

**UNEMPLOYED YOUTH IN SOUTH AFRICA:  
THE DISTRESSED GENERATION?**

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## Abstract

*After a long contemplation of the human condition, Freud nominated work and love as the two essential ingredients of a healthy and well-adjusted personality*

*Work has always been part of man's history and a crucial factor in social organization. The earliest prehistoric people sustained themselves by hunting and fishing. Cultures developed and a division of labor replaced an essentially nomadic life. Working activities such as hunting, fishing, herding, and trading occupied primarily the men. When social structures further developed they led to the evolution of distinct occupations such as farming and craftwork. This trend toward focusing on a specific group of tasks gave birth to the concept of career.*

## The value or the meaning of work

According to the traditional career development perspective work is seldom just seen as a means by which an individual sustains life (Holland, 1997; Super, 1995; Zunker, 1994; Savickas, 1991). Instead, work is viewed as having many dimensions or functions. First, work has an economic function: people work to earn some sort of wage, or are involved in activities to be rewarded in such a way that they can sustain themselves and dependents in order to fulfill certain primary needs. Second, there is a social dimension to work; the occupation or work that individuals are involved in determines to a large extent where and how they live, the community and organizations in which they participate, and many other social aspects of their lives. Social status has long been associated with individuals' jobs. Third, work has a personal or psychological dimension: it is an essential source of identity, and provides people with the feeling of self-worth and self-esteem as they experience a feeling of mastery and self-fulfillment when they successfully engage in work activities. Research shows that unemployed people often experience feelings of low self-esteem resulting from their not being involved in activities that are valued by other people (Zunker, 1994). The functions of work therefore seem to be of great importance to both society and the individual. Many studies confirm the importance of work in people's lives. One such study (Yankelovich, 1982) described the responses of workers to three possible views of work. The options included the following:

1. People work only because they would not otherwise have the resources to sustain themselves.
2. Work is a straight economic transaction in which people relate effort to financial return.
3. Work carries a moral imperative to do one's best apart from practical necessity or financial remuneration.

In this study more than three quarters (78%) of the workers who participated selected the third response, whereas only 15% selected the first response and 7% the second. These attitudes towards work were confirmed in later studies with a national sample carried out in the US by the National Career Development Association in 1987 and 1989.

Donald Super initiated one of the most well-known international studies with regard to the value of work: the Work Importance Study (WIS) (Super & Sverko, 1995). Eleven countries (Australia, Belgium: Flanders, Canada, Croatia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, United States), ranging from moderately developed to some of the world's most advanced nations, took part in this cross-cultural study, whose main aim was to review the state of the understanding of the human aspects of work. These studies in the different countries mainly reflect three approaches to capturing the meaning of work for individuals: 1) work values or goals; 2) work involvement and work salience; and 3) effects of work alienation (Super & Sverko, 1995). Since social-

psychological studies on the meaning of work are usually done within the framework of the western European culture, researchers can never be sure if the conclusions can be generalized to other cultures. The findings of the WIS, however, provided cross-national universal evidence that the structures of human values and roles pertain broadly to human behavior in the modern world.

What do people usually seek in their jobs? Work values can reflect the qualitative aspect of the meaning of work for individuals. This can only be identified through the goals that they try to reach through their work, such as high income, economic security, variety, social interaction, altruism, and self-fulfillment, to mention a few of these goals. Work values are usually described under two categories; i.e. intrinsic values that encompass job content and work itself; and extrinsic values that refer to the work context such as physical conditions in the workplace, income, and prestige. Although work values are primarily determined by the process of socialization, they are not fixed and can be influenced by factors such as changes in the labor market, social policy, educational opportunities, occupational level, phases of career development, and psychological well-being. Work values are also experienced primarily by the employed.

While work values can shed light on the qualitative aspect of the importance of work to people, they do not reveal anything about the quantitative aspects. Concepts such as work involvement and work salience serve this purpose rather. Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) conducted some of the most important research on work involvement. According to these researchers work involvement can be described as both a complement of self-image (i.e. the degree to which a person identifies psychologically with his work), and as a performance-self-esteem contingency (i.e. the degree to which a person's performance affects his or her self-esteem). This may again not be true of all people. The self-images of people who are not work-involved may not depend on their jobs or performance at all. In this regard, Super (1980) defined work salience as the relative importance of work in relation to other life roles such as study, homemaking, community activities, and leisure. A psychometric instrument was developed in order to measure the importance of different life roles according to: the participation rate in the different life roles; the commitment levels to the different life roles; and the perception of the possibilities to realize values in these roles. However, this might again not apply to all people. It might well be that work is experienced as a monotonous and/or meaningless routine by many individuals.

Therefore studies on the meaning of work have also investigated it from this opposite point of view: the meaningless or alienation of work. This approach draws on philosophy and social theory concerning work alienation and goes as far back as Karl Marx's description and analysis of the importance of work. Although he described work as one of the most important characteristics of human existence, giving man the opportunity for self-fulfillment, he also argued that the capitalistic environment does not

provide this opportunity but, instead, leads to alienation from work. Factors such as powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation are at work here.

The discourse on the value of work can only take on real meaning when the issue of unemployment is raised: Unemployment has become an immense global problem and it affects a vast majority of the world's population currently.

## A global perspective on youth unemployment

Youth unemployment has become a contentious issue. The youth unemployment rate is much higher than that of adults in most countries of the world. An estimate of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in their World Employment Report (1998) indicated that at least 60 million young people are unemployed and that youth unemployment rates can be as high as three times adult rates. The question of employment opportunities is frightening as more young people are about to enter the labor market worldwide than ever before in the history of mankind. The estimate is that between now and 2010, 700 million young people will try to enter the labor market in developing countries (more than the entire labor force of the developed countries in 1990) and the ILO projects that this requires the creation of more than a billion jobs in order to give these new workers access to labor markets and reduce unemployment.

Reports showed in 1998 that in countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) the unemployment rate of the 15 to 24 age group was 12,9%. This figure was more than double the 5,7% for adults and is the equivalent of approximately 10 million young people. It is difficult to accumulate figures for developing countries, but according to the ILO the gap between youth and adult unemployment is wider than in industrialized countries and many transition economies show the same trend.

The operational definition of youth differs widely from country to country. Most of these definitions depend on cultural, institutional and socio-political issues. The standard United Nations definition states that *youth* include people between 15 and 24 years of age (United Nations, 1992). In South Africa the National Youth Act of 1996 describes youth as persons in the age group 14 to 34 years. As 15 is the age at which children are permitted formally to enter the labour market in South Africa, this age is used as the lowest level for discussions on employment and unemployment. For reasons of comparison, a distinction will be made in the next part of this paper between those in the 15 to 24 age group and those in the 25 to 34 age group in the discussion of youth unemployment in South Africa. A further distinction between teenagers (15-19) and young adults (20-24) will also be made in some instances in order to address differences in unemployment trends that might be revealed, as has been found in other countries.

A study by O'Higgins (2001) reported that although youth unemployment varies from one country to another, a few features are common to most of the nations

investigated. First, it was found that youth unemployment was higher than adult unemployment in almost every country for which data was available. In most of these countries youth unemployment was double adult unemployment and, in certain cases, even three times the adult rates. A second common factor of youth unemployment across countries is that it is strongly linked to adult unemployment. It was also found that upsets in the aggregate labor market that have a direct effect on adult unemployment have a more pronounced effect on youth employment. Youth unemployment can therefore not be separated from the aggregate unemployment situation; the general context will always have an influence on youth unemployment. Lastly, a link was found between (un)employment and economic growth, indicating that output growth is a precondition for employment growth, although the picture for this is clearer in developed countries than in some of the developing countries.

## **Reasons unemployment is higher for youths than adults**

The main causes of youth unemployment have been widely analyzed at different levels; i.e. looking firstly at characteristics of youth labor markets and the young population as a whole (Rees, 1986; O'Higgins, 2001), and secondly at the behavioral and demographic traits of individuals that might have an influence on their opportunities in the world of work (Ryan, 2001). The first level of analysis usually looks at the following determinants of youth unemployment: aggregate demand, youth wages, size of the youth labor force, and lack of skills. Although lack of demand is the major cause for adult unemployment, O'Higgins argues that the changes in aggregate demand have higher consequences for youth unemployment. General human resource practice in recession times is usually to discontinue recruitment, which affects young entrants to the labor market and makes younger workers rather than older workers redundant. Youth are separated from jobs through lay-offs more than older workers are mainly because it is cheaper and also because they are less experienced than older workers - Mlatsheni & Rospabe (2002) for example found that one of the most obvious differences causing higher unemployment for youth than adults was the level of experience. It is also often found that younger workers are more likely than older workers to leave their jobs as they might have shorter goals and are still discovering what they want in life. As part of the debate on wages it is argued that if youth wages are not flexible downward, the effect of minimum wages on youth unemployment is often found to be significant (Neumark & Wascher, 1999).

The size of the youth cohort is seen as a major contributor to youth unemployment. The United Nations Population Fund (2000) indicated that more than 50% of the world's population is under the age of 25 – just over 3 billion individuals are youth and children. Youth, internationally defined as people between the ages of 15 and 24, count 1,3 billion alone - approximately one person in five is between the age of 15 and 24, or 17% of the world's population. The International Labour Organization (ILO) projects that the vast numbers of young people entering the labor market require the creation of

more than a billion jobs in order that they can be given access to labour markets and unemployment can be reduced. The lack of education and job-related skills is another reason provided to explain high levels of youth unemployment.

The second level of analysis generally concentrates on regional disparities, age categories (e.g. teenagers versus young adults), gender and ethnic determinants, as well as educational attainments. Unemployment is not evenly spread, although the groups that are vulnerable will vary according to different conditions and circumstances. The general trend is that unemployment rates tend to decrease with age. The picture for young women has been starker than that for young men; it is generally found that employment opportunities for young women are more limited than those for young men, leading to slightly higher unemployment rates for young women. Dominant ethnic groups are usually worse off than minority groups, except in a country like South Africa, for example, with its legacy of discrimination against the majority. Research has shown that in most of the OECD countries unemployment rates fall when the level of education improves. However, in developing countries (e.g. South Africa) it is often found that youth unemployment is also high among the better educated (Moleke, 2003). The relevance of the analysis of the above-mentioned determinants is of great importance if employment policies developed are to combat unemployment in general and, specifically, youth unemployment.

Beyond the orthodox analysis of causal factors is a range of less tangible factors that influence youth unemployment. These include lack of labor market information, inexperience with the processes of applying for jobs, lack of access to the main information networks in the labor market, and social deprivation (i.e. factors such as joblessness of other household members and residence in low-income areas).

## Youth unemployment in South Africa

There are two definitions of unemployment in South Africa – the official or strict definition and the expanded definition. Both definitions include people aged 15 or older who are not employed but are available for work. The requirement of the strict definition is that an individual must have taken steps to find employment for four weeks prior to a given point. The expanded definition also includes the discouraged (despairing) individuals who have not taken active steps to find work. Unemployment figures calculated according to the official definition are therefore lower than those for the expanded definition. It can be argued that the expanded definition would provide a more accurate indicator of the extent of the problem in South Africa.

According to Statistics South Africa (2003) in September 2002 there were an estimated 28,0 million people aged between 15 and 65. Among these people 15,9 million were economically active and almost a third (30,5%: 4,8 million) were unemployed according to the official definition. Almost three quarters (70,8%: 3,4 million) of the 4,8 million

people who were unemployed were youth – between the ages of 15 and 34 according to the South African definition. Almost a third (31,2%: 1,5 million) of unemployed youth in South Africa fall into the internationally defined category of youth - persons between the ages of 15 and 24.

Table 1 reflects the expanded unemployment rates using the United Nations' as well as the South African definitions of youth. The youth group is further categorized as teenagers (15-19), young adults (20-24), and prime adults 1 (25-34). If the expanded definition is used, the overall unemployment rate increases to more than a third (41,8%: 7,9 million) of economically active people. If compared to the results obtained using the official definition, nearly the same percentage of unemployed people is youth (69,6% compared to 70,8%) - between the ages of 15 and 34 according to the South African definition. Again, almost a third (31,6%: 2.5 million) of unemployed youth fall into the internationally defined category of youth (persons between the ages of 15 and 24). The inequality in the distribution of the burden of unemployment across age groups is a matter for concern. While there is a sizable differential between youth and aggregate unemployment rates, there are also noticeable differences in the unemployment rate for identifiable groups of youth.

These employment and unemployment trends are discouraging. Therefore notice should be taken of the concern of the ILO in their Country Review Report (Standing *et al.*, 1996) that the level of employment might be understated. Reports by Schlemmer and Worthington (1996) also address this issue. These writers suspect that the informal sector might be hugely underestimated. The evidence was provided when their studies showed that the personal spending of the unemployed was higher than that of persons in *low-level, unskilled work*. The researchers made the assumption that the income could only have been generated by activities in the informal sector.

The Labour Force Survey data of September 2002 was used to determine youth unemployment rates. The purpose of the following statistical information on youth unemployment in South Africa is to profile this disadvantaged group and to bring the seriousness of the matter to the fore, as well as arguments about the erosion of the quality of life of many young, primarily black, South Africans. The intention of this paper is not to conduct analysis of different sources of employment and unemployment data in order to argue about the statistical variation in correctness of trends. Klasen and Woolard (1999) appraised the similarities and dissimilarities between the major sources of information on the South African labor force. They found that the household surveys give a broadly accurate picture with regard to unemployment rates.

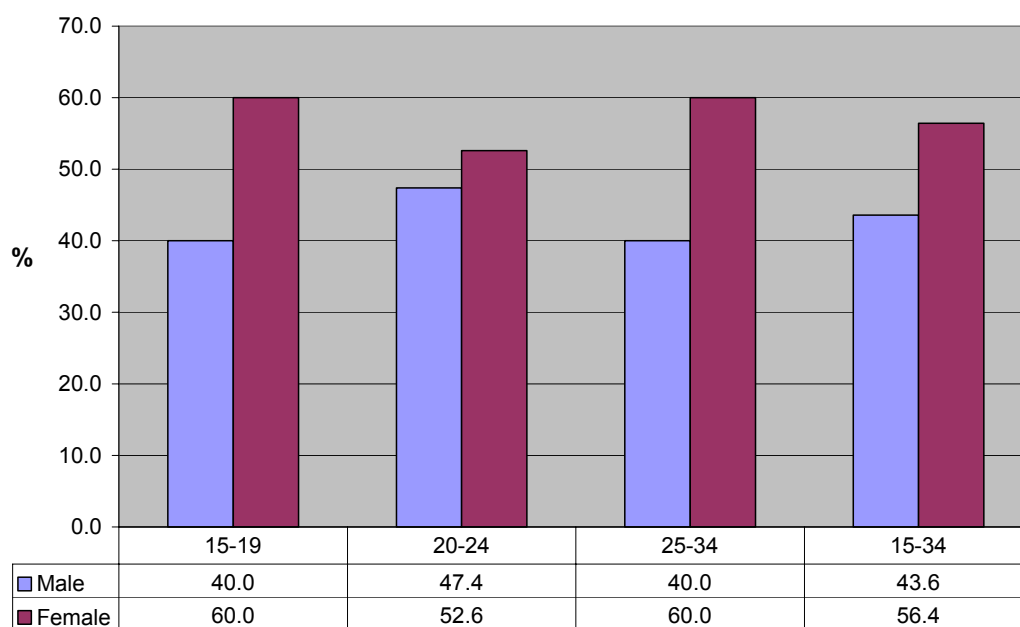


**Table 1 Unemployment rates applying the expanded definition and using the South African and United Nations' definitions of youth.**

	N (millions)	%
Economically active people in South Africa	18,9	
<b>Total unemployed</b>	<b>7,9</b>	<b>41,8</b>
15-19 (teenagers)	0,6	7,6
20-24 (young adults)	1,9	24,1
<b>Total: International youth definition (15-24)</b>	<b>2,5</b>	<b>31,6</b>
25-34 (prime adults 1)	3,0	38,0
<b>Total: SA youth definition (15-34)</b>	<b>5,5</b>	<b>69,6</b>
35-64 (prime adults 2)	2,3	29,1
<b>Total: SA adult definition (35-64)</b>	<b>2,3</b>	<b>29,1</b>
<b>Total: International adult definition (25-54)</b>	<b>5,1</b>	<b>64,6</b>

Source: September 2002 LFS

**Figure 1 Unemployment rates by gender and age**



When considering the unemployed youth population of 5,5 million, the unemployment rates for young women (56,4%: 3,1 million) are higher than those for young men (43,6%: 2,4 million) (see Figure 1). This trend is noticed across all the different age categories. In a study that the ILO (O'Higgins, 2001) conducted over the period 1981-98 for the OECD countries, it was found that youth unemployment rates also tended to be slightly higher for young women than for young men in the European OECD countries, while in the non-European OECD countries it was just the opposite. In most of the developing countries (e.g. India, Indonesia, Latin American countries like Chile, and Jamaica) unemployment rates also tended to be slightly higher for young women

than for young men. Female unemployment is consistently higher than male unemployment across the different age groups.

If race is taken into consideration, the majority of the unemployed youth (89,7%: 4,9 million out of 5,5 million) are young Africans (see Figure 2). They face unemployment rates nearly nine times as high as their Coloured, Indian/Asian and White counterparts. African unemployment is consistently higher than unemployment for the other groups across the different age groups. The most vulnerable group seems to be Africans between the ages of 25 and 34.

**Figure 2 Unemployment rates by race and age**

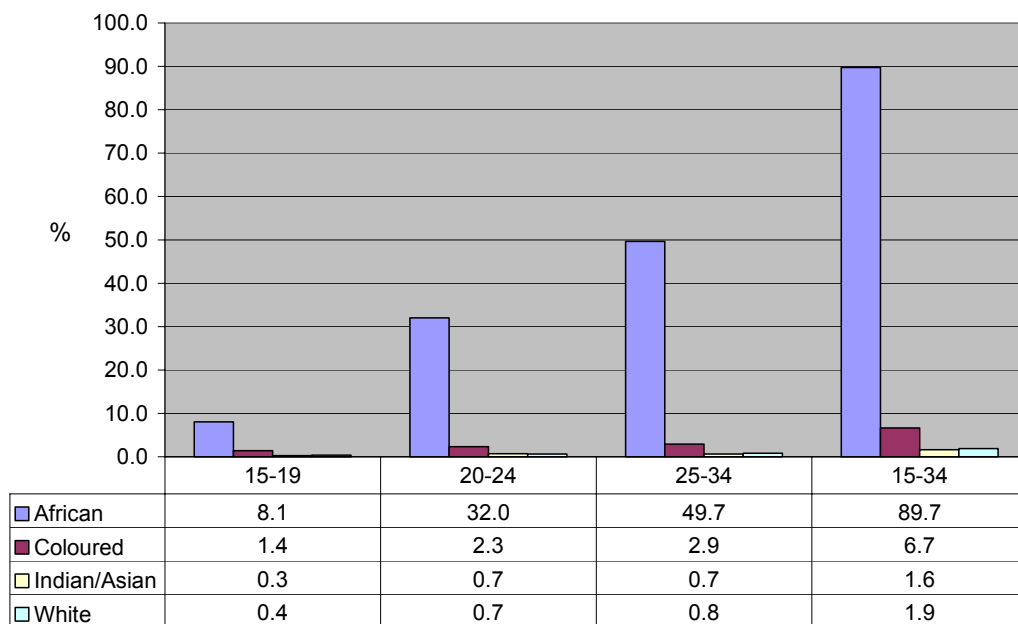
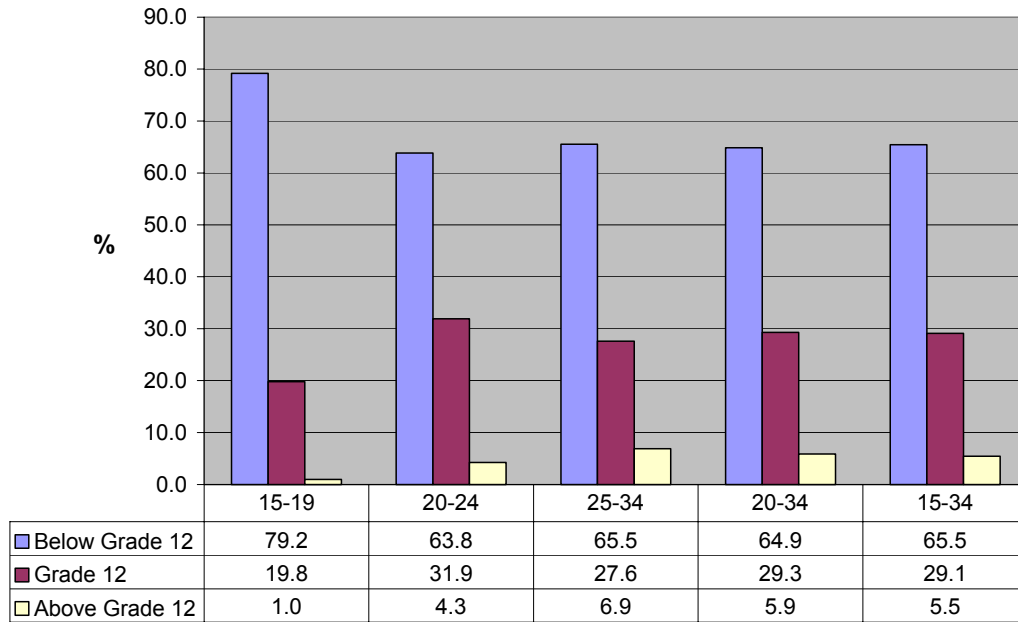
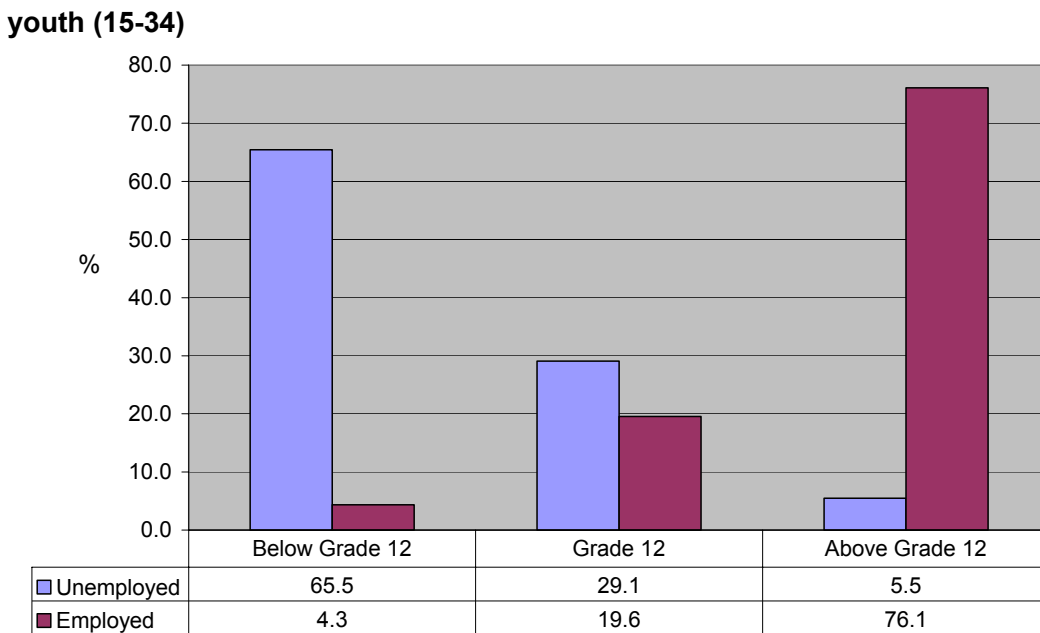


Figure 3 shows the impact of education on youth unemployment. Nearly two thirds (65,5%: 3,6 million) of the unemployed youth do not hold a Grade 12 certificate. The majority (90%: 3,2 million) of this group is African. It appears that lack of education greatly affects employability. Moleke (2003) showed that the unemployment rate of those with post-secondary education is lower. Her study further revealed that the unemployment duration among this group was shorter than for those with lower qualifications. However, once more the incidence of this advantage differed for identifiable groups of youth. Africans and women are again the majority of this group who are expected to experience unemployment. An alarming trend is that educational levels do not increase with age. It is expected that fewer youth between the ages of 15 to 19 will hold secondary or tertiary qualifications, but it is surprising that this trend continues across the other age groups. Figure 4 compares the educational levels of unemployed and employed youth between the ages of 15 and 34. It is obvious that the employed graph is an inverse of the unemployed graph.

**Figure 3 Unemployment rates by education and age**



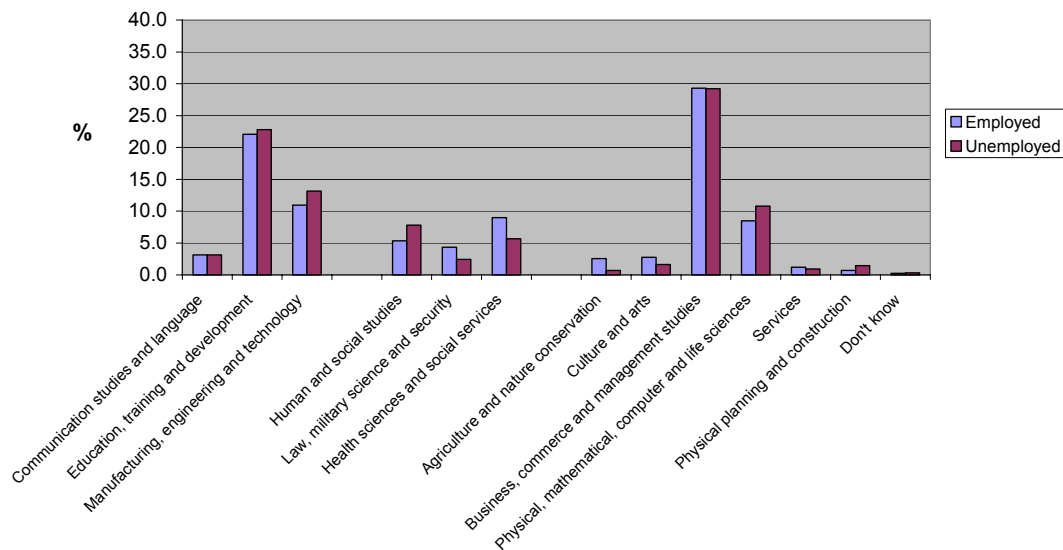
**Figure 4 Educational levels of unemployed and employed youth (15-34)**



Nearly a fifth (15,9%) of the employed youth hold a certificate, diploma or degree compared to only 4,6% of the unemployed. These qualifications are spread across certain fields of study. The view is sometimes held that the unemployed do not hold the right kind of qualifications. Figure 5 shows that there are no real differences between the fields of study of the employed and unemployed. It can be expected that those who hold

qualifications in the humanities and art-related fields would struggle more to find opportunities in the labor market. Most of the qualifications are, however, in the business, commerce and management fields. Once again the African youth are on the receiving end. For example, almost all (97%) of the economically active white youth who hold qualifications in the business, commerce and management fields are employed, while only 53,3% of African youths with qualifications in the same field were successful to find employment. It is assumed that most of the African youths attained their qualifications from previously disadvantaged training institutions. Therefore it seems that employers have the perception that African graduates from these institutions lack essential competencies - a survey by the HSRC (Business Day, 23 July 2003) has just revealed for example that there is doubt about the ability of FET institutions to produce skilled graduates. Another explanation might be that the African youth who pursue training in business, commerce and management specialize in fields such as human resource management and marketing, which are not in demand like accounting.

**Figure 5 Fields of study of unemployed and employed youth**



Almost three quarters (74,5%: 4,1 million) of the unemployed youth indicated that they had never worked for pay, profit or family gain. This is an alarming fact; it means that they had never had the chance to enter the labor market at all. For these young people their lack of previous work experience will have a considerable effect on their efforts to seek and attain work in future. The question in the Labour Force Survey is phrased as follows: *Has...ever worked for pay, profit or family gain?* To avoid confusion, work is then explained as: *formal work for salary, wage, profit or unpaid in family business; informal work such as making of things for sale, selling things or providing a service; work on a farm or land, whether for a wage or as a part of the household's farming activities; casual/seasonal work.* If the possibility of misunderstanding is eliminated, the first question that comes to mind is how do these young people support themselves?

As they have never worked before and, therefore, cannot claim unemployment assurance, one would expect that they would have access to some kind of charity, church, or welfare support. However, only 0,8% indicated that they do receive this kind of support. Nearly all of them (87,4%) pointed out that other persons in the household support them.

About 60,8% of the unemployed youth said that they had taken some steps four weeks prior to the survey to find a job. More than half (57,6%) of this group mentioned that they had enquired at workplaces, farms, and factories or called other possible employers. Some other avenues that were used to seek employment were: placed or answered advertisement (16,2%); waited at the street side where casual workers are found (9,6%); sought assistance from relatives or friends (9%); waited or registered at employment agencies or trade unions (6,9%); and looked for land, building, equipment or applied for a permit to start a business or farming (0,7%). More than a third (39,2%) indicated that they had been searching for a job more than a year.

It is assumed that the other 39,2% are discouraged people. The main reasons given by this group for not trying to find work or start a business in the four weeks prior to the survey were that no jobs were available in the area (47,1%) anyway and that they did not have money to pay for transport to look for work (23,5%). This sketches a bleak picture for those who are willing to work.

The statistics tell only one side of the story. Many of us forget that each statistic represents an individual with his or her own personal chronicle, and that this usually reflects hardship and feelings of failure and exclusion.

## **Consequences of youth unemployment**

There is nothing new about unemployment, or about the economic, social and psychological consequences of it. The unemployed have been recognized for centuries. From an economic perspective the loss of output to the economy and the loss of income to the families of the unemployed are some of the most important issues at stake. So is the duration of unemployment. Economists would for example analyze the difference in the duration of unemployment for youths and adults. They would calculate the impairment of an unemployed individual's productive potential. If supportive facilities for the unemployed are considered, it will be normal to assume that the principal agencies for welfare will be concerned about the material needs of these unprivileged individuals; they need jobs and they need money. However, this economic analysis of the consequences of unemployment does not eliminate the social and psychological consequences they might experience during their unemployment.

The first social-psychological research on the problems of the unemployed date back to the early 1930s. The depression experienced at that time gave researchers

opportunities to investigate the consequences of unemployment. However, O' Brien (1986) warns that those studies differ considerably from present-day unemployment studies. The profile of the unemployed during those years was predominantly adult males, while today a considerable number of youth and women are unemployed.

The literature covering this topic has since expanded substantially. Kelvin and Jarret (1985) ask the humane question: What is the point of social-psychological research on unemployment? There should be no doubt about the *undisputed hardship of the great majority of unemployed*. Kelvin and Jarret warn that the idea of essentially *academic* research into their condition may appear almost indecent. They plead that the motivation and purpose of social-psychological research on unemployment should unequivocally aim at helping this destitute group of human beings.

Although there is a school of thought that suggests that research on the psychosocial effects of unemployment might be of little or no direct help to the unemployed, the possibility exists that it might create awareness and help other people to be sensitive and understand the problems of the unemployed. It can also provide the unemployed with ways to cope with the implications of their status, although this might only be on a diminutive scale of solutions.

In societies whose socio-economic structure is mainly defined on its importance and division of labor, unemployed people are defined by what they are not. According to this definition they are not part of the structure that enables people to earn a living, feel productive and part of a structure of economic development, and/or experience positive feelings about being engaged in activities that they enjoy; i.e. living out vocational interests. Whether the causes of their unemployment are at the macro-economic level (some unemployment can be due to structural problems in an economy), or at the micro-economic level of the individual (e.g. lack of appropriate qualifications or skills), it would be normal to expect that unemployment would affect the individual and his or her behavior to a certain extent.

Recent research acknowledges the complexity of studying the problems of the unemployed. It is clear that modern studies do not always allow clear inferences about the relative importance of job loss and economic loss, or the importance of personality and past experiences that can have an influence on the behavior of the unemployed anyway (Hartley & Freyer, 1984). Many studies try to measure indicators of psychological well-being and mental health, ranging from simple statements of life satisfaction and self-esteem to multidimensional measures of states of mind – these are then statistically analyzed in relation to labor market status i.e. employment and unemployment (Axelson & Ejlertson, 2002; Winkelman & Winkelman, 1998; Warr, Jackson & Banks, 1982; Stafford, Jackson & Banks, 1980). Most of them confirm the relationship between unemployment and psychosocial distress. Some of the studies (O'Brien, 1986) conclude that unemployment experiences are less difficult for unskilled

people because they have learnt to expect less of life than people who are better skilled. It is also speculated that youth would be more vulnerable and, therefore, much more affected than adults. Fraccaroli, Le Blanc and Hajjar (1994) showed in a study with young unemployed people the importance of psychosocial support. They found that those young individuals who had a low self-image and believed that they had restricted access to supportive psychosocial resources, were much more disposed to suffer and not enjoy well-being. They suggested that efficient techniques of job search, vocational training, and vocational counseling be offered as coping strategies for this disadvantaged group.

Moller (2001) did a major study between 1987 and 1988 in South Africa on the quality of life in unemployment. From a social-psychological vantage point, she examined the quality of life of the black unemployed in urban areas. The overall conclusion was that of relative financial and psychological deprivation. Although quality of life was undoubtedly deprived, there was evidence that feelings of self-esteem and personal competence were not permanently harmed. The question arises as to whether many participants in the study did not expect less of life from having known only poverty and hardship.

It was found that although the unemployed suffered from a lack of time structure, variety of social contacts, participation in a collective purpose, and lack of recognized social status and identity, consciously or unconsciously they made efforts to compensate for these shortcomings in their lives. It was also evident that unemployed adults experienced greater difficulties in retaining their social identity than did the youth. One of the more positive outcomes of Moller's (1992) study was the demonstration of self-reliance in many cases. This is an extremely important aspect and can be applied with great success in support circumstances. Disappointingly, it is reported in the next section that the Employment Services of the Department of Labour assist the unemployed youth in so far as registering them for unemployed benefits, if applicable, and placing them in skills programs for temporary periods of time. The services do not offer any counseling support.

Since the completion of the 1987-1988 survey South Africa has undergone a major socio-political transformation. No in-depth research on the unemployed youth has been conducted on this scale in the meantime. It is therefore important to plan a study of this nature again against the background of transformation and the rising levels of unemployment.

Drug abuse and crime are major consequences that are mentioned in many studies of the unemployed. Conflicting views on the rates of drug abuse among the unemployed and employed exist. Many studies have major methodological flaws and make it difficult for conclusions to be reached. Kandel (1980) indicated that the unemployed have the highest rates of use of most drugs, while Winton wrote that there is little evidence to support this view (Janlert & Hammerstrom, 1992). Interestingly enough

Peck and Plant (1986) found no significant association between unemployment and alcohol consumption in youth, although there was a correlation between illegal drug use and unemployment. Janlert & Hammerstrom (1992) found a reciprocal relationship between unemployment and alcohol consumption in their study of unemployed youths.

It would be noteworthy to try and determine what the relationship is between crime and unemployment in South Africa. Although no in-depth studies have been conducted to determine this hypothesis, the speculation is that in a country with such high unemployment rates the correlation would be obvious. Information on the prison population as of 28 February 2001 showed that nearly a third (31%) of prisoners were under the age of 26 (South Africa Survey 2001/2002). However, Schonteich (In: South Africa Survey 2001/2002) stated categorically that there is no link between poverty or unemployment and crime levels. The researcher explains his statement through the example of the province of Gauteng, which has low unemployment yet one of the highest crime levels in the country.

There are no illusions about the consequences of unemployment. The most important question that remains if the consequences of unemployment are taken into consideration is: What is the durability of the adverse effects, do the scars fade, and what can be done to relieve the distress of this group?

## **Solutions: policies and support structures**

Various measures for addressing youth unemployment are applied globally. These measures usually refer to policies and programmes. The ILO has a long history of designing policies to promote youth employment and training, starting as early as 1935 with the adoption of the Unemployment (Young Persons) Recommendations, 1935 (No. 45). Other relevant recommendations, conventions, and reports followed. The Special Youth Scheme Recommendation, 1970 (No. 136) for example gave guidelines for youth employment and training schemes, while the Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142) provided guidelines for vocational guidance and training linked to employment. The Youth report in 1986 included recommendations such as the role of social partners, the adoption of international labor standards on youth, formal education in preparation for the world of work, labor utilisation and access to education, training and employment, conditions of work in the informal sector, self-employment and small business creation schemes, and measures concerning special groups of youth like young women (O'Higgins, 2001). The World Employment Report 1998-1999 (ILO, 1998) importantly focused on training and employability, addressing issues such as: the implications of the change in demand for certain skills; the need - especially in developing countries - to be aware of the potential of the informal sector; and the need for training policies to take care of vulnerable groups. In 1998 at the International Labour Conference the ILO adopted a resolution concerning youth employment that contains valuable recommendations. Some of these



recommendations relate to the promotion of employment-intensive strategies to combat youth unemployment and encourage self-employment, as well as the importance of employment services providing more and better vocational guidance.

In the developed countries policy debates about youth unemployment usually oscillate between observations that relatively high rates of youth unemployment might be the efficient outcome of free market forces, and observations that youth get trapped into states of long-term unemployment because of inexperience and a lack of improvement of skills (Orszag & Snower, 1999). In developing countries like South Africa where falling aggregate demand is alarming as it affects the youth specifically, one would expect there to be policies and strategies in place to combat youth unemployment. One would also assume that these policies and strategies would *inter alia* concentrate on education and training systems, school-to-work issues (e.g. vocational guidance), active market policies and interventions, and direct employment creation programs in order to equip this disadvantaged group with lifelong advancement in skills, earnings, and occupational mobility. A few relevant policies are mentioned below.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement Policy of 2002 of the Department of Education makes provision for career guidance from Grade 1 to 9 under the learning area *Life Orientation*. Policy has been planned and prepared for quite some time now to give career guidance the status of a school subject from Grades 10 to 12. This policy is now ready and will be implemented in 2006. The Department of Education categorizes subjects as core, fundamental, or electives. Career guidance is now classified as a fundamental subject (Seckle, 2003).

However, two major problems are experienced. First, the career guidance at school level usually aims at activities such as getting to know oneself, as well as getting to know the world of work. Currently there is no formal comprehensive labor market information system available that provides information on occupations and training opportunities. The Department of Labour used to distribute a highly valued publication called *My Career* that included information on occupations. This publication was stopped in 1998. A few private career information systems have been developed and are available, but are usually very expensive and not accessible to most of the disadvantaged school learners. A crucial lack of information on the demand for certain skills or occupations is also experienced. Agencies like the Human Sciences Research Council (Whiteford et al., 1999), and the Bureau for Market Research (Van Aardt, 2001) have conducted independent studies in this regard and made information available through publications. The importance of timely and accurate labor market information cannot be overstated. Information on the labor market and opportunities available is critical if the move from a supply-driven to a demand-driven framework is to be facilitated. The Department of Labour does offer employment services through their labor centers that are located in all the nine provinces. With regard to unemployed youth these services relate mainly to registering them for UIF if they were in employment previously, and assessing and directing them to

skills programs and learnerships. Counseling interventions on how to handle unemployment are, however, not available.

The second problem refers to a register, or the non-existence of a register, of school or education leavers. Learners leave school from Grade 9 to 12 to enter either training institutions or the labor market. No official record is kept of those who leave school and try to enter the labor market. Statistics have shown that most of them who do not pursue further training, are immediately confined to unemployment and, as was reported in the section on unemployed youth in South Africa, stay unemployed. In order to identify and prioritize training and job placement services for the unemployed, Erasmus (2002) proposes a register that classifies unemployed people according to certain features; for example those who are entering the labor market for the first time, those who were previously employed, and those who are in long-term unemployment. The primary aim, however, should be to register the youth who leave school or education and want to enter the labor market so that a record can be kept of: how long they take to find a job; when they become unemployed; if they are confined to long-term unemployment; and what type of support strategies can be made accessible to them.

Skills development has always been placed high on the national agenda as a result of South Africa's history of discrimination, segmentation of the labour market, separation of education and training, insecure jobs, and the high unemployment rates. Various policies have emerged over the past few years in order to improve the low skills base of the South African population. The aim of these policies is to establish sustainable mechanisms for ensuring the availability of relevant skills to the national economy, and to provide opportunities so that people will be able to upgrade their skills in order to obtain access to the labor market. At the core of these policies lies the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a nationally regulated and standardized system of certification that closes the gap between education and training through the provision of opportunities without discrimination. Measures like the Further Education and Training Act, 1998, and the Education White Paper 4 promote a cost-effective and efficient further education system.

The Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy is the overarching framework that directs the South African government's approach and commitment to skills development in the workplace. The HRD has four main objectives, the third of which directly speaks to youth unemployment (DoL, 2001, 2002):

- Improving the foundation for human development: ensuring access to basic education;
- Improving the supply of high quality skills, by identifying scarce skills and promoting their development;
- Increasing employer participation in lifelong learning, and addressing youth unemployment and general unemployment; and

- Supporting employment growth through industrial policies, innovation, research and development.

The National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) was launched in February 2001 and some of the primary problems that the NSDS are trying to address are current and past discriminations in access to education and training opportunities along racial and gender lines, and the extremely high levels of unemployment, particularly among blacks, women, and rural communities. One of the most important objectives of the NSDS is to assist new entrants into employment. Linked to this objective are equity and integral aspects; national targets have been approved for the benefiting of blacks, females, and people with disabilities.

The mechanisms that were developed to achieve the objects of the NSDS are the Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levies Act. The primary aims of these acts are to introduce new institutions, programs and funding mechanisms to increase investment in skills development that is linked to economic and employment growth. The creation of learnerships, learning programs that lead to occupational qualifications, was one of the key endeavors of the SDA in the area of youth unemployment. The main intention was to make learnerships available for young people leaving schools and colleges and for unemployed people. In selecting people for learnerships, government has approved ratios of 85% black, 54% women and 4% people with disabilities. Unemployed people, however, have no guarantee of a job at the end.

National targets were set: Government wants by March 2005 a minimum of 80 000 people under the age of 30 to have had entered learnerships, and 50% of those who have undertaken learnerships to be employed, in full-time study or further training, or in a social development programme within six months of completion. The NSDS is now in its second year of implementation and there are currently in excess of 38 000 learners in learnerships, but only 20% (7781) of these learners are unemployed youth (DoL, 2003). The Employment and Skills Development Agencies Programme is a further initiative of the Department of Labour to try and fast track youth in learnerships. A pilot that will run over three years will commence shortly. The target is to train 20 000 unemployed youths over the three-year period. A further endeavor of government to assist the unemployed is their social development programmes. These programs are funded through the Social Development Funding Window under the National Skills Fund and are also aiming to assist *inter alia* the unemployed youth. Programs have been set up in this regard and are managed by the Department of Labour's provincial offices.

Amongst the policy successes in Europe in increasing employment prospects for unemployed youth are *inter alia* vocational education, apprenticeships, and labor market programs (Ryan, 2001). However, it was found that unlike additional schooling, labor market programs are not always that successful, particularly those based upon work experience and training in the workplace. Regular youth employment is

sometimes displaced by ventures of this nature and often these programs do not really make unemployed young people better off.

The Employment Equity Act (EEA) was established in 1998 and can be seen as an active labor market intervention to remove the discriminatory barriers to recruitment and employment that existed in the past. The EEA aims to promote equal opportunity and fair treatment in recruiting and employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination. It activates this through implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups. Employers have to implement affirmative action measures for designated groups in order to achieve employment equity.

Direct employment-creation programs are run by certain government departments. These programs are usually not sustainable in so far as they create mostly temporary employment opportunities. Some examples are the National Public Works Programme (NPWP) that consists of the Community Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP) and the Construction Industry Development Programme (CIDP). Although these programs primarily alleviate poverty, temporary jobs are also created, human resources are developed, and, communities are empowered. The CBPWP, for example, targets the poorest and most disadvantaged sector of South Africa's population: unemployed rural people. During 1997 the program was evaluated by the ILO and the National Community Agency for Social Enquiry. The evaluation was extremely positive, evaluating the program as one of the best programs among similar programs in 30 countries. However, this program has thus far managed to create only 76 000 temporary employment opportunities since 1998. The positive note to this is that at least 42% of these jobs were filled by women and 43% were filled by youth. This is only a drop in the ocean if it is considered that 5,5 million people between the ages of 15 and 34 are currently unemployed.

There are quite a number of organizations in South Africa that focus on the problems of youth and offer assistance and programs to address the problems. Some of the best known are the National Youth Commission, Umsobomvu, and the South African Graduates Development Association. The National Youth Commission is responsible for national youth policies and action plans. The Commission established the Youth Information Services in 1998. This is a comprehensive national information service to meet the needs of young people with no immediate access to advice and counseling resources on such priority issues as HIV-AIDS, careers, educational opportunities and youth rights. The Umsobomvu Youth Fund was established in 1998 with the main aim of creating a platform for job creation, skills development, and skills transfer for young people. Umsobomvu works to design and conceptualize strategies with key partners and role players in the youth employment field where they focus on youth entrepreneurship–self-employment, which is highly recommended by the ILO for developing countries with high unemployment rates. The South African Graduates

Development Association is an example of an organization that strives to address graduate unemployment.

While it should be noted that the mentioned policies and strategies could help to combat youth unemployment they can, however, only be successful in the realm of an overall healthy economic situation. Although an analysis of this falls outside the parameters of the paper, it is noteworthy to mention the most recent economic strategies aimed at addressing the unemployment issue. The Presidential Jobs Summit in October 1998 was an urgent drive for job creation initiated by the Department of Labour (1998). However, Erasmus, Steyn and Mentz (2003), as well as comments in the Soweton (2003), raised the question of the rising unemployment figures despite the objectives of the Presidential Jobs Summit. The predicament of high unemployment made labor, business and government join forces again in June 2003 with the Growth and Development Summit. They agreed to attempt to halve the unemployment rate by 2014, and committed themselves to increasing the number of unemployed young people in learnership programs to 72 000 by May 2004.

From the point of view of social justice, designing and implementing policies and strategies to address unemployment should carefully target the unemployed youth.

## Conclusion

There can be no doubt that youth unemployment in South Africa is a serious cause for concern. The damaging consequences are too ghastly to contemplate. Currently, a generation of young people in South Africa is caught in an inhumane dilemma that affects all spheres of their lives. Most of them have no prospect of a decent work-life that could enable them to earn an income, choose working activities that they would like to do, and be integrate into a socio-economic system whose stated aim is to benefit the majority of the nation.

Ridding the country of unemployment is one of the transformation issues that just can't wait. Job-creation strategies need to be increased in number and pace. The past decade was marked by consistent economic growth (an average annual rate 2,4%). Manufacturing exports have been growing strongly, and the economy is well positioned. A number of institutions have been put in place to enhance skills development. This re-positioning of the economy in the global arena augurs well for higher rates of labor absorption. Maximizing the country's obvious human potential needs new and flexible thinking.

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