither are they distributed evenly throughout the province. For example, the unemployment rate for Alberta was 10.8% in April, 1985. The rate varied by region however, from a low of 8.4% in the northwest part of the province to a high of 13.8% in Edmonton. Likewise, looking at labour force characteristics such as age, sex, family status and education, it is evident that not every labour force sector is equally prone to unemployment.

Figure 1 compares the unemployment rates of four age groups; 20-24, 25-44, 45-54 and 55-65. As the recession has continued in Alberta, the jobless rates for workers in all age groups have increased. Younger members of the labour force, who historically have had the highest jobless rate, are the first to experience unemployment. As indicated by Figure 1, the 20-24 age group are disproportionately represented in the ranks of the jobless. In 1981, unemployment for this age group in Alberta averaged 5.2%. By 1984 the official rate had jumped to 15.4%. Youth are particularly hard-hit in times of high unemployment because they often lack work experience, have little seniority and are considered more expendable as they do not usually support dependents. MacKay (1984) refers to youth as being "competitively disadvantaged" and notes that such a situation has serious implications for our society.

On the other end of the age scale, older workers, especially those 55 and older, have also experienced substantial increases in unemployment in the last two years. One would generally consider this group, on the basis of their experience and seniority, to be "safe" from unemployment. Prior to 1983, the numbers of unemployed over the age of 55 were too low to be included in the Statistics Canada labour force report. As Figure 1 shows, unemployment for this group has become significant, increasing rapidly to 8.3% in 1984. Involuntary early retirement is a likely consequence of unemployment for people in this age

FIGURE 1



Source: Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Annual Averages 1975-83, The Labour Force*

group. Older workers are more likely to "have longer durations of unemployment, find it more difficult to find re-employment and ... to withdraw from the labour market when they do become unemployed" (S.P.C.M.T., 1985).

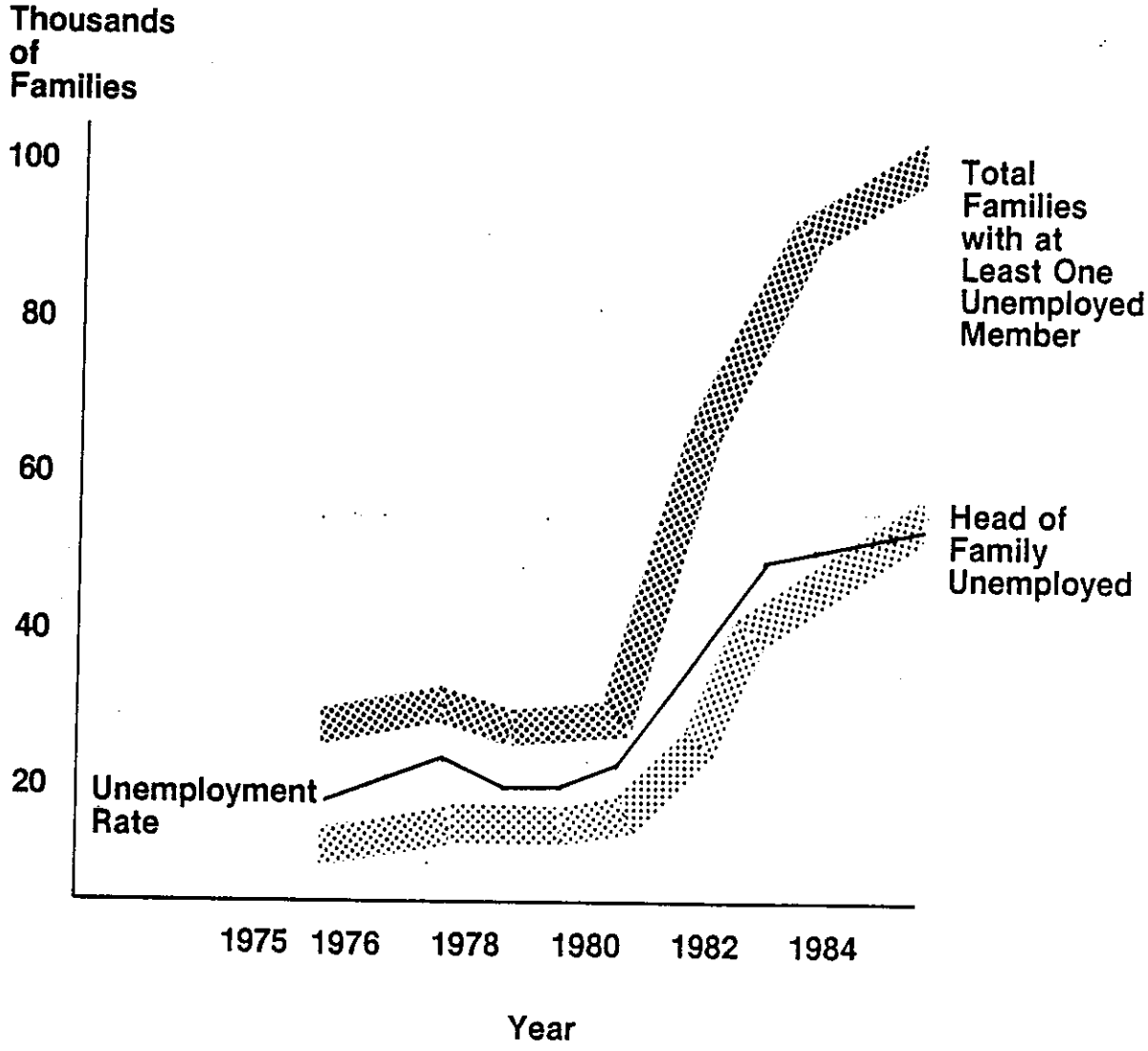
The 45-54 age group has not been immune from the economic downturn either. Figure 1 shows the increase in unemployment rates for this group since 1981. Unemployment rates rose from a number too insignificant to be reported in 1980, to 7.3% in 1984.

The male-female ratio with respect to unemployment rates varies according to age category. The largest discrepancies are in the age groups 20-24 and 55-65. In the former, the Alberta jobless rate in 1984 stood at 17.2% for males and 13.4% for females. While the jobless rate for males in the 55-65 age group stood at 8.7% in 1984, the number of females in this group was too low to be statistically relevant. For the 25-44 age groups, the sex related differences in the jobless rate are minimal.

That unemployment is indeed a pervasive problem in our society can readily be seen from the statistics indicating the number of families in which at least one member is unemployed. Figure 2 illustrates how changes in the number of families with at least one unemployed member and the number of families in which the family head is unemployed have followed the same trends as the unemployment rate. In 1980 there were 31,000 families in Alberta with at least one unemployed member. Of these, the number of families in which the family head was unemployed totaled 10,000. By April, 1985, the number of affected families had increased to over 101,000. Of those families in which unemployment is currently encountered, the head of the family is jobless in approximately one-half. This proportion has increased from 1980 when it stood at roughly one-third. Many of these family heads are single mothers, a group which traditionally experiences a high rate of joblessness and which has little access to resources necessary for finding jobs (such as reliable day care, transportation and training opportunities).

FIGURE 2

Alberta
Families and Unemployment
1976-1984

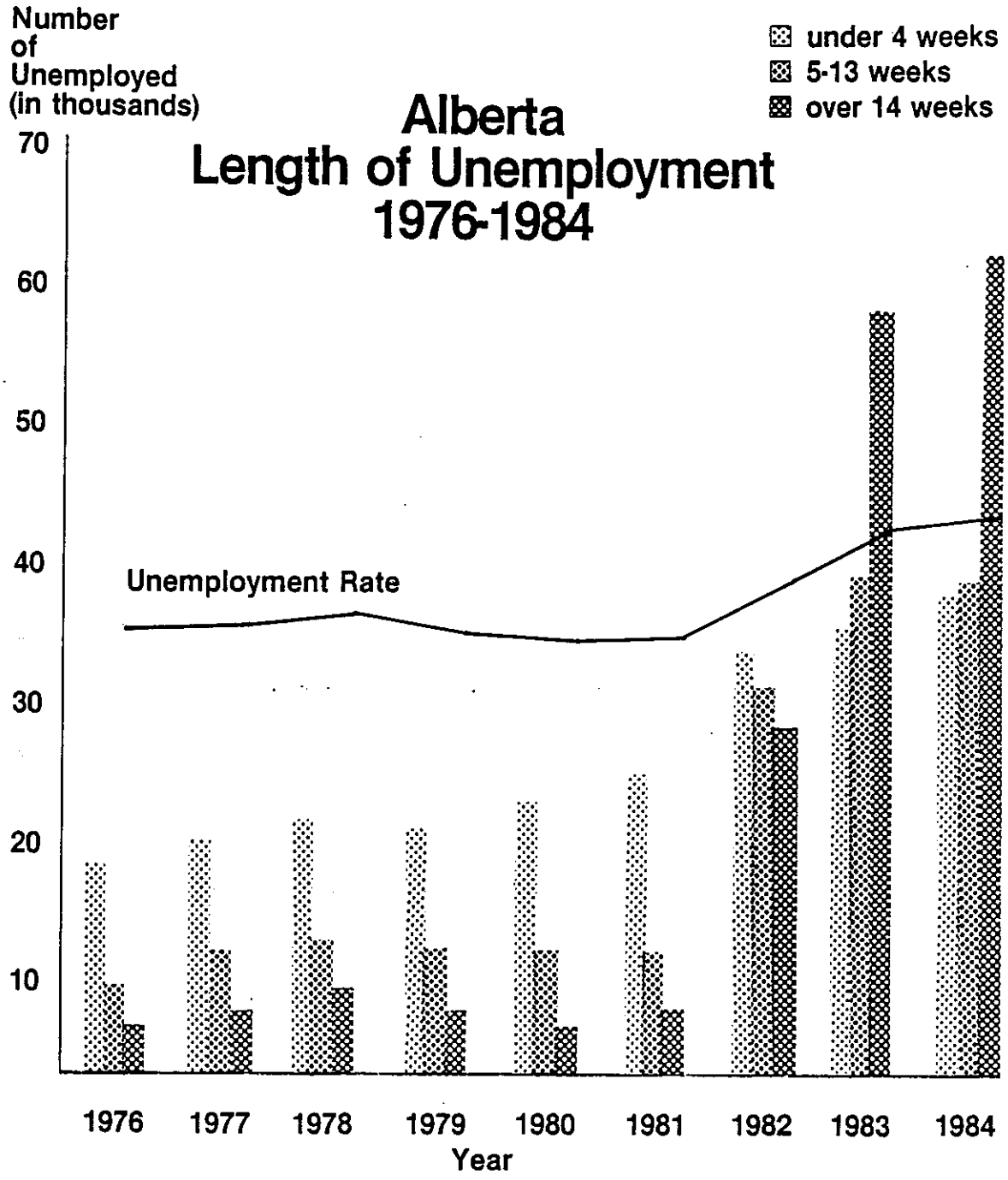


Source: Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Annual Averages 1975-83, The Labour Force*

It is usually assumed that education is a key to finding employment and subsequently retaining it. Table 1 supports this assumption in part. The pattern of unemployment and educational attainment has been unchanged in the last four years; that is, high unemployment rates have been associated with lower levels of educational attainment. A point worth noting from Table 1 however, is that unemployment rates have been increasing for all levels of educational attainment. For example, in 1981, the unemployment rate for those with university degrees was not statistically significant. Yet, as of April, 1985, the rate for this group was 5.3%. Clearly, the well educated are not immune from unemployment.

With respect to the duration of unemployment, it has already been noted that prolonged unemployment has increased rapidly in recent years. Figure 3 illustrates the changes in duration of unemployment. In 1981, the number of people in Alberta who had been unemployed for 14 weeks or more was approximately 6,000. By 1984 this number had shot up to 62,000. No longer is unemployment a short-term phenomenon for the majority. The average duration of unemployment in Alberta has increased between 1981 and 1985 from 6.9 weeks to 21 weeks. In short, not only are more people unemployed, they are unemployed longer. "We used to think that unemployment was temporary. It has become permanent for far too many" (MacKay, 1984, p.5).

FIGURE 3



Source: Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Annual Averages 1975-83; The Labour Force*

Table 1

Alberta Unemployment and Level of Education

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
0 - 8 years	4.5%	9.4%	13.2%	13.4%	16.7%
High School	4.5%	9.3%	12.8%	13.1%	14.4%
Some Post-Secondary	3.7%	7.8%	10.2%	10.6%	8.0%
Post-Secondary Diploma and Certificate	-	4.6%	8.2%	8.6%	8.2%
University Degree	-	3.4%	4.4%	5.9%	5.3%

April, 1985 estimates

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Annual Average 1975-83; 71-529
The Labour Force, Dec. 1984, Mar. 1985, 71-001

WORK, EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment cannot be viewed in isolation. To understand the real costs of unemployment for individuals and for society, it is important to examine the meaning of work, the benefits associated with employment, the experience of unemployment and the important factors which can influence a person's reaction to unemployment.

The Meaning of Work

Work is a basic part of our social structure and among the most pervasive of human activities. It fulfills a variety of functions both for the individual and for society. Over the centuries, the concept of work has taken on a positive value assessment in our society widely referred to as the "Protestant work-ethic". This view of work as intrinsically "good" has become deeply ingrained in Western culture. However, given recent advances in technology and greater availability of leisure time, there is some suggestion that the work ethic is diminishing in importance. Regardless of the value that we place on work, the lives of the vast majority of adults in our society continue to revolve around work roles.

Work, in the technological age has come to be equated with employment or with "having a job". However, in the interest of clarity, a distinction should be made between work and employment. The term "employment" suggests wage-earning labor within a structured milieu whereas work is "... a broader concept embracing all sorts of purposeful activities where money is not necessarily involved" (Fagin and Little, 1984, p. 27).

The assumption that unemployment is associated with a wide range of social and psychological costs is based on the premise that a job provides more than the obvious benefit of financial remuneration. The study of work, and to a

large extent the study of unemployment, have amply demonstrated that the motivation to work goes far beyond the need to earn a living. The following list of employment-related benefits is derived from a number of sources but relies particularly on the work of Fagin and Little (1984), Jahoda (1981) and Warr (1984).

The Benefits Associated with Employment

Personal identity and status

Work is central to personal identity in our culture. We tend to identify one another according to work roles and to ascribe differential status based on these roles. The response to the frequently-asked question, "What do you do?" serves to establish where a person fits in the world. Furthermore, "Work identity is not confined to the person who is working; often the family is also included in the status and influence that the job confers..." (Fagin and Little, 1984, p.9).

Self-concept is based to a large extent on one's work identity. This is not to suggest that high self-esteem is an automatic by-product of employment; in fact, some jobs contribute little to self-worth. On the other hand, being identified as jobless tends to be associated with a negative status in our society and the experience of unemployment "...leads to questioning who we are, challenges our social worth and undermines self-confidence and self-respect" (Nelson, 1981, p.38).

Time structure

Another benefit of employment is that it imposes a structure on one's use of time which is difficult for a jobless person to duplicate. Such regular tasks and routines as are found in most jobs are important in providing a sense of continuity and stability. Friedmann and Havighurst point out that, "Sheer passing of time seems to be an important value of work" (Fagin and Little, 1984, p.33).

Social contacts

Employment provides access to a variety of social contacts as well as to new experiences and ideas. Frequently, the commonality of experiences among co-workers encourages the formation of informal social support networks which generate feelings of belonging and personal value. For people who have neither nuclear nor extended family support available, such networks may become particularly important as sources of social support.

Furthermore, employment allows for a legitimate means of temporary but regular separation of family members, hence removing the pressure of constant togetherness while at the same time enriching family life by the introduction of new relationships and new ideas.

Enforced activity

Employment is also beneficial in that it requires the worker to be active in pursuit of a pre-defined outcome and hence, "provides outlets for physical and mental energy" (Warr, 1984, p.265).

Creativity and skills

For most people, work provides the primary outlet for being creative and displaying their skills. In general, employment allows individuals to both maintain and refine the skills which they possess and to develop new competencies. The respondents in Fagin and Little's study "...who had developed specific skills over the years were not only proud of them, but many believed they were safeguards they could rely on when looking for jobs" (1984, p.33).

Sense of purpose

Most people like to feel that they are doing something useful, something that has meaning beyond the necessity of earning a living. It seems that this is what Freud was referring to when he suggested that work is man's strongest tie to reality (Jahoda, 1981, p.188). It is through their work that many individuals achieve a sense of purpose or, as Jahoda puts it, being linked "...to goals and purposes that transcend their own" (1981, p.188).

Earning a living

Clearly, a major benefit of employment for most people is that it allows them to earn a living, to be financially self-sufficient, to have discretionary income and in some cases to support others. Important too are the related benefits of paid employment such as pension plans and health coverage.

Jahoda refers to earning a living as a manifest consequence of employment whereas the benefits previously discussed, she labels as latent consequences. It is these latent consequences which, she points out, "...help me to understand the motivation to work that goes beyond earning a living and to understand why employment is psychologically supportive even when conditions are bad; by the same token, they help explain why unemployment is psychologically destructive" (Jahoda, 1981, p.188).

While there are no doubt numerous other benefits which accrue from employment, the foregoing appear to be the principal advantages upon which there is widespread concensus in the literature. While recognizing the divers benefits associated with employment, we should take care not to promote the notion that all work is intrinsically good and all unemployment intrinsically bad. Indeed, there are many jobs which are exploitive, stressful or tedious and which provide little that is advantageous. Conversely, some people benefit on the whole from the experience of unemployment. Notwithstanding these facts, the research points overwhelmingly to serious social and psychological costs associated with unemployment.

The Experience of Unemployment

The loss of one's job is frequently conceptualized in the literature as a psycho-social transition requiring a personal coping response to deal with the associated stress. (C.M.H.A., 1983; Fagin and Little, 1984; Warr, 1984). In this sense, job loss is viewed as being similar to other major losses experienced through such events as retirement, divorce or death. In exploring the process of

psychological reaction to job loss, numerous authors support the notion of an adjustment cycle consisting of a number of stages which the unemployed individual moves through in sequence. While the various phase models which have been proposed differ somewhat on certain dimensions, overall, the similarities between them are significant (Fagin and Little, 1984).

The model most widely supported in the literature derives primarily from Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938) and consists of four stages:

1. Shock. Even people to whom loss of their job is expected are said to respond with shock to the actual event. Fagin and Little describe this stage in terms of "...a sense of disorientation and confusion, feeling 'at a loss', and an inability to plan for the future" (1984, p.40).

2. Optimism. The jobless person regains equilibrium in this phase and engages in active job searching, perceiving his/her unemployment as temporary.

3. Pessimism. As attempts to find employment prove unsuccessful, a feeling of failure sets in. Job-seeking continues at a high level but anxiety and fear increase. Dwindling resources and concommitant financial strain often exacerbate the anxiety of this stage. "Fears for the future, about money, skill loss, growing unemployability and about relations within the family, are all said to increase" (Warr, 1984, p. 28).

4. Fatalism. Job seeking activity, while continuing, becomes irregular in this stage and tends to lack enthusiasm. Hopelessness, apathy and resignation are the words frequently used to describe reactions in this stage. The unemployed individual will often withdraw from social contacts and family relationships. In general, the identity of "unemployed" becomes internalized.

For descriptions of other models, interested readers are referred to Borrero (1980), C.M.H.A. (1983) and Fagin and Little (1984).

Although acceptance of various phase models of job loss is widespread, it is by no means universal. Some writers reject such models as being too restrictive and Warr states that "...my own belief is that there is so far almost no evidence for phase models in the area of unemployment" (1984, p.282). The phase models document a certain commonality of experience in reaction to job

loss, and in so doing, they make an important contribution to our understanding of unemployment. However, there is a need for caution in applying such models to real life given that job loss is a very individual experience with different ramifications for each person. Perhaps, while recognizing the common patterns of reaction to job loss, we should heed the words of Hepworth who notes that, "... the unemployed are by no means homogenous in their reactions to joblessness, and it should not be assumed that every unemployed person passes through a similar pattern of subjective experiences" (1980, p.145).

Unemployment - What is Lost?

The most obvious loss associated with unemployment (and frequently the most devastating one) is the loss of income. For the vast majority of people, unemployment results in a substantial reduction in income and means an inevitable decline in their standard of living. The loss of a job further deprives people financially because of the loss of associated benefits such as medical care, dental care and pension support. It is not unusual for the unemployed to encounter difficulties in making mortgage payments, in buying clothing for themselves and their children, and in paying for even simple forms of entertainment. Moreover, the expenses incurred in looking for another job may be very high, and be beyond their modest means. Furthermore, there is evidence to indicate that the majority of people who become unemployed are those who are likely to have fewer resources to begin with. For example, a study done in Edmonton by Krahn, Lowe and Tanner (1985) indicated that the jobless were more likely to be less-educated people from blue-collar jobs. For many of these people, prolonged unemployment results in severe economic hardship.

Unemployment insurance forms part of the social safety net intended to assist the poor, the disadvantaged, and the jobless in Canada. However, at a time when unemployment stands at record-high levels, government restraint measures are eroding unemployment insurance benefits. A report of the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto points out that, "...increased eligibility requirements have been used to limit the 'claim load' ...there have also been

reductions in benefit levels. People get less money for fewer weeks" (1982, p.1). Unemployment insurance was originally intended to assist people through relatively brief periods of unemployment. Currently, however, as unemployment becomes more prolonged, an increasing number of people are exhausting their U.I.C. entitlements. Many of these people are being forced to turn to welfare simply to survive: "...workers consider this the last step in a downward economic and social spiral" (Madonia, 1983, p.484).

The financial hardship which accompanies unemployment is clearly at the root of many other problems for individuals and families as the loss of a stable and sufficient income leads to increased anxiety. Fagin and Little emphasize this concern when they state that, "It cannot be stressed sufficiently that the main source of distress in the families of the unemployed is the uncertainty about regular, adequate income" (1984, p.214). As well, a paycheque is hard-earned money and represents social participation and ability; to deprive a person of these earnings is to deprive them of the sense of participation and control which previously derived from their income. Whereas an earned income generates a feeling of accomplishment and self-worth, reliance on assistance, be it unemployment insurance or welfare, tends to destroy self-respect and lower human dignity. As Muszynski commented, "Not to be valued, not to be useful to oneself or to society is one of the most stressful experiences that a person could have" (1984, p.209).

Many of the benefits associated with regular employment are also lost. The time structure and enforced activity imposed by a job are gone. "Most of the men we saw found immense difficulties in creating a framework which would impose on them a regular purposeful activity" (Fagin and Little, 1984 p.31). Unemployment causes a disruption in the patterns of social interaction as there is a tendency for the unemployed to withdraw from social contact with former job colleagues, even with those who have also lost their jobs (Muszynski, 1984).

While a person's reaction to losing a job is bound to be quite idiosyncratic, it is likely to be influenced by a number of important variables.

These variables may be viewed as mediating factors in that, in some measure, they will determine the nature and extent of one's reaction to unemployment. These mediating factors include the following:

Length of unemployment

Generally speaking, the more prolonged the period of unemployment the more damaging are the effects on psychological well-being (Hepworth, 1980; Hill, 1978; Marsden and Duff, 1975; Warr, 1983). Other research has noted that an increasing period of unemployment adversely influences a person's motivation to find work, often as a result of a growing fear of future rejections (Colledge and Bartholomew, 1980; Nelson, 1981).

Age and/or stage of the family life cycle

The relationship between age and the effects of unemployment has been shown to be curvilinear (Hepworth, 1980; Warr, 1983). That is, the experience of unemployment is likely to be more stressful and potentially more damaging to the psychological health of middle aged men rather than those who are younger or older. Warr relates this to the "greater financial strain among the middle-aged group who often have more demanding family commitments" (1983, p.307). Fagin and Little (1984) also comment that the degree of stress experienced by a family in which the male breadwinner is unemployed is related to the particular stage of the family life cycle.

Sex

Evidence regarding differences between men and women in their reaction to unemployment is rather limited as the majority of the research has been focused on men. However, Warr comments that "for single women or others who are principal wage earners, the pattern of effects is the same as for men" (1983, p. 308).

Financial situation

There are numerous references in the literature to the importance of financial situation in mediating the impact of joblessness. It stands to reason

that, the greater the economic deprivation generated by unemployment, the greater will be the psychological distress experienced. (Little, 1976; Muszynski, 1984; Shelton, 1985; Warr, 1984). More specifically, the availability of financial reserves, a positive credit rating, favorable severence pay and a spouse with a well-paying job will all help to cushion the financial strain of unemployment and hence, render the experience less devastating. Muszynski (1984) notes that the loss of one's house as a result of unemployment is a particularly stressful occurence.

Level of skill

There is evidence that level of skill influences a person's subjective reaction to unemployment. While there has been some disagreement about the precise nature of the relationship, the research suggests that less skilled individuals are likely to suffer more acutely from the effects of unemployment (Hepworth, 1980; Marsden and Duff, 1975).

Employment commitment

Another mediating variable is the strength of one's commitment to employment. Having frequently studied the effects of this variable, Warr comments that, "We have consistently found that strength of employment commitment is strongly positively associated with degree of psychological distress during unemployment..." (1984, p.307). It is interesting to note that Warr has also consistently found a high level of employment commitment among the jobless.

Social class

Looking at social class, Warr (1984) has discovered that working class people have more difficulty adjusting to unemployment than do middle-class people. He attributes this finding to the effects of greater financial strain and more difficulty in ability to fill one's time among working class jobless. Little's (1984) study of middle-class unemployed persons certainly supports the notion that, in general, the middle-class jobless encounter fewer negative impacts during unemployment.

Alternate interests

Whether or not the unemployed person has other interests and activities to occupy their time will also influence the psychological effects of joblessness. Both Hepworth (1980) and Warr (1984) have demonstrated that an ability to fill one's time meaningfully is an important factor in promoting better mental health during unemployment. Little (1976) also notes that the availability of alternate interests has a positive effect on well-being of the jobless.

Social support

The extent to which an unemployed person's needs for affection, esteem, approval, identity and security are met through a social support network of family and friends has been shown to be a significant factor in coping with the negative effects of unemployment (Cobb, 1976; Gore, 1978; Thoits, 1982). In her longitudinal investigation of physical and mental consequences of job loss, Gore (1978) found that the unemployed who had limited social supports were more likely to have a higher level of cholesterol and more symptoms of illness than those with a more extensive social support network.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE FAMILY

The majority of research on the effects of unemployment has focused on the jobless individual and has, for the most part, overlooked the inevitable impacts of unemployment on the family as a whole. Family research clearly supports the notion that a change in any member of a family will be accompanied by changes in the entire family (Fagin and Little, 1984; Montgomery, 1981). It stands to reason then that unemployment will affect all family members and may in fact be experienced as a family crisis. This view is increasingly reflected in recent literature which examines unemployment in the context of the family and documents the processes that family members go through in responding to job loss of the major breadwinner (Fagin and Little, 1984; Moen, 1983; Popay, 1984).

Statistics Canada, in its Labor Force catalogue, defines a family as "a group of two or more persons who are living together in the same dwelling and who are related by blood, marriage or adoption". Moen adds a sociological perspective to the definition: "The family is more than an aggregate of individuals who happen to live in the same dwelling, it is a unique social system that changes in both form and function over time" (1979, p.563).

As a dynamic social system, the family is characterized by two opposing forces: the tendency to strive to maintain stability and the tendency to develop and change. Hence, in responding to the unemployment of one of its members, a family will naturally attempt to minimize the impacts of this event and to maintain its equilibrium. At the same time, the family will be forced to adapt by reorganizing itself and developing new patterns and relationships.

It would be naive to suggest that the impacts of unemployment on the family are, without exception, negative. In fact, "There are some families and some individuals within families whose lives are enriched by unemployment..." (Fagin and Little, 1984, p.15). For these families, the increase in time spent together, the freedom from work-related tensions, the changes in roles and

relationships and the opportunities to pursue other interests may outweigh the negative consequences of job loss, at least initially. In some families, cohesion among members may increase as they rally together to cope with the stresses generated by unemployment (Moen, 1983). Nevertheless, for the vast majority of families, loss of employment results in severe economic and psychological tensions which jeopardize the well-being of the family and its members.

Clearly, just as individuals vary in their reactions to unemployment, so families will differ in how they respond to the joblessness of a family member. One factor which has some bearing on a family's reaction is their stage in the family life cycle.

The concept of family life cycle is based on the assumption that families tend to move through stages of development, each stage characterized by different goals, tasks and issues. Unemployment would, of course, have different impacts on families according to their stage of development. A couple with young children, for example, faces a different situation when unemployment occurs than does an older couple whose children have left home. Also, families in the initial stages of the life cycle are frequently less stable economically and may still be working out relationship issues. Unemployment for these families could well bring about sufficient stress to contribute to marriage breakdown. It should be noted that the usefulness of the concept of family life cycle in examining the effects of unemployment is limited to two-parent families in which the male breadwinner loses his job.

How Unemployment Affects Families

It has been clearly established that unemployment affects families but how and why do these effects occur? The family tensions and conflicts which are frequently generated by joblessness relate to a number of circumstances common to families experiencing unemployment. These include:

- economic deprivation
- change in family roles
- loss of status
- adjustment to more frequent contact
- change in the family's relationship with the outside world

The first two of these circumstances will be discussed below.

Economic deprivation

A basic assumption in our society is that families are responsible for providing for their members. Hence, the family functions as an economic unit which supports its members financially and purchases goods and services to meet its needs. For most families, economic support derives from the employment of one or more members. Loss of employment leads to a disruption of the family's economic function and as a result, threatens its very existence (C.M.H.A., 1983). If the duration of unemployment is short or if the unemployed person has easily marketable skills, the impact of joblessness will obviously be less traumatic. Social safety net income transfers such as unemployment insurance and social allowance were designed to provide short-term relief. However, these programs do not replace all of the income lost through unemployment, nor are all families necessarily eligible. Moreover, the shift from unemployment insurance to social allowance which many families experience with prolonged unemployment can have a devastating effect on the dignity and self-esteem of family members (C.M.H.A., 1983; Muszynski, 1984).

Families headed by single parent females tend to suffer the most severe hardship following job loss since there is no other breadwinner to fall back on (Moen, 1980). For those families who were just above the poverty line before unemployment (the working poor) and for those who have exhausted their unemployment insurance benefits, poverty is the inevitable result (Muszynski, 1984). According to Popay, "the poverty and deprivation which unemployment brings falls most heavily on those who are already the poorest, the least healthy and the most vulnerable members of our society" (1984, p.13).

Along with the sudden change in economic status, unemployment forces a change in lifestyle. In a study of unemployed blue-collar workers, Larson (1984) found that the majority of families reduced their expenditures on food, entertainment, gasoline and home energy consumption. He speculates that reducing food expenditures is a less visible sign of change in economic status and is therefore, a preferred option to wearing older or out-of-style clothing. In addition, the loss of a stable and sufficient income may force people to relinquish such family goals as home ownership or repairs, higher education for the children and retirement plans.

Young children are particularly affected by the economic hardship which accompanies unemployment. A loss of income to the family may mean for example, cutbacks on books, toys, lessons, recreation and preventive dental and health care (Moen, 1983). Finally, all family members will suffer from the threat to their security which results from the loss of a regular and adequate income.

Role change

The roles of family members, particularly those of the husband and wife, revolve around both work and family activities. Traditionally, the husband has assumed the role of family provider. Despite the major changes in sex roles which have occurred in recent decades and the entry of large numbers of women into the labor force, the traditional pattern in which the husband is the major breadwinner is still firmly entrenched. Power and authority, respect and self-esteem are all associated with this role (Voydanoff, 1984). Unemployment of the male breadwinner inevitably requires a change in roles and corresponding adjustments in power relations and self-image. Because differential sex roles are a basic feature of most marital relationships, such adjustments can prove to be difficult and stressful for both spouses.

In a study of unemployed blue-collar workers, Larson (1984) found that in families with a traditional sex role pattern, job loss resulted in increased tension in the marriage. The men in the sample held traditional views about role expectations and, when they were unable to meet these expectations, marital

strains were exacerbated. However, both Larson (1984) and Voydanoff (1984) conclude that if the unemployed husband is not perceived as a failure in his provider role, there will be less strain in the marriage. Moreover, it should be noted that, in a study of unemployed managers and professionals, Thomas, McCabe and Berry (1980) found that unemployment did not have a negative impact on the marital relationship. They attribute this finding in part to the greater role equality in many middle-class marriages.

Marital Instability

The economic hardship and psychological stress which accompany unemployment will inevitably lead to strains in the marital relationship. However, not all marriages will have difficulty in coping with these strains. Research suggests that, in general, unemployment tends to reinforce the marital relationship which already exists in that people in close relationships will become closer while those in relationships characterized by social distance will move even further away from each other (Madge, 1983; Marchand, 1983). The nature of a couple's response to loss of employment will also be determined by such factors as the duration of unemployment, the couple's financial circumstances and their role expectations and behavior.

There can be no doubt that many marital relationships are seriously affected by unemployment (Becker et al., 1977; Bishop, 1980; Larson, 1984; MacDonald, 1981). Anxiety over finances, increased social isolation, loss of self-esteem and disorganization of family roles, combine to exacerbate marital tensions and hence to threaten the stability of the marital relationship. Some of these relationships are moved toward dissolution while in others, the stress is internalized and is manifested in such pathological behavior as spouse or child abuse. Both types of responses will be discussed below.

It is not easy to measure marital stability or lack of stability. Divorce is commonly seen as reflecting instability but in fact, divorce is only one indication of marital instability. Moreover, the link between divorce and unemployment remains confused because of the large number of variables which come into play. Social changes such as liberalized divorce laws, increased numbers of childless couples, increased female participation in the labor force, higher pay for women and enhanced opportunities for remarriage are all factors which contribute to the rising divorce rate (Becker et al., 1977). Determining a cause and effect relationship between unemployment and divorce is further hampered by the complexity of marital interaction. Nevertheless, there have been a number of attempts to examine the relationship between marital breakdown and loss of employment using both aggregate and individual-level data.

A long-standing and widely-accepted belief in the area of family sociology is that divorce rates tend to decline in times of economic recession and to increase during periods of greater prosperity (South, 1985). This would imply of course, a negative relationship between divorce and unemployment. A plausible explanation for this suggestion is that, in times of economic recession, people frequently lack the wherewithall to formally dissolve their marriages.

However, the belief that unemployment is associated with fewer divorces is not uniformly supported by the research. A study conducted in Israel by Berman revealed a significant positive relationship between divorce and unemployment. He notes that, "As unemployment increases, the number of divorces per 100 marriages increases and as economic growth is lower, number of divorces per 100 marriages is greater" (1982, p.103). South likewise contends that the correlation between divorce rates and unemployment rates is both positive and statistically significant. Based on a multi-variate, time-series analysis of post war U.S. data, and using a one-year time lag, he found that, "The divorce rate tends to fall following periods of relative prosperity (at least as measured by low unemployment rates) and tends to rise following periods of contraction" (1985, p.35).

Miao (1974), on the other hand, notes that a relationship between unemployment and marital instability (as measured by divorce rates) is present only until 1957 and thereafter disappears for white Americans. She attributes this finding to changes in marital and sexual roles which no longer emphasize the economic rewards associated with marriage. However, Miao does allow that a clearer relationship exists between unemployment and rates of marital separation. In another study, Ross and Sawhill (1975) using individual survey data, found that separation rates were at least twice as high among couples in which the husband experienced serious unemployment during the three years preceding the survey than among couples who did not experience joblessness. From their findings, they conclude that a steady income promotes marital stability more than does a high income. Hetherington comes to a similar conclusion noting that, "... poorer parents and those with unstable incomes are more likely to divorce" (1979, p.854).

In his review of literature in this area, Larson (1984) states unequivocally that unemployment can lead to divorce. Larson's conclusion was supported by Becker, Landes and Michael (1977) in that their economic analysis of marital instability showed that, in extended periods of unemployment, there tended to be an increase in the probability of divorce. Kitson and Sussman (1982) studied marital complaints cited by spouses as reasons for their divorce. They found that employment problems, including loss of employment, ranked in the top third of all reasons cited by women for marital breakdown.

As mentioned previously, the stresses brought on by unemployment, rather than leading to marital dissolution, may be internalized by the family. One manifestation of such stress is wife abuse. However, very little is known about the relationship between unemployment of the male breadwinner and the incidence of wife abuse. Parke and Collmer (1975) cite one study conducted by Steinmetz and Straus (1974) in England which showed a sharp rise in reports of wife beating during a six-month period when unemployment increased rapidly. These findings led Parke and Collmer to suggest that violent behavior is most likely to be elicited by the sudden and unexpected occurrence of unemployment.

The following discussion on child abuse will shed some light on the family dynamics associated with unemployment and family violence.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Research examining the relationship between unemployment and child abuse and neglect has focused on stress-inducing social conditions. Unemployment is seen, not as the cause of child abuse and neglect, but as an event which creates stress, which in turn precipitates abusive behavior (Garbarino, 1976; Parke and Collmer, 1975; U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, 1983).

There are a number of ways in which unemployment can create stress within a family:

- A reduction in income and a concommitant decline in standard of living may produce feelings of frustration and anger (Bottom and Lancaster, 1981; Parke and Collmer, 1975; Steinberg et al., 1981).

- A reorganization of family roles and loss of status for the male breadwinner may create tensions (Galdston, 1965; U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, 1983).

- An increase in parent-child contact may generate tensions as well as providing more opportunities for child abuse (Justice and Duncan, 1977; Steinberg et al., 1981).

Evidence suggests that there is a high risk of child abuse when there is economic distress. For example, overall rates of abuse are higher in regions with a high proportion of low-income families (Garbarino and Sherman, 1980). A study cited by Pelton (1978) shows that in one sample of abusing parents, 42.7% were receiving public assistance and 10.7% were "financially comfortable". In 58% of the families, the wage-earner had never been continuously employed for any two-

year period. In a study of child abuse and neglect in Britain, Creighton (1979) found that marital discord was the most frequently mentioned stress factor associated with abuse. The next three most frequently mentioned factors were unemployment, financial problems and poor self-image on the part of the parents. Stress factors are frequently co-mingled as reflected by the fact that more than one-half of the families studied indicated the presence of four or more factors. The relationship between family stress and child-abuse was also examined by Justice and Duncan (1977) who noted that significantly more abusive parents had undergone greater life-stress than had non-abusive parents. The major stressors which appeared to be related to abuse were: work related problems (including loss of employment), change in financial state and change in living conditions.

Unemployment and adverse economic conditions are clearly tied to family stress and hence to the incidence of abuse.

> Children become the special victims of their parents' unemployment. Serious declines in school performance, increases in malnutrition, child abuse and domestic violence and a worsening of parent-child relationships are all real testimony to the real costs paid by unemployed families. (U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, 1983, p.1).

The authority and respect that attend the breadwinner status for males may be lost when the former wage earner becomes unemployed. This may lead to attempts on the part of the husband-father to "assert greater authority in the family as a way of re-establishing his status and self-esteem" (Parke and Collmer, 1975, p.528). Galdson conducted a five-year study of young children admitted to a hospital in Boston as a consequence of child abuse. He observed that a major reversal in the traditional roles of the parents was a feature common to a significant number of abusing parents. "Many of the fathers were unemployed or worked part-time, often alternating with their wives who also worked." (1965, p.442).

It should not be assumed that unemployed fathers are the sole abusers of their children. Research by Gelles and Hargreaves (1981) reveals that working wives shoulder additional burdens when their husbands are unemployed and that this type of situation is highly correlated with mothers abusing their children.

When a male breadwinner loses his job, he not only has to cope with the stresses associated with unemployment, but also with the stresses arising from increased contact with his children. A Canadian study of unemployed fathers of young children found that there was a direct association between the length of unemployment and the negative elements in the unemployed father's description of his children. Those fathers who were unemployed for a prolonged period and cared for their children all day, tended to describe their children in particularly negative terms (Johnson and Abranovitch, 1985). In their comparison of abusing and non-abusing parents, Justice and Duncan observe that unemployed fathers caring for their children at home is a situation which is "perilously stressful" in terms of potential child-abuse (1977, p.54). If the finding of these studies and that of Gelles and Hargreaves (cited above) are valid, the consequences for children in this type of situation are serious.

Other research strongly supports the relationship between unemployment and child abuse. In a long-term study of two communities, Steinberg, Catalano and Dooley (1981) noted that a decline in the work force was significantly related to an increase in reported child abuse in both communities. In an examination of domestic disturbance calls in a U.S. city, abusers were found to be unemployed in 26% of reported incidents in 1981 and in 34% of incidents in 1982 (U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, 1983). Gil (1970) studied a sample of fathers involved in child abuse and found that only 52.5% had been employed throughout the year preceding the abuse incident. Nearly 12% of the fathers were unemployed at the time of the abuse, a rate three times as high as the national unemployment rate at the time (Parke and Collmer, 1975). In his study of child abuse and neglect in America, Light observes that,

> ... the variable that shows up most frequently as somehow related to child abuse is father's unemployment. This finding confirms a widely held theory that family stress, both emotional and financial, related to unemployment, ties in to incidence of abuse (1973, p.588).

In summary, the social-psychological costs of unemployment are borne not only by jobless individuals but also by their families. While not all families are adversely affected in the long run by unemployment, many suffer acutely from the financial hardship and psychological stress which frequently accompany unemployment, particularly that of the male breadwinner. The result may be family breakdown or internalization of the stress as manifested in such behavior as family violence. The available evidence provides support for the notion that marital instability is exacerbated by unemployment to the extent that marital dissolution may result. Similarly, the relationship between unemployment and child abuse is strongly upheld by the research findings. The situation is effectively summed up by the following statement:

> Loss of employment is a major life trauma. It shakes the economic, interpersonal and social security of the individual, the family and the community. Loss of income results in drastic lifestyle changes, inability to support dependents, anger, hopelessness, loss of self-worth and fear. Loss of hard-earned possessions often occurs. The stress is profound. Exacerbated by the socialized violence and aggression of our society and the rigid role expectations we have of the 'breadwinner of the family', the strain of unemployment can be a devastating catalyst of violent family breakdown (U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, 1983, p.27).

The Alberta Situation

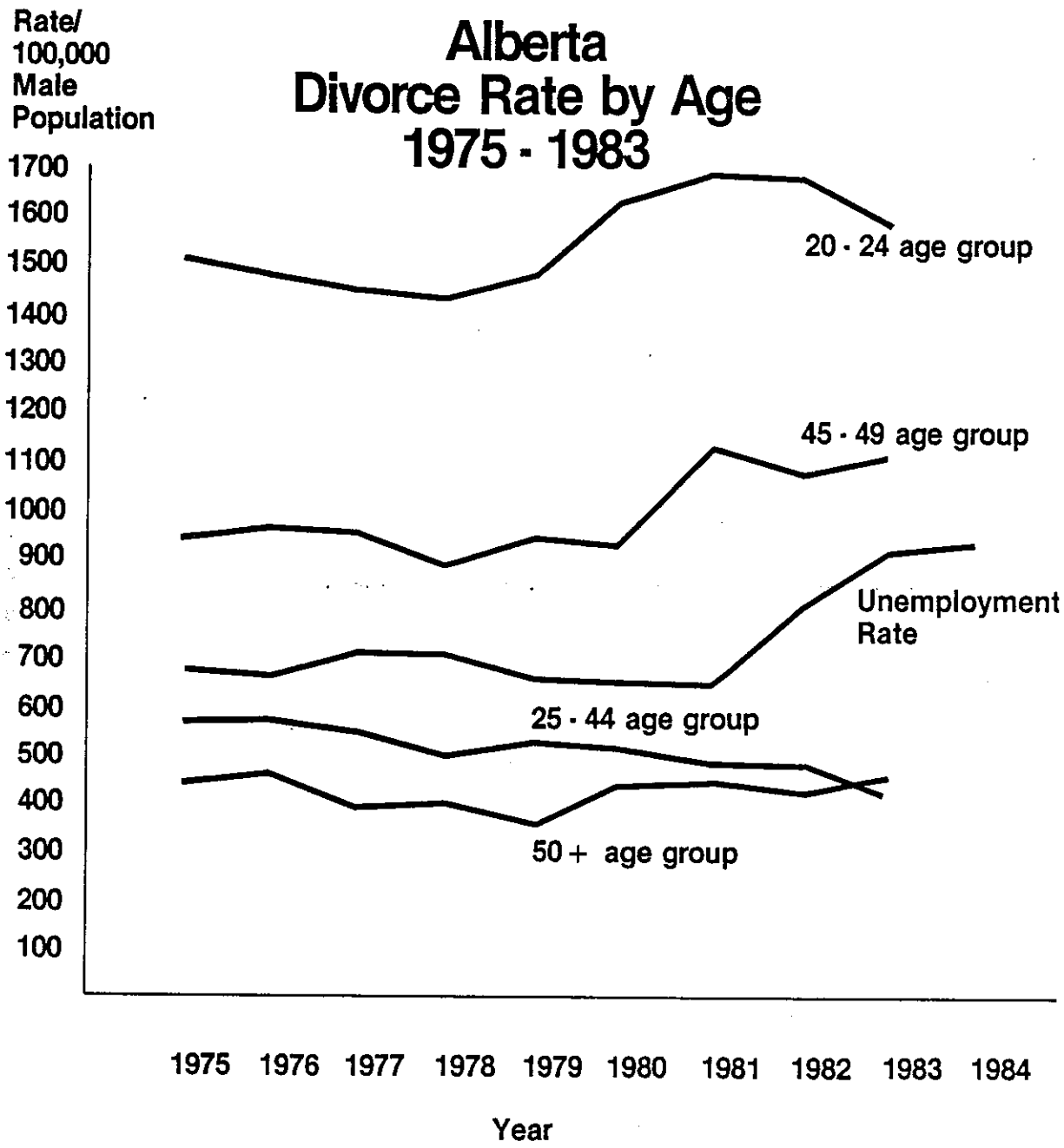
Statistics for Alberta were examined to determine whether the relationships found in the research conducted elsewhere held true for Alberta. It

should be noted however, that this attempt is, of necessity, a cursory one and that a more sophisticated analysis would be required for definitive results.

First, the divorce rates by age and sex were examined. Comparison with unemployment rates was hampered by the fact that figures are available only up to 1983. Because unemployment in Alberta underwent its sharpest rise in 1982, it is difficult to determine any meaningful patterns. As figure 4 shows, the divorce rate for 20-24 year old males has declined steadily (with the exception of 1979) from a high of 564.9 divorces per 100,000 in 1975 to 432.7 in 1983. The fact that marriage rates for this age group have also declined may be a relevant factor. The rate for the 50+ age group on the other hand, increased from 414.4 per 100,000 to 456.9 in the same period. From 1976 to 1978, the divorce rate for 25-44 year old males declined while the unemployment rate increased. As the unemployment rate decreased from 1978 to 1981, the divorce rate increased dramatically from 1,426 per 100,000 to 1,694.3. The period from 1981 to 1983, a time when unemployment jumped from 3.8% to 10.8% was a period of levelling off and then declining divorce rates for this group. It may be that examination of the statistics for the last two years, the use of time-lag analysis or individual-level research on Alberta samples would reveal more discernable patterns in the relationship between unemployment and divorce in Alberta. Data on separation rates might also be more relevant.

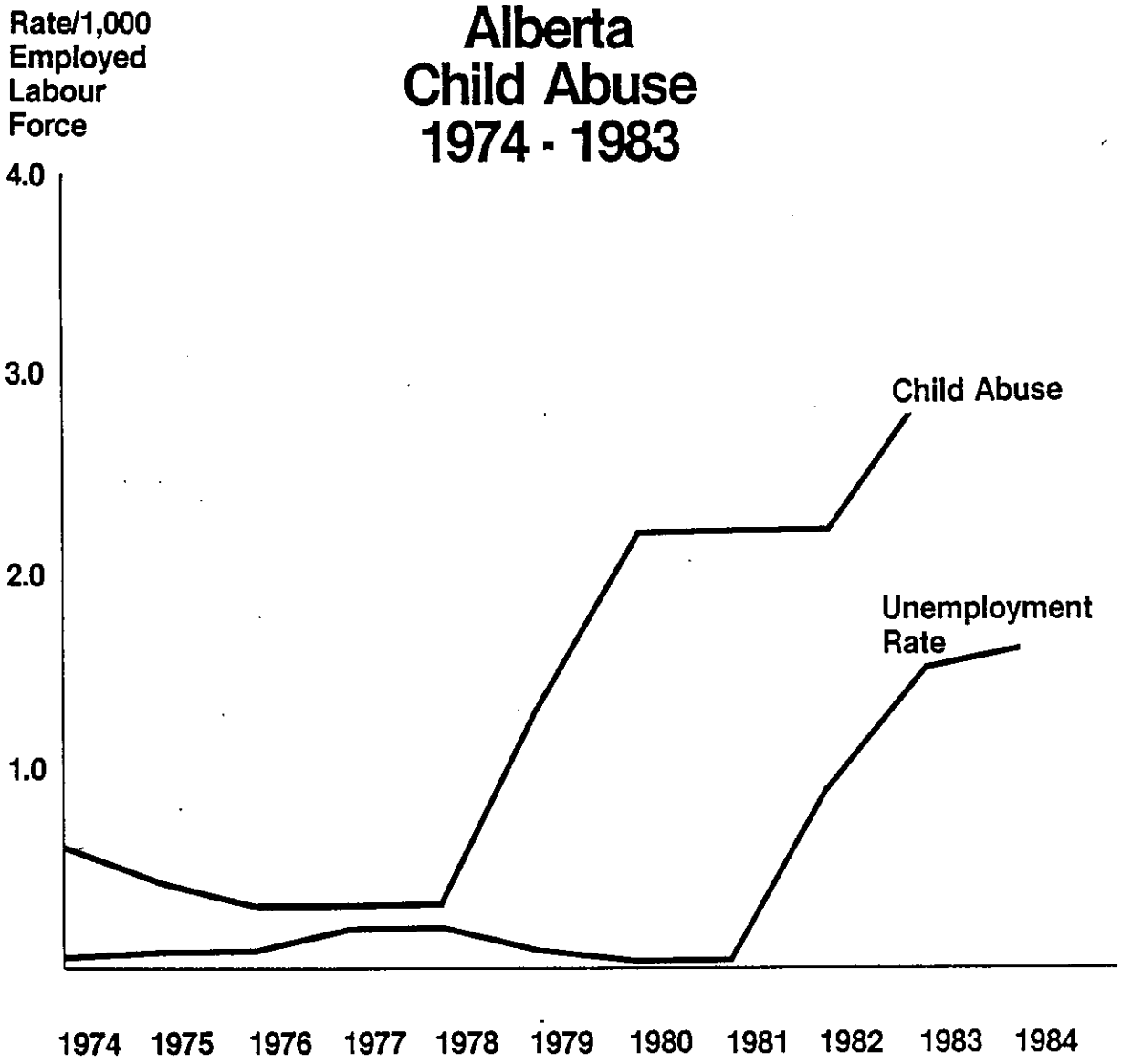
Examination of unemployment and child-abuse statistics in Alberta does not indicate any significant direct relationship. As indicated by figure 5, the biggest increases in the child abuse rate took place during Alberta's boom years, increasing from a rate of 0.3 per 1,000 employed persons in the labor force in 1978 to 2.2 in 1980. After a period of stability from 1980 to 1982, the rate increased from 2.2 in 1982 to 2.8 in 1983. It is not possible to say whether this is due to increases in the unemployment rate or to other factors such as increased public awareness and reporting of child abuse. Of greater value would be a study of abusing parents to determine the extent to which unemployment plays a role in the incidence of child abuse in Alberta.

FIGURE 4



Source: Calculated from *Statistics Canada data*

FIGURE 5



Source: *Alberta Social Services and Community Health*

UNEMPLOYMENT AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Research conducted in the United States in the past two decades has produced strong evidence of a statistical linkage between low socioeconomic status and physical and mental ill health. The work of Dr. Harvey Brenner has been particularly significant in this regard. While he is careful to avoid the suggestion of a direct causal relationship between unemployment and physical health, Brenner has demonstrated that, "economic policy decisions have a substantial effect on many aspects of societal health and well being" (Joint Economic Committee 1984a, p.5). His recent study, which confirmed many of the findings in his previous research, found important relationships between unemployment and nine indicators of social stress. For example, Brenner showed that the 14% increase in unemployment in the United States in 1973-74 was linked to a 2.3% increase in the overall mortality rate, a 2.8% increase in the cardiovascular mortality rate and a 1.4% increase in the cirrhosis of the liver mortality rate.

In an early study, Brenner (1979) introduced the principle of the acceleration of stress to explain the positive linkage between unemployment and mortality. Brenner's argument was that unemployment can begin a chain of stressful life events, including divorce, bankruptcy and migration, all of which will increase the susceptibility of the unemployed to stress-related chronic illnesses. It is this acceleration of stress that also accounts for the two or three year time lag before the full accumulated impact of unemployment is really felt.

Brenner's approach and his conclusions have understandably drawn considerable criticism. British researchers (Stern, 1982; Ramsden and Smee, 1981) were quick to point out that a statistical relationship between unemployment and mortality did not necessarily prove causality. As one researcher commented, "... it hardly needs social surveys to show that unemployment is, for almost all of the unemployed an extremely unpleasant, worrying and depressing experience. It is frequently psychologically damaging though such effects seem rarely to persist

on returning to work" (Stern, p.421). Other writers have pointed out that those whose health is bad are more likely to lose their jobs and are also likely to have more difficulty in finding new ones (Ramsden & Smee, 1981). As well, it has been suggested that there are a number of important variables such as age, income, educational level, diet and housing, that are associated with poor health and mortality. It is therefore very difficult to distinguish the separate effects and determine the actual connection. While these writers accept that unemployment does have an adverse effect on health, they believe that there is no evidence which can be used to estimate the form, the extent or the timing of its impact (Gravelle et al., 1981; Cook et al., 1982).

One of Brenner's strongest critics, Joseph Eyer, has shown that a graphical comparison of the U.S. mortality rates and the national unemployment level over time reveals that mortality has usually declined when unemployment has been rising (Joint Economic Committee, 1984b). Eyer is particularly critical of Brenner's argument of a time lag in measuring the full impact of higher levels of unemployment as he believes that the influence of unemployment on mortality and ill health can only be observed in the short term. Eyer quoted a major study by Kasl and Cobb (1980) which did not reveal a long term continuing pattern of physical stress reactions to unemployment. In their two year study, Kasl and Cobb found that increases in serum cholesterol and blood pressure were sensitive to acute stress, rather than long term stress. However, they were cautious about their findings because of the narrowness of the sample they used and the limitations of the research design.

In an attempt to verify Brenner's hypothesis, Heller and Kasoff (1980) examined mortality and unemployment rates over a ten year period for Dayton, Ohio (Joint Economic Committee, 1984b). They discovered three separate sharp increases in unemployment levels during the period studied. It was found that, after each increase, heart disease and cerebrovascular mortality rates, particularly for males aged 45-64, began to rise in precisely the pattern hypothesized by Brenner. Both rates peaked approximately two years after unemployment was at its highest, and then gradually declined to the previous levels.

A further concern about Brenner's approach is that he deals exclusively with aggregated data on a national scale and therefore, it is impossible to establish firm conclusions about the health of individuals who become unemployed. While the causal connection between unemployment and poor physical health cannot be firmly established, the results of various studies that have examined the health of unemployed men and women have been revealing.

In a recent study conducted in Britain into the health of unemployed middle-aged men, it was found that the unemployed had far more physical illness than did the employed (Cook et al., 1982). In another study, the unemployed subjects showed a significant deterioration in their health during unemployment and almost half of them felt that this was a consequence of job loss and increased anxiety (Warr and Jackson, 1984). The various health problems that were identified included angina, arthritis, bronchitis, headaches, high blood pressure and ulcers. However it is also significant that the study identified a number of unemployed persons whose health had improved as a result of losing their job, particularly when their previous work had involved hazardous chemicals, dust or unsatisfactory working conditions.

In a 1970 study, Kasl and Cobb conducted a longitudinal investigation into the health conditions associated with unemployment, measuring such items as blood pressure, pulse rate and general state of health. All subjects in the study were stably employed married men, some of whom were subsequently laid off while others remained employed. The first sub-group was followed through the stages of employment, layoff, unemployment and re-entry to the work-force and compared on the selected indicators with the employed sub-group. Kasl and Cobb found that blood pressure levels increased during the stressful periods of job loss anticipation, unemployment and subsequent probationary employment. As well, it was found that there was a correlation between sustained high blood pressure levels and a severe unemployment experience, low self esteem and prolonged personal stress.

The important role that a network of social supports can play in ameliorating the impact of unemployment was well demonstrated in a study by Susan Gore (1978). She found that in a study of 100 urban and rural working class males who had been laid off, the men who reported that they felt needed and accepted by their families and friends were less depressed and less likely to become physically ill. The unsupported men showed greater fluctuation in measures of serum cholesterol and more reported symptoms of illness than the men who felt that they had support. She also noted that, although the rural men experienced a longer duration of unemployment than their urban counterparts, they had fewer abnormal changes in their health and they tended to return to normal much more quickly. Gore attributed these differences to higher levels of social support in rural communities as a result of existing ethnic ties and increased concern shown by neighbours and friends.

The need to maintain social contact and support was also highlighted in a study of the health related behaviours of a sample of unemployed youth in Sydney, Australia (Turtle and Ridley, 1984). It was found that the long term unemployed were characterized by heavier smoking, reduced participation in sports and increased drug use. As well, long term unemployed females were inclined to drink more and visit the doctor more frequently than their short term unemployed peers. The study showed that the males who were included among the long term unemployed were much more likely to have lost contact with their friends and to have changed their drinking, eating and sleeping habits.

The available evidence therefore provides very strong support for the argument that rising levels of unemployment are closely associated with increasing mortality and ill health, although the existence of a direct causal relationship is still in dispute. Both the national aggregate data and the studies that have examined the unemployment circumstances of individuals show that a critical factor which influences the health-related outcomes of a period of unemployment is the person's capacity to deal with the accumulated stress that almost inevitably is present. Research evidence suggests that the possibility of a stress related illness occuring during, or even following, a period of prolonged

unemployment is likely to be much less if the unemployed person's self esteem has been maintained, particularly through the support and understanding of family and friends.

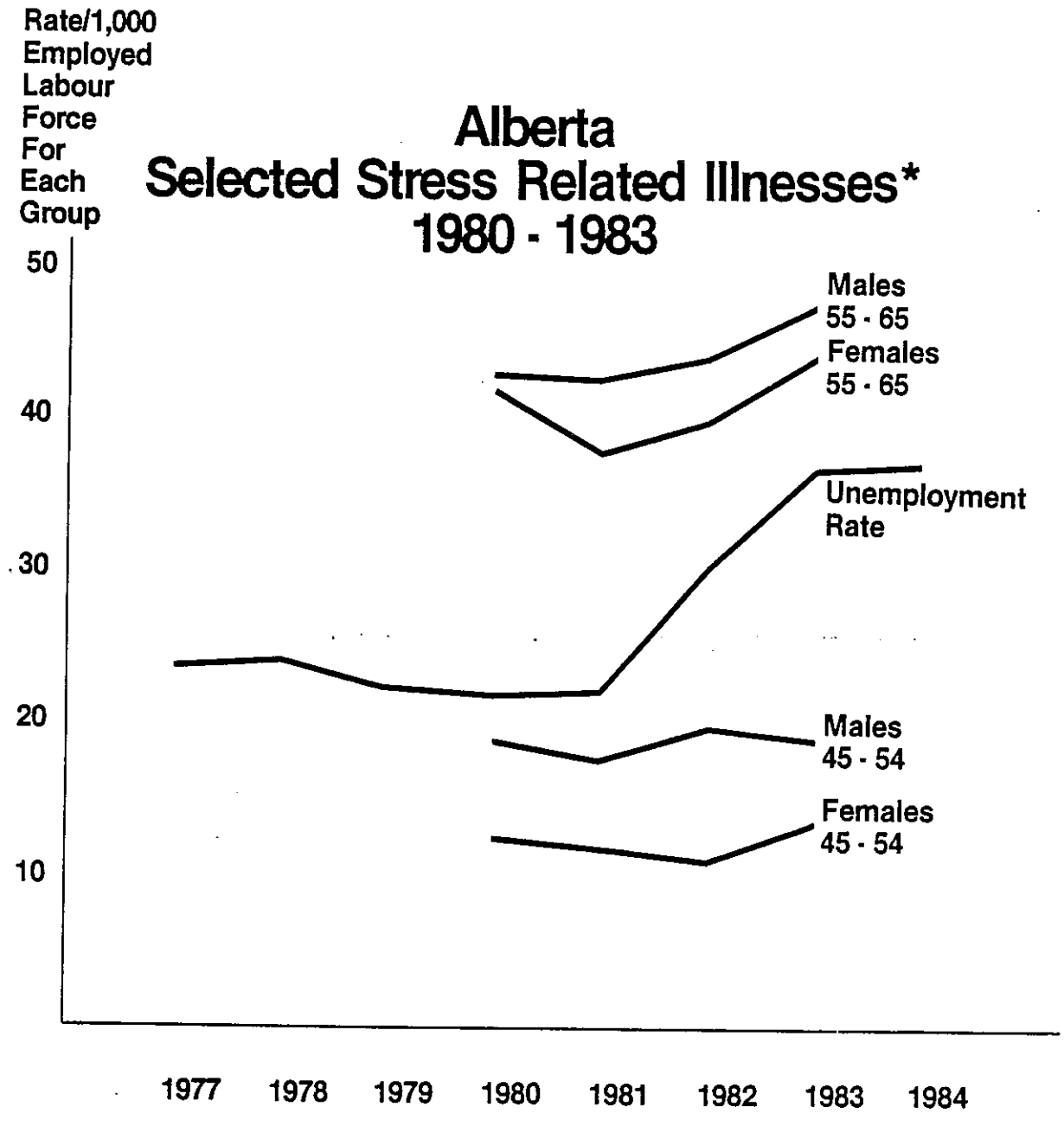
The Alberta Situation

The research findings on the relationship between unemployment and physical health were considered in the context of Alberta's rising levels of unemployment. Two important indicators were examined - the incidence of selected stress related illnesses and the utilization of the services of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC).

Incidence of Selected Stress Related Illnesses

On the basis of the previous research evidence, four stress related illnesses were identified - hypertension, ischemic heart disease, ulcers and cirrhosis of the liver. A statistical analysis of the incidence of these particular illnesses was conducted for the years 1979/80 to 1982/83. It was found that there has been a significant increase in reported incidence of these illnesses since 1981, particularly for older men and women. For women between 55 and 65 there has been a 25% increase between 1981 and 1983, while men of the same age have experienced a 20% increase. As well, men between the ages of 25 and 54 showed a 13% increase in the incidence of these stress related illnesses in the same two years. In figure 6, the rate of occurence of selected stress related illnesses for the two older age categories is shown on the basis of the employed labour force for each group. The employed labour force was selected as an appropriate measure as it would allow for the inclusion of those who had dropped out of the labour force because of retirement or discouragement. Again, it confirms that in 1983, men between 55 and 65 had the highest rate at 47.63 per 1,000, up from 42.64 in 1981. Women of the same age had a rate of 43.97 per 1,000 in 1983.

FIGURE 6



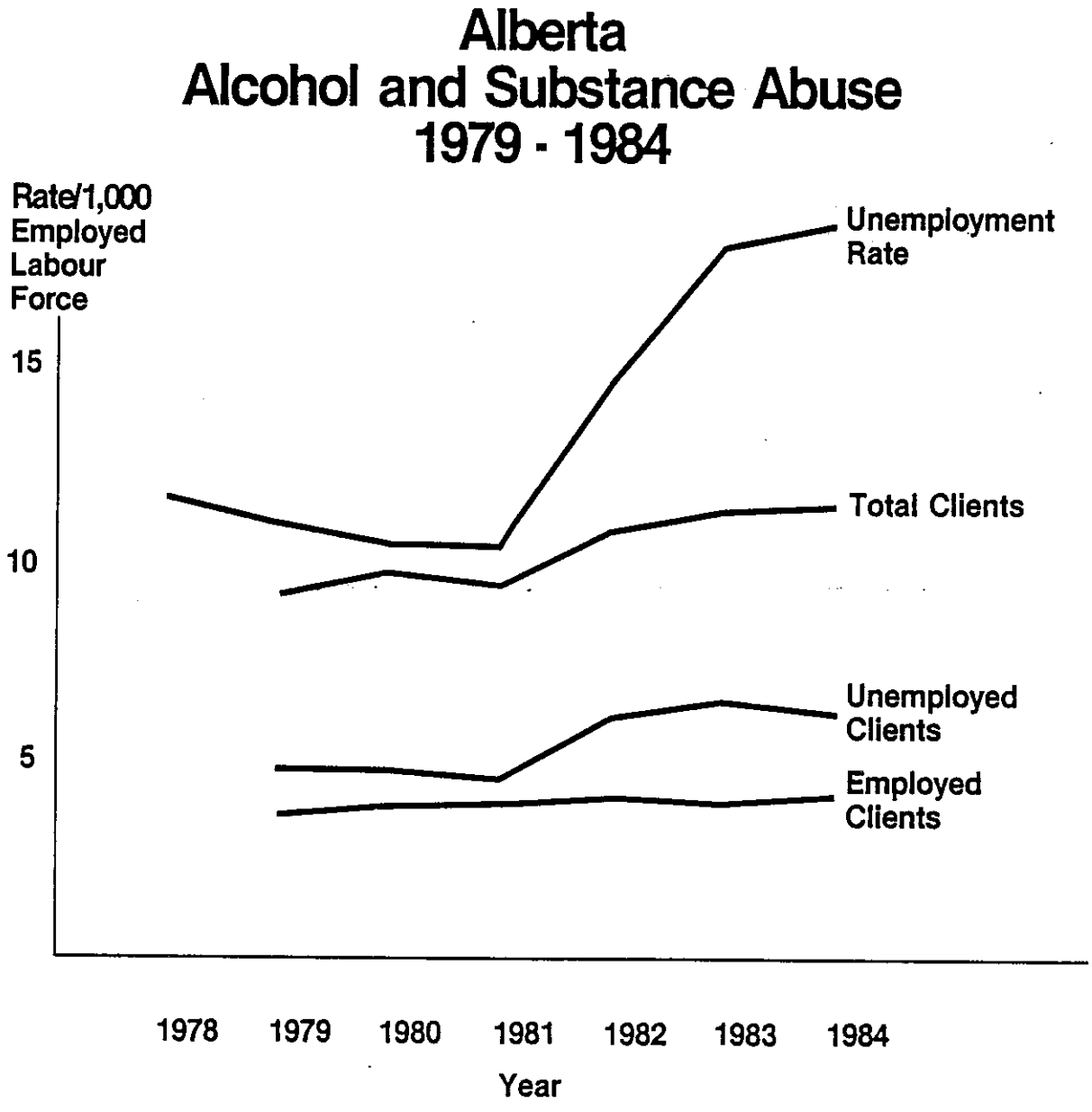
*Includes hypertension, ischemic heart disease, ulcers, and cirrhosis of the liver.

Source: *Policy Development Division, Alberta Hospitals and Medical Care*

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

The literature has suggested that the additional stress that is likely to result from periods of unemployment, as well as the evident boredom that comes from inactivity, will encourage an increase in the consumption of alcohol. From a health perspective, this may lead to an increasing number of people requiring help with alcohol related problems. In order to investigate this situation for Alberta, the study examined the number of admissions into AADAC treatment facilities for 1979 to 1984. These included the detoxification centres, inpatient facilities and outpatient services. It was also possible to identify the employment status of the clients involved. Figure 7 shows that the number of unemployed clients using the AADAC facilities increased significantly between 1981 and 1983, the period of greatest increase in the Alberta unemployment rate. By comparison, the number of employed clients during the same two years remained unchanged. It would be useful to monitor these trends over a longer time period in order to substantiate the relationships between unemployment and physical health.

FIGURE 7



Source: *Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission*

UNEMPLOYMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH

During the past decade, general agreement has been reached on two fundamental points - that mental illness is inversely related to socio-economic status and that economic change is associated with a variety of stress related outcomes. However, it cannot be stated with any degree of certainty that the correlation of mental illness and reduced economic circumstances is any more than a strong association.

The considerable research that has been conducted into the relationship between mental health and unemployment has generally used one of three basic approaches. These are aggregate regional or national data, community surveys based on information gathered from a scientifically selected group of individuals and case studies which involve intensive interviewing and testing of a small non-random group of individuals. Significantly, recent research has used a combination of these approaches in order to establish more definitely the direction and the strength of the mental health/unemployment relationship.

The research of Dr. Harvey Brenner has again led the way in the use of aggregate data. In his study Mental Illness and the Economy (Joint Economic Committee, 1984b), Brenner showed that there was a consistent relationship between increases in mental hospital admissions and adverse economic changes, especially at a lag of one to two years. His research correlated admissions to all of the mental hospitals in New York state for the period 1914-1967 with the state's manufacturing employment rate for the same period. When he examined the mental health admissions in more detail, Brenner found that the relationship was strongest for men aged 25 to 65. He also identified that a person's economic status, ethnic background and marital status affected the strength of the relationship.

In later work, Brenner extended his analysis of mental hospital admissions and economic change by using national statistics. Using multiple

regression analysis to test the impact of a number of economic variables on mental hospital admissions, he showed that admissions were strongly and positively related to the rate of unemployment and the rate of inflation for the period 1940 to 1971. In particular, Brenner's evidence showed that middle-aged, high economic status males were much more likely to be admitted to a mental hospital during periods of economic downturn than any other group. Brenner concluded that this was strong support for his view that the loss of socio-economic status, or the loss of the associated resources and opportunities, is a major factor in the incidence of many types of mental illness.

In a critique of Brenner's findings, Marshall and Funch (1979) were particularly concerned that, in using mental hospital admissions as an indicator of mental illness, Brenner had failed to account for changes in the capacity of the mental hospitals to accept new patients. However, when they analyzed mental hospital admission rates and incorporated a method of controlling for hospital capacity, they confirmed that for the working age population there was in fact a strong correlation between admission rates and declining economic conditions.

A second study correlated monthly state unemployment statistics and admissions to mental health facilities for a period of eight years (Ahr et al., 1981). Again it was found that there was a strong positive relationship between unemployment and admissions. Notably, the strongest correlation was found between readmissions and increasing levels of unemployment. This suggests that the availability of community care as an alternative to admission to a mental hospital is particularly critical during periods of economic adversity.

Major criticisms of Brenner's findings have also come from the research of Catalano and Dooley (1977). Their study contained aggregated regional data on mental health admissions and survey material that examined life events and preadmission symptoms of mental illness. It was found that both the rate of mental health admissions and the existence of preadmission symptoms of mental illness were positively related to undesirable economic change, such as an

increase in the rate of unemployment. However, Catalano and Dooley did not believe that their findings supported Brenner's hypothesis of 'proaction', which proposed that economic change introduces stresses that eventually push vulnerable people to the point of requiring hospitalization for mental illness. Instead, they introduced an 'uncovering' hypothesis which suggests that increases in mental hospital admissions during periods of economic decline are the result of increased intolerance for the mentally ill in families that are themselves facing economic hardship.

Another important study that adopted a longitudinal survey approach in investigating the relationship between unemployment and mental health was conducted in the United Kingdom by Stokes and Cochrane (1984). Using a sample of 48 men and women who had lost their jobs as a result of a plant closure, the researchers conducted structured interviews every four weeks for 24 weeks. The results were then compared with those from a matched control group of 48 men and women who remained employed during the period of the study. Various measures were used in the interviews to monitor the feelings and experiences of those who were unemployed. The research found that the unemployed showed higher levels of stress and mild psychiatric disturbance and were much more likely to be at risk from serious psychological problems.

The study also showed that despite being laid off from their jobs, the unemployed tended to view their situation as an indication of personal failure, and generally had much lower self-esteem than those who remained in work. As well, the unemployed expressed higher levels of frustration as a result of their unmet expectations. Notably, the research found no significant evidence that the psychological condition of the unemployed became worse as their period of unemployment lengthened, although it was pointed out that as the study monitored the unemployed for only 24 weeks, it was possible that the more damaging psychological impact could well occur beyond that point in time. It was also found that while the level of marital and family satisfaction was not influenced by the experience of unemployment, the employed reported feeling that they had more authority within the family than did the unemployed. Stokes

and Cochrane suggested in their report that this concern about exercising authority within the family was probably related to the unemployed being denied the opportunity to assert themselves outside the home. Unemployed women also tended to cope better than unemployed men with a lengthening period without work, possibly because their family responsibilities provided them with an alternate source of self-esteem and status.

In a major U.S. study, Kasl and Cobb (1980) examined the effects of two plant closures, one urban and one rural, on the mental health of terminated workers. The findings for the sample group of 100 men were compared with those for a control group of employed men at four other manufacturing plants. Interviews and psychological tests to monitor mental well-being were conducted at six month intervals for a period of two years.

On the basis of the various mental health variables that they examined (depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, anger, resentment and suspicion) Kasl and Cobb concluded that "the mental health impact of job loss and unemployment appears to be a limited one, both in terms of magnitude and in terms of duration" (Joint Economic Committee, 1984b, p.54). They did notice, however, that those who were unemployed as a result of the urban plant closure were more likely to show symptoms of mental health difficulties than were those from the rural environment; presumably because the social networks in the city are more dependent on the work place than is the case in a smaller rural community.

The findings of Kasl and Cobb tend to contradict the earlier research on the relationship between unemployment and mental health. However, the researchers offered some explanations for these apparent contradictions. They suggested that the low level of satisfaction with the previous job and the limited economic loss that resulted from the period of unemployment were major reasons why the terminated workers did not experience more negative outcomes. As well, the researchers found that almost all of their respondents were back at work, in jobs that were similar in pay and status to their earlier jobs, within six months of the original plant closures. This does suggest that while unemployment can be

the cause of significant mental health difficulties recovery from depression and anxiety can be relatively rapid once the person concerned has returned to work.

It is also of interest that the research conducted by Kasl and Cobb produced a book of case studies of those who lost their jobs in one of the plants. The fact that this book, entitled Termination, showed a rather different picture from the statistically significant findings reported in the structured study, prompted a telling comment from the two researchers.

> "In the psychological sphere the personal anguish experienced by the men and their families does not seem adequately documented by the statistics of deprivation and change in effective state. Those of us who visited these men in their homes feel that what we saw is somehow better represented in Termination. This is not saying that effects in this area were not observed, it is merely that the numbers don't seem commensurate with the very real suffering that we observed" (Joint Economic Committee, June, 1984).

Case studies of groups of unemployed have been particularly important sources of research information in understanding the possible impact of unemployment on mental health. As well, case studies have tended to identify the type of resources and support that might help in the amelioration of the psychological difficulties engendered by unemployment.

The study conducted by Zawadski and Lazarsfeld in Poland in the early 1930's is still regarded as a classic example of this approach (Zawadski, 1935). The researchers encouraged unemployed workers to write autobiographical accounts of their experiences by offering prizes for the most complete and readable presentations. In all, 57 autobiographies were selected for study. Quoting extensively from the writings of the unemployed, Zawadski and Lazarsfeld identified four basic mental attitudes that characterised the unemployed - the unbroken, the resigned, the distressed and the apathetic. The researchers also identified that feelings of humiliation and of being superfluous

were very common among the unemployed.

These findings were confirmed in a second major study undertaken by Lazarsfeld and Eisenberg (Eisenberg, 1938). In reviewing the research that had been conducted to date, the authors observed that a common conclusion was that unemployment tends to make people more emotionally unstable than they were when they were employed. As well as threatening an individual's economic security, unemployment was very likely to bring on a loss of morale, self-confidence, prestige, and a common sense of values. Significantly, the research examined by Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld also suggested that while unemployment was likely to have a negative impact on an individual's mental stability, a return to work would bring a rapid improvement in their emotional well-being.

Despite the extensive case study research into the psychological impact of unemployment in the 1930's, it was not until the mid 1970's, when it became more evident that widespread unemployment had become a permanent feature of western society, that similar research into the issue of mental health and unemployment began to arouse further interest. In Britain, Marsden and Duff (1975) carried out an in-depth study of 12 unemployed families and suggested that less skilled workers found the experience of unemployment more difficult to cope with than others. Hepworth (1980) conducted interviews with 78 unemployed men using a 12 item General Health Questionnaire in order to identify the presence of psychiatric illness and a Present Life Satisfaction scale to measure subjective well-being. The study found that the unemployed had significantly poorer mental health and poorer subjective well-being than did the employed. The research also confirmed the findings of Marsden and Duff that semi-skilled and unskilled men were likely to have the most difficult time coping with unemployment. Although Hepworth made clear that the unemployed are by no means homogeneous in their reaction to being without work, it was also apparent that the unemployed who felt capable of using their time meaningfully enjoyed better mental health.

The findings of a study by Swinburne (1981) which involved in-depth interviews with 20 unemployed managers and professional staff, indicated that white collar workers were likely to move more slowly through the various psychological stages of unemployment. In general they felt less stigma was associated with being unemployed and they were better able to adjust to being without work. As well as the possibility of having some savings or assets, the white collar unemployed normally had had experience of self-direction in their previous work and therefore, were more likely to successfully structure their time while they were unemployed. Further, as Harrison (1976) suggested, the apathy and inactivity of blue collar workers is probably related to their lack of experience at using leisure time.

The impact of unemployment on the psychological health of young people has attracted considerable research attention. Studies by Tiggeman (1980), Stafford (1980), Gurney (1980), Koller (1980), Feather (1981, 1983) and Jackson (1983) have all contributed to a better appreciation of the issues involved. All of the research, with the exception of the work carried out by Gurney, indicates that unemployment has damaging psychological consequences - depression, loss of confidence, diminished self-esteem - for young people who are unemployed. This is particularly true for young people who are strongly motivated and have a high degree of commitment to work. Gurney (1980), on the other hand, believes that while unemployment has the effect of inhibiting a young person's development, it is unlikely to inflict the degree of trauma that is suggested.

The research findings then, on the basis of aggregrate regional or national data, community surveys and case studies, confirm the existence of a strong association between economic change, such as rising levels of unemployment, and stress-related illnesses. While the unemployed are not homogeneous in their reaction to being without work it would seem that those unemployed who are able to use their time constructively and as well maintain their self-esteem are more likely to withstand the psychological burden that unemployment undoubtedly brings with it. It would also appear that returning to the workforce is likely to bring about a rapid improvement in emotional well-being.

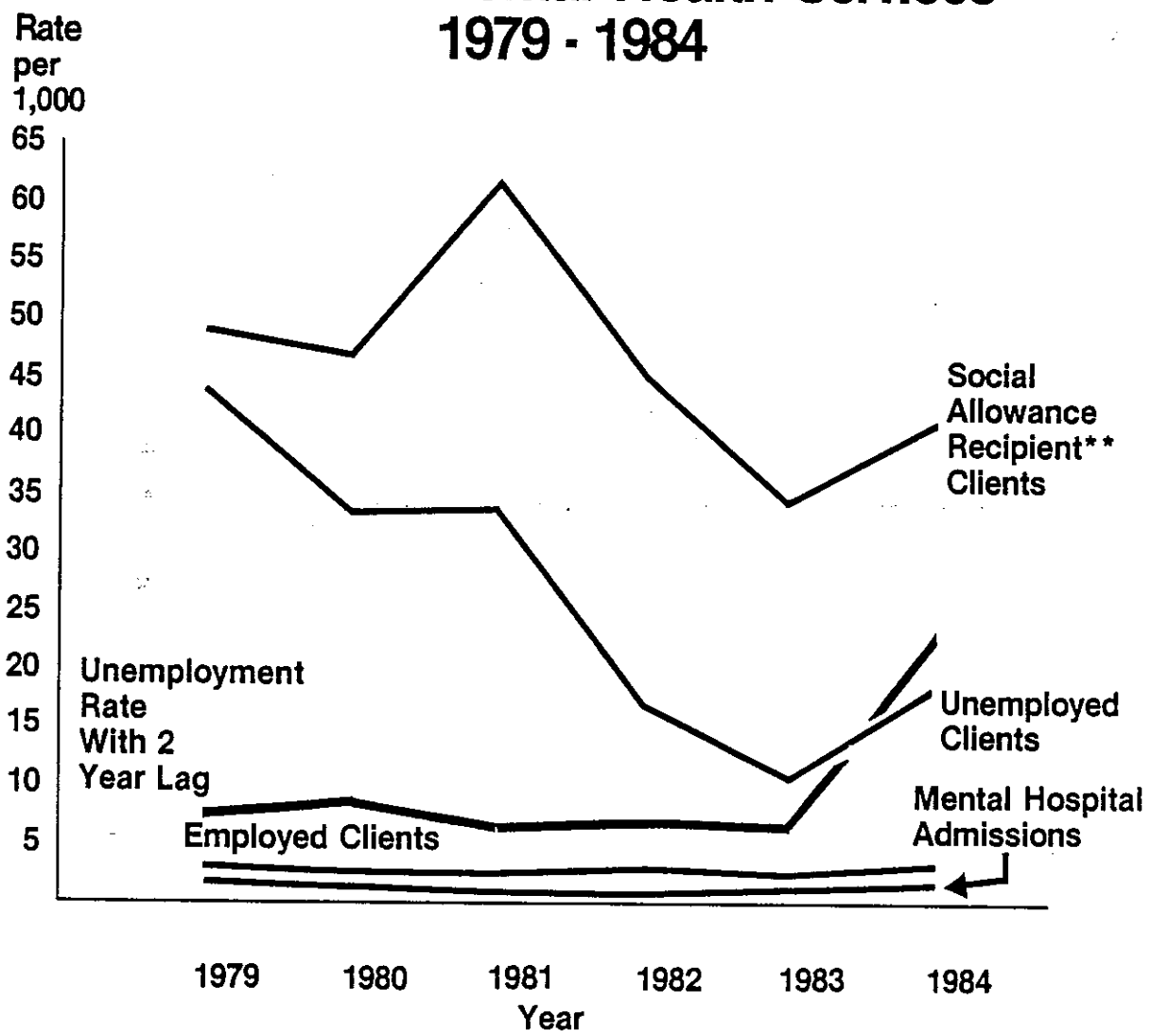
The Alberta Situation

In considering these research findings in an Alberta context, it was decided to examine the pattern of admissions to mental hospitals in Alberta and the number of referrals to the mental health clinics that are provided by the province's Department of Social Services and Community Health. A summary of the findings is presented in Figure 8. In terms of mental hospital admissions, it is apparent that the numbers began to rise in 1982, despite a determined government policy to return as many mental hospital patients to their communities as possible. In 1984, 2,142 patients were admitted to Alberta Hospital Ponoka and Alberta Hospital Edmonton, a 17% increase over the number admitted in 1982.

The pattern of referrals to Mental Health Services was analyzed on the basis of whether the clients were employed, unemployed or on social allowance. Figure 8 shows that an increase in the number of referrals occurred in all three categories in 1983, which may offer support to Brenner's argument that there is generally a two year time lag before the rising levels of unemployment are seen to impact significantly on the emotional well-being of members of the community. Worsening economic conditions and the associated stress-related outcomes are perhaps illustrated by the fact that while an unemployed person is five times more likely to use the services of the mental health clinics than someone who is employed, a person who is presently receiving social allowance is eleven times more likely to become a client at a mental health clinic.

FIGURE 8

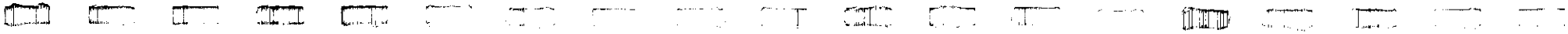
Alberta
Referrals to Mental Health Services*
1979 - 1984



* The rates for each category are based on per 1,000 population in that category.

**Rate per 1,000 caseloads.

Source: *Mental Health Information System, Alberta Hospitals and Health Care; Alberta Social Services and Community Health; Statistics Canada, The Labour Force; Alberta Hospital Ponoka and Alberta Hospital Edmonton.*



UNEMPLOYMENT AND SUICIDE

The negative impacts of unemployment on the jobless individual as well as on the family and community have been well-documented. Depression, loss of self-esteem, increased anxiety and physical ill-health are some of the individual effects which have been dealt with extensively in the literature. It is also widely acknowledged that family stress, marital conflict and social isolation frequently result from unemployment, particularly that which is prolonged. Given these potentially devastating effects of unemployment, it is hardly surprising that unemployment has been linked to the incidence of suicide.

Stack and Haas cite numerous studies to support their statement that, "There has long been a general agreement that unemployment increases suicide" (1984, p.20). They note that most of the studies conducted to date have been based on aggregate data. However, they report one study by Stillman (1980) which is based on individual data and which shows that unemployed workers have a suicide rate thirty times the national U.S. average.

The relationship between unemployment and suicide appears to be influenced by such factors as age, sex, duration of unemployment, financial resources and the availability of social supports. Shepherd and Barraclough (1980) suggest that mental illness may also be an intervening factor. In their study comparing the work histories of suicides and a control group, they found that the most striking difference was in the occurance of unemployment: nearly one quarter of the suicides in the labor market were unemployed on the day of their death whereas none of the controls were unemployed on the index day. Shepherd and Barraclough speculate however, that mental illness, rather than broad social and economic trends, was responsible for the suicides having lost their jobs. They conclude that belonging to a work force has protective value for the individual and that, "Work loss weakens the subject's social integration by loss of integration with the work force, deprives him of social role and status, and may

well increase his isolation, all of which may drive him to despair and suicide" (1984, p.476).

Several studies note a stronger correlation between unemployment and suicide for males than for females (Schapiro et al., 1982; Stack and Haas, 1984; Vigderhous and Fishman, 1978). This finding is attributed to the traditionally higher involvement of males in the labor force and to the salience of other roles (for example, wife-mother role) for females. Boor (1980) however, in his cross-cultural study of unemployment and suicide rates, notes that no significant differences were found in the suicidal behavior of males and females.

In a time-series analysis of the relationship between unemployment and suicide, Hammermesh and Soss found that, "The suicide behavior of older people is significantly more sensitive to variations in unemployment than is that of younger people" (1974, p.97). Boor (1980), on the other hand, found that increases in unemployment rates were related to increases in suicide rates of relatively young persons but not to those of older persons. The disparity between these findings can be attributed to recent shifts in age-related patterns of suicidal behavior in that major increases have occurred in suicide rates of youth during the last decade.

Suicide has also been associated with duration of unemployment. Stack and Haas (1984) suggest that, as the length of unemployment increases, social and material coping resources will be depleted. Hence, they hypothesized that the greater the average duration of unemployment, the higher will be the suicide rate. They tested this hypothesis using U.S. aggregate data and controlling for other explanatory variables and found that duration of unemployment was indeed related significantly to suicide rates.

Access to social and economic support tends to mitigate the negative effects of unemployment (Cobb, 1976; Gore, 1978) and hence, could be expected to mediate the relationship between unemployment and suicide. Unemployment insurance is intended to provide financial support for jobless individuals and their

families, at least in the short-term. Yet, Vigderhous and Fishman point out that, "... the unemployment insurance system established after the depression years did not diffuse the positive impact of economic hardship as a causal variable in changing suicide rates" (1978, p.246).

Perhaps the most widely-known studies of the impacts of unemployment have been conducted in the U.S. by Harvey Brenner. In a study which examined the relationship between changes in U.S. economic performance and national measures of social pathology (such as suicide rate, cirrhosis mortality rate and rate of admission to mental hospitals) between 1950 and 1980, Brenner found that "... suicide is the first indicator of mental pathology found to increase consistently with adverse changes in the economy (Joint Economic Committee, 1984a, p.27). The study concluded that the rise in the unemployment rate during the 1973-74 recession was associated with a suicide rate increase of 1% or 270 known deaths and an additional 8,416 admissions to mental hospitals. The concommitant decline in real per capita income was related to 320 known suicides. The first major change in the suicide rate occurred about one year after the deepest part of the recession. Brenner notes that these suicides probably reflect psychological reactions to substantial economic loss. Another peak period for suicides occurred two to three years following the depth of the recession and is attributed by Brenner to the continued economic loss for a population which became downwardly mobile as a result of the recession.

While Brenner's work has been criticized (Ramsden and Smee, 1981; Stack and Haas, 1984), other studies support his conclusions about the relationship between unemployment and suicide (Boor, 1980; Schapiro and Ahlberg, 1982; Vigderhous and Fishman, 1978). Basing their conclusions on U.S. Vital Statistics information for the period 1940 to 1978, Schapiro and Ahlberg (1982) calculated that an increase of 318 suicides was associated with a one percentage point increase in the unemployment rate.

In a study of the relationship between unemployment rates and suicide rates in eight countries, Boor found that, despite the variety of cultures, suicide

rates "... were associated positively and significantly with concommitant annual variations in the unemployment rates of Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Sweden and the United States" (1980, p.1099). Only in Italy and the United Kingdom was this relationship not found. Interestingly, Boor found that, as unemployment rates decreased, suicide rates did not fall in a corresonding fashion. The relationship between unemployment and suicide is also supported by research from Britain which shows that approximately one-half of attempted suicides among males involve the unemployed (Harris, 1984).

Brenner has been explicit about the meaning of these findings on unemployment and suicide. He argues that economic policy decisions have a substantial effect on many aspects of societal health and well-being and that suicide rates could be reduced by economic policies which take into account people's health and social needs (Joint Economic Committee, 1984a).

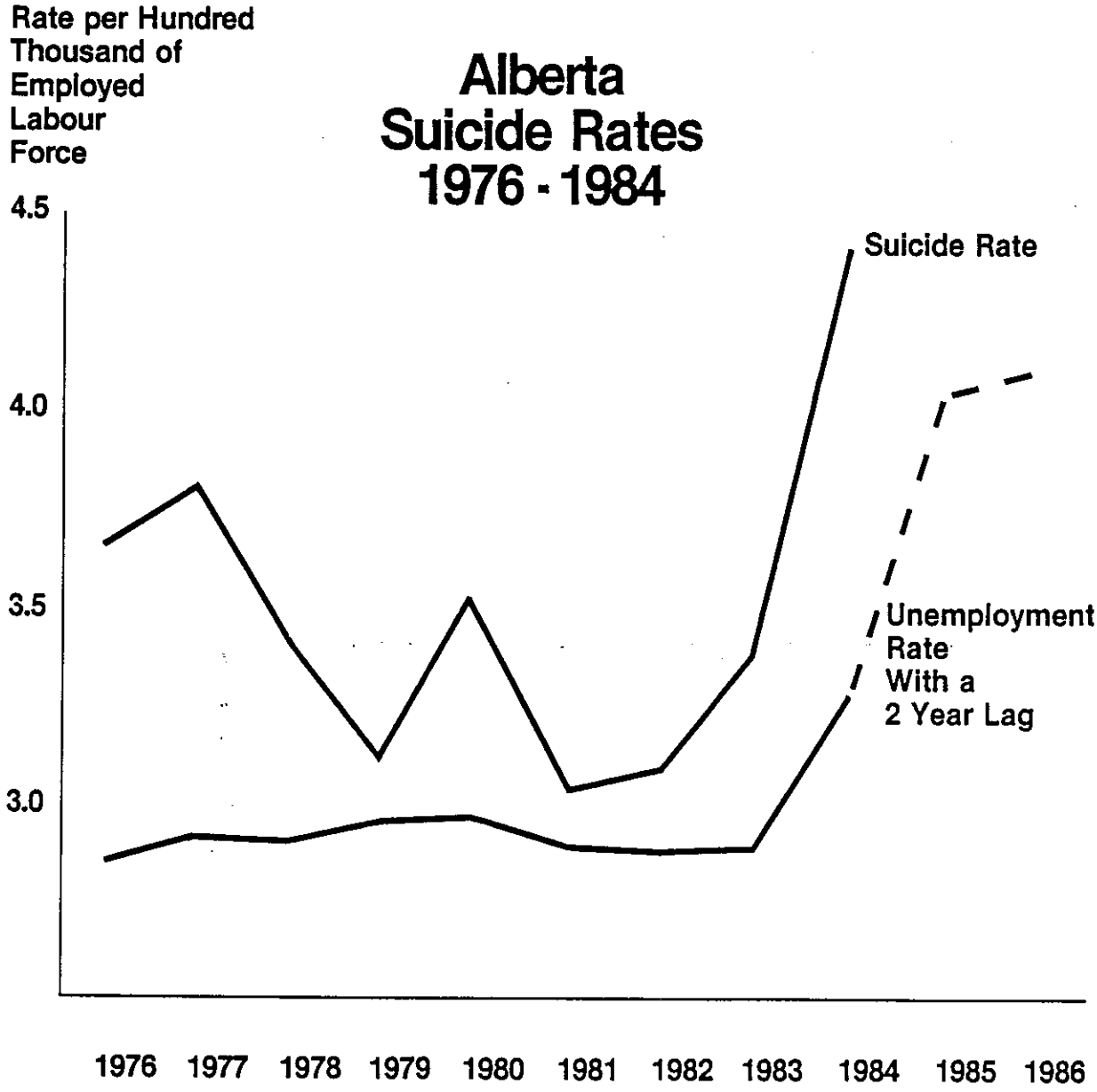
The Alberta Situation

Historically, suicide rates in Western countries have increased steadily with age. In an Alberta study which compared suicide and age for the period 1951 to 1977, Hellon and Soloman (1980) found that Alberta conformed to this general pattern. In addition, they found an emerging pattern which shows that the suicide rate for younger people is increasing more rapidly than that for older people. Furthermore, the suicide rates for all age cohorts have been increasing. Unfortunately, this study was conducted prior to the recent boom and recession periods which brought about major changes for Albertans.

In the 1977 to 1984 time period, the unemployment rate for males aged 20 to 24 has increased from 10.4% to 19.4%. For males in the 25 to 44 age group, unemployment increased from 2.3% to 10.9%. The pattern for females is similar.

Figure 9 compares suicide rates with unemployment rates. When the unemployment rate is lagged two years and then compared with the suicide rate,

FIGURE 9



Source: *Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta Attorney General.*

the pattern is startling. The association between the overall suicide rate and the unemployment rate appears very strong, a result which is consistent with Brenner's findings (Joint Economic Committee, 1984a).

As of May, 1985, 132,000 Albertans were officially unemployed. Of that number, roughly 80,000 or two-thirds had been laid off or fired. If the association indicated by figure 9 is indeed valid, the rapid increases in suicide rates can be expected to continue. Such a trend clearly has dire ramifications for the well-being of Albertans.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME

Traditionally, a major concern with respect to rising unemployment rates has been that jobless individuals, particularly unemployed youth, will resort to such anti-social behaviour as crime or political extremism. Consequently, there have been numerous studies during the last century which have examined the association between economic conditions and anti-social behavior. The majority of these have focused specifically on the relationship between unemployment and criminal activity.

Several explanations have been given for the probability of a positive relationship between crime and unemployment. One explanation is that joblessness leads to economic deprivation and that some individuals when thus deprived will turn to crime to make a living (Joint Economic Committee, 1984b; MacKay, 1983). It has also been suggested that the unemployed frequently find themselves outside the mainstream of society. Lacking strong ties to the conventional world, some may drift into criminal activity (MacKay, 1983). Another explanation is that unemployment among the working class, particularly youth, generates feelings of frustration and hostility toward the more affluent sectors of society and that these feelings may be manifested in criminal behavior (Clark, 1985; Joint Economic Committee, 1984b).

Despite the considerable amount of research which has sought to substantiate the relationship between unemployment and crime, the link between these variables is far from clear. The view that adverse economic conditions and criminal behavior are positively correlated has gained many adherents over the years. As Wilson and Cook point out, "Many people find the claim that economic adversity drives up the crime rates so plausible as scarcely to require demonstration" (Wilson and Cook, 1985, p.3). Yet, the results of research into this relationship are inconclusive and frequently contradictory (Grainger, 1980; Orsagh and Witte, 1981).

Following a detailed examination of research on the relationship between unemployment and crime, Gillespie (1975) concluded that the strength of this relationship is "neither trivial nor substantial, but modest" (MacKay, 1983, p.33). Similarly, Freeman suggests that the bulk of studies which he examined "... show some connection between unemployment ... and crime, but they fail to show a well-defined, clearly quantifiable linkage" (1983, p.106). Others such as Grainger (1980) and Wilson and Cook (1985) are more sceptical about the research findings, and suggest that the research fails to support any relationship, either strong or weak.

The ambiguity of the research findings can be attributed in part to the methodological deficiencies which characterize this area of inquiry. Grainger notes that, "In general, the quality of the research in this area has not been high" (1980, p.3). Perhaps the most serious criticism centres around the almost total reliance on aggregate-level data to explain what is an individual-level phenomenon (Grainger, 1980; Joint Economic Committee, 1984b; Wilson and Cook, 1985). Although aggregate studies fail to confirm a link between unemployment and crime, Grainger suggests that there may indeed be a positive relationship between these variables "... for certain sub-groups of the population even though this relationship exhibits no aggregate manifestation because the characteristics of the small group are completely lost when the groups are homogenized in large-area studies" (1980, p.32). Unfortunately, the accuracy of this hypothesis cannot be determined, for very little research has been conducted at the individual level.

A further difficulty with the research relates to the lack of theoretical specification. The processes operating in the commission of any criminal act are very complex and have not been adequately dealt with in the research (Grainger, 1980; Wilson and Cook, 1985). If the empirical research is to yield more useful results, researchers must be more cognizant of these complexities and must develop their conceptual frameworks accordingly.

Notwithstanding the deficiencies of the research, several important and useful studies have been conducted in this area. Greenberg (1980) cites a number of studies which demonstrate a positive relationship between unemployment and admissions to prison in both Canada and the U.S. (Greenberg, 1977; Jankovic, 1977; Robinson et al., 1974). He notes that the relationship as shown by these studies is so strong as to leave little room for alternate explanatory variables. In a recent study of unemployed youths, Clark examined attitudes toward political activity and lawlessness, comparing these with attitudes of a control group of employed youths. He found that "... unemployed youths with a working class background reported an attitude favoring political action and lawlessness to a greater extent than their employed counterparts" (1985, p.106).

Recognizing the complexity of the relationship between unemployment and crime, several researchers have attempted to clarify the relationship by controlling for such factors as type of crime and age. On the basis of a cross-national literature review, Guttentag contends that, "When the adult crime rate has been broken down by the type of crime, studies in both the United States and Europe show a significant correlation between adult property arrests, i.e.; larceny, burglary, robbery and auto theft, and the rate of male unemployment" (1968, p.108). Glaser and Rice suggest that the failure of researchers to find a clear relationship between crime and economic conditions reflects countervailing influences due to age. When controlling for age, Glaser and Rice found an inverse relationship between juvenile criminality and unemployment but a direct relationship between adult crime and joblessness. Their research clearly supported the hypothesis that, "... adult crime rates vary directly with unemployment, particularly rates of property offenses by persons of 20 to 45 years of age" (1959, p.685).

Lamenting the fact that current theories of criminal behavior are unidirectional in structure, Thornberry and Christenson (1984) emphasize the benefits of a reciprocal causal model to examine the etiology of crime. They used such a model in a recent study of the relationship between unemployment and criminal activity and found that the effect of unemployment on criminal

involvement is rather immediate, while the reciprocal effect, that is, the effect of criminal involvement on unemployment is more long-range.

Commenting on the complexity of the relationship between unemployment and criminal behavior and on the inconclusiveness of results in this area, Orsagh and Witte (1981) suggest four distinct relationships between unemployment and crime which are bound to influence the results of any aggregate-level study of these variables. The relationships which they identify are:

1. Commission of some types of crime requires employment (for example, white-collar crime). Therefore, a decrease in these types of crime would accompany an increase in unemployment.
2. Some individuals mix employment and crime (for example, moonlighting in criminal activity or using a job as a front). Thus, for moonlighters, unemployment may increase criminal activity while for those using unemployment as a front, unemployment may decrease criminal activity.
3. Some people alternate between employment and crime, that is, they switch from legitimate to illegitimate economic activity when unemployment occurs. In such cases, unemployment would be associated with an increase in criminal activity.
4. A small group of individuals is firmly committed to crime as a primary means of support. For these people, "unemployment" is a way of life and no relationship could be expected between unemployment and criminal activity.

It should be noted that these categories deal only with individuals who are already involved in crime. While they clearly demonstrate the need for individual-level research, they do not shed any light on the probability of unemployed persons becoming involved in criminal activities.

In summary, the research appears to provide tentative support for a relationship between unemployment and criminal involvement for certain sub-

groups of the population. However, the need for more adequate conceptualization of this relationship is apparent. It is also imperative that research be undertaken at an individual level of analysis.

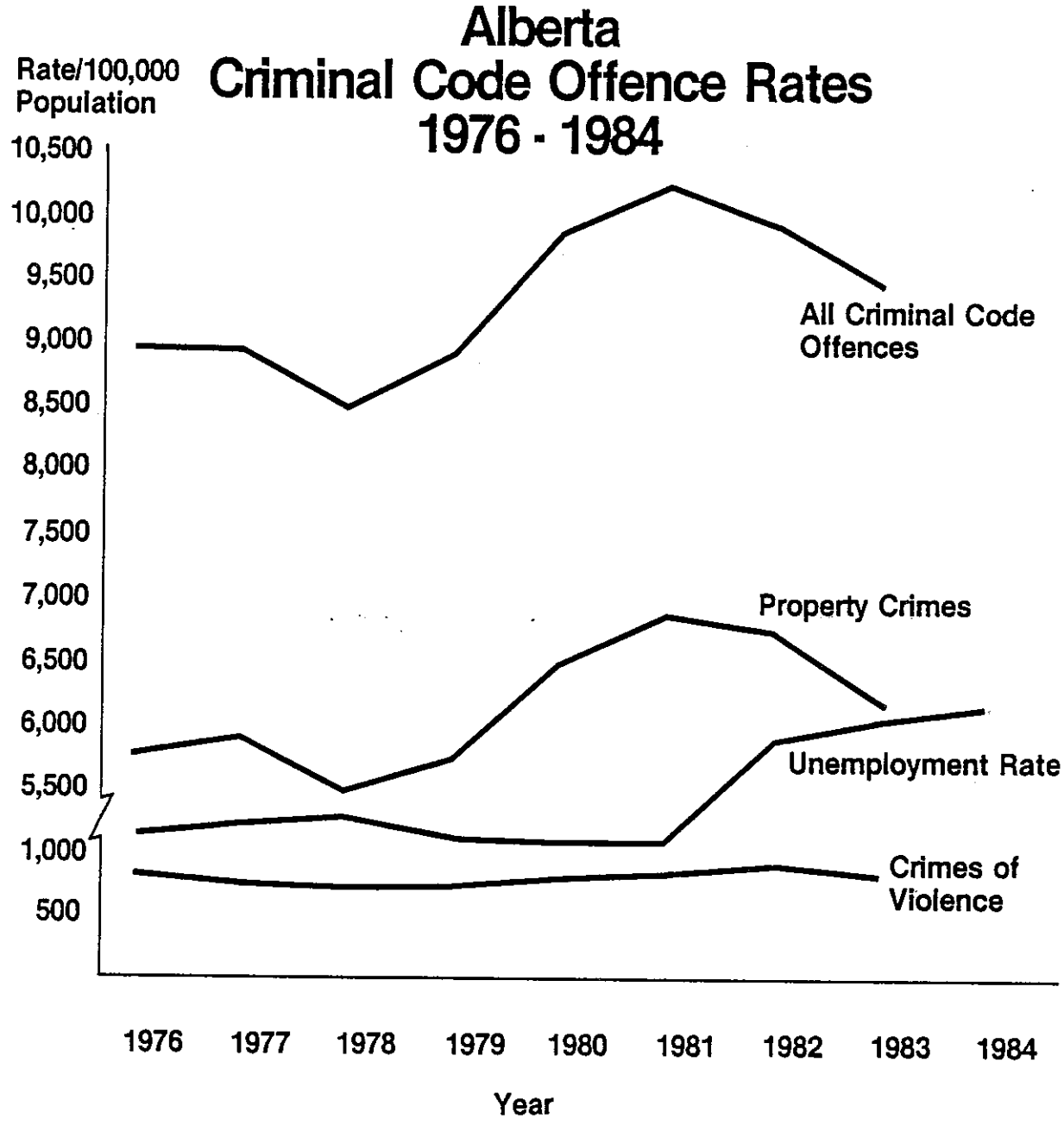
At this time, it would seem too simplistic to suggest that unemployment leads to criminal behavior. Such a hypothesis needs to be further refined, taking into account the myriad of variables involved. It is likely that the extent to which an individual is integrated into conventional society and embraces the laws and mores of that society will be very influential in determining his reaction to unemployment in terms of possible involvement in criminal activity.

The Alberta Situation

Criminal code offense rates for Alberta were examined for the period 1976 to 1984 and were compared with the unemployment rate. As indicated by figure 10, the overall criminal code offense rate and the rate of property crimes increased during the boom period of the late 1970's and began to decline with the onset of the recession. The rate of violent crimes has remained relatively stable over the time period studied. At this level of analysis, the Alberta statistics fail to show a relationship between unemployment and criminal activity.

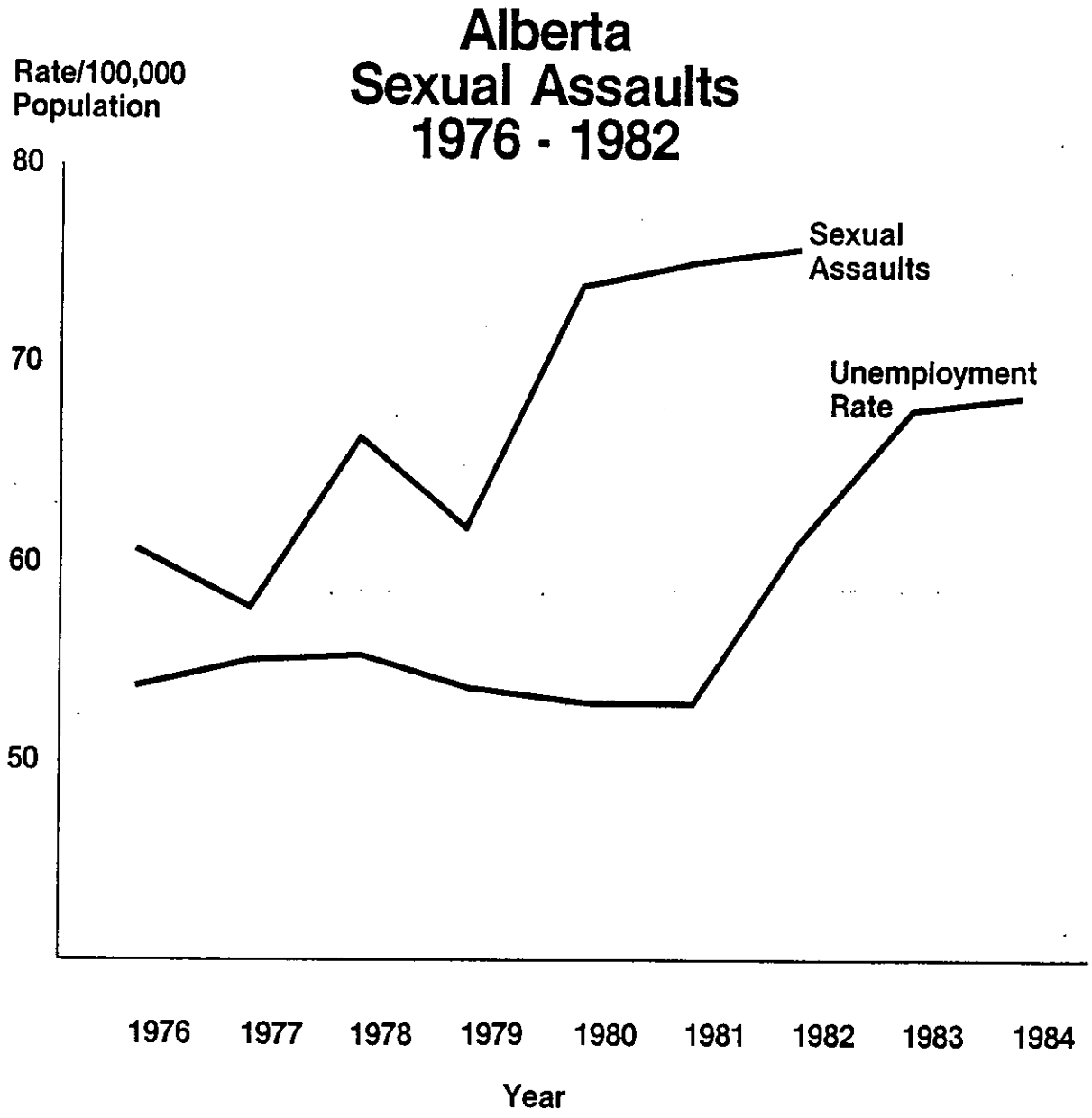
The rate of sexual assaults was also compared with the unemployment rate for the period 1976 to 1982. While the rate of sexual assault has increased steadily from 1979, as shown by figure 11, there is no clear pattern of association with the unemployment rate. Again, a more detailed level of analysis over a longer time period would be more useful in examining the relationship between employment trends and crime in Alberta.

FIGURE 10

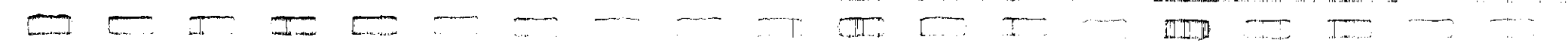


Source: Statistics Canada, *Crime and Traffic Enforcement Statistics*

FIGURE 11



Source: Statistics Canada *Crime and Traffic Enforcement Statistics*



CONCLUSION

The Problem

The preceding sections of this study present the findings from research on the social and psychological costs of unemployment. In reviewing this research, every attempt was made to analyze and integrate the findings and, wherever possible to apply them to the situation in Alberta. Of course, not all of the findings are unambiguous and consistent. The results of some studies are contradictory, the relationship between unemployment and various personal and social problems is not always clear and controversy over causation persists. Nevertheless, the evidence from this review provides overwhelming support for one point: that the social and psychological costs of unemployment are both numerous and profound.

Because of the emphasis on unemployment as an economic phenomenon, there has been a tendency to overlook or at least to under-estimate the personal consequences. In recent years, however, there has been a surge of interest in looking at the ways in which unemployment actually affects people. It has become increasingly clear that the costs of unemployment are borne not only by the jobless individual but also by family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, businesses, communities and society as a whole. Madonia (1983) refers to this tendency for the effects of unemployment to spread as a "rippling effect".

Predominant societal views encourage the unemployed to view themselves as failures with only themselves to blame for their jobless situation. Because of the value associated with work, particularly paid work, in Western cultures, the jobless individual is indeed viewed as having little social value. The person who loses a job is often compelled to rely on unemployment insurance payments for their livelihood and when these entitlements run out, welfare is frequently their only recourse. Such benefits are viewed by many as government handouts and do little to enhance the dignity and self-esteem or even the financial security of

recipients. As Nelson suggests, "That contact with U.I.C. is impersonal and dehumanizing is largely a consequence of our policy makers seeing unemployment to be an income problem and our collective indoctrination to the belief that anyone who wants a job can get one." (1981, p.39).

There is reason to believe that unemployment, particularly that of the major breadwinner is often most devastating for families. The stresses generated by financial hardship, changing family roles, loss of status and other related circumstances may well lead to unemployment being experienced as a major family crisis. Many families deal with such a crisis and remain intact. For others, the stress may be manifested either by family dissolution or by such behavior as child or wife abuse. Given the fragility of the nuclear family in today's society and the large proportion of families headed by single women, it is no wonder that so many families are unable to cope with the added burden of job loss.

While an increasing number of white-collar workers are joining the ranks of the unemployed, it is still the blue-collar (or pink-collar) worker who stands the most chance of becoming jobless and of remaining out of work for a prolonged period. Women, youth, minorities and the poor have the highest rates of unemployment and yet are most likely to lack the resources with which to cope. Hence Muszynski's statement that, "Unemployment is one of the causes of poverty in Canada" (1984, p.213).

The Costs Spelled Out

Based on the preceding review of literature, it can be stated unequivocally that unemployment is a devastating and costly experience for individuals, families and society. Yet, it is not an easy task to calculate the real costs of unemployment. As Shelton points out, "Social costs include not only the lost productivity of the unemployed worker, but also the cost of providing other social services that are needed to deal with the psychological problems stemming from long-term unemployment" (1985, p.18).

Despite the complexity involved in calculating costs, some attempts have been made to estimate the economic costs associated with unemployment. According to an Edmonton Social Planning Council report (1985), unemployment in Alberta in 1983 resulted in a direct economic cost of $6.66 billion dollars which is equivalent to 71.3% of the 1983/84 Alberta government budget. These figures include only those costs associated with lost production such as lost earnings, lost business profits and lost tax revenue to the government. They do not take into account the costs related to social and psychological impacts. If the costs associated with these impacts were added to the figure cited above, the total cost of unemployment would be much higher.

Richard Deaton (1984) estimated the social and economic costs of unemployment to Canadians in 1982 to be about $78.3 billion. This amount is roughly double the federal government deficit which currently exists. If the same ratio of economic to social costs as was used by Deaton was applied to Alberta, then the total cost of unemployment would be roughly double the economic cost and hence, would stand at $13.32 billion for 1983. It should be emphasized however, that this figure is speculative and unlikely to be precise. A calculation of the costs of unemployment has also been attempted by Frank Reid of the University of Toronto Centre for Industrial Relations. Reid estimates that each 1% increase in Canada's unemployment rate has a social cost of $270 million (E.S.P.C., 1985).

Whatever method is used to calculate the dollar values, it is clear that unemployment has significant economic and social costs which affect all segments of society. These costs are too large to ignore. Borrero (1981), commenting on the unemployment problem in the U.S., sums it up effectively when he states that:

> The costs of unemployment to society are extremely high and quite often invisible. Unemployment is a very costly social problem which we all pay for whether we like it or not. We pay billions of dollars annually for unemployment in terms of lost production of goods and services; a loss which could never be recovered. A decrease in production due to unemployment means fewer tax revenue dollars being collected, while at the same time an increase in expenditures for social programs...

> We pay for unemployment in terms of increases in crimes, suicides, emotional disturbances, mortalities, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, and violence against women and children. We pay in terms of family deterioration, greater conflict between parents and children and spouses; even the children of the unemployed have been found to achieve less in school. But perhaps the greatest price we all pay for unemployment is the tremendous waste of human creativity and productivity (1981, p.128).

The Implications for Policies and Programs

While it is beyond the scope of this report to make recommendations with respect to policy directions, it is clear from the findings that the problems associated with unemployment have important implications for future social and economic policy and program development. For governments as well as community agencies to respond effectively to the problems generated by unemployment, an understanding of the nature and scope of the impacts of joblessness is essential. As Nelson so aptly points out, "... the failure to recognize the non-economic impact of unemployment results in policies and programs which are ineffective for dealing with (and in some cases actually exacerbate) some of the most personally destructive consequences of unemployment" (1981, p.37).

There is widespread agreement that social stress due to unemployment is increasing and will likely continue to do so. At the same time, policies of restraint in government spending are effectively reducing the services and supports available to the unemployed and their families just when they are most needed (Muszynski, 1984). It is essential at this time that a commitment be made to providing these services and to strengthening the role of U.I.C. or developing other income support programs.

Concommitant with the increases in unemployment rates in recent years, social agencies are reporting substantial increases in their case loads (C.M.H.A., 1983; Muszynski, 1984). These increases are due primarily to an influx of unemployed individuals and their families but also reflect the fact that a considerable number of persons are seeking counselling because they are afraid of losing their jobs given the high unemployment rates. In discussing the

potential role of social workers in assisting unemployed clients, Briar (1980) suggests that, "More systematic concern with unemployment problems of our clients should result not just in a restructuring of social services but in new leadership roles for social service agencies as well" (1980, p.903). As Muszynski (1984) points out, the provision of services to assist the unemployed and their families will require the commitment of government funds for community-based services.

Despite the fact that predictions with regard to the likelihood of full employment in the future are far from optimistic, it is encumbent upon government to develop policies which will provide more jobs for more people. At the same time, more creative and innovative ways of looking at work and income must be considered. We cannot continue to rely on "more of the same" when it comes to employment policies. The unemployment problem will not go away, at least not without "... a significant re-direction of federal and provincial economic policy" (Muszynski, 1984).

The Future - What is Needed?

The review of the literature undertaken for this study reveals that there is a need for more research on the social and psychological impacts of unemployment. In particular, there is a need for more methodologically-sound studies and for a variety of research approaches and methods which would complement each other. More research using individual-level data would add immeasurably to our knowledge in this area. As far as Alberta is concerned, the trends in unemployment and in the various indicators of social and psychological distress need to be monitored more closely and consistently.

As noted previously, there is a pressing need to develop more creative approaches to work, income and unemployment. There is certainly nothing sacred about our current values and patterns around work. Perhaps above all, there is a need for a broader recognition of and sensitivity to the fact that unemployment

does have deleterious effects for individuals, families and society as a whole. Unemployment is a devastating experience for many people. Unemployment does generate considerable stress. Unemployment does cause poverty. What can be done?

THE SOCIAL COSTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

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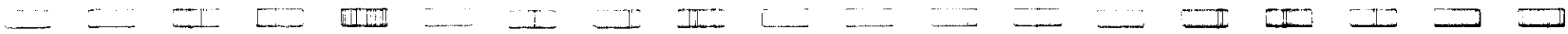

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