

THE EXPERIENCES AND REFLECTIONS OF UNEMPLOYED FEMALE YOUTH IN LEPELLE-NKUMPI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY: TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

“The majority of the South African female youth are faced by scourge of unemployment; that has roots in the past apartheid legacy that resulted with majority of South African receiving poor education and training; labor demand and supply mismatch; slow economic growth; and lack of interest for entrepreneurship among citizens. These challenges affect youth more than adults, and female youth in particular. The purpose the study was to explore the experiences and reflections of women youth on the scourge of unemployment; and explore how entrepreneurial development and support can address their unemployment status and enculturate them in entrepreneurial activities. Two questions were raised, ‘to what extent does lack of job opportunities affect Lepelle-Nkumpi unemployed female youth? And what intervention strategies are put in place to support and prepare unemployed female youth into entrepreneurship spaces?’ The study is premised within interpretivist paradigm, and interviews and observation qualitative techniques were used to gather data from sixteen unemployed female youth. Content and narrative analysis were used.

The research findings revealed, firstly, a lack of job opportunities for job seekers, and difficulties in entering labor markets. Secondly, inadequacies in entrepreneurial development and support spaces that are needed for entrepreneurial success. As part of conclusion, this study recommends that government and private sector should create employment opportunities for female youth; and government enforce compliance to employment equity. Secondly, the level of entrepreneurial development and support intervention that target female youth should be raised in all communities, to improve female youth in entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Unemployed Female Youth, Entrepreneurial Development, Unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

“The majority of the South African female youth are faced by scourge of unemployment; that has roots in the past apartheid legacy that resulted with majority of South African receiving poor education and training; labor demand and supply mismatch; slow economic growth; and lack of interest for entrepreneurship among citizens. These challenges affect youth more than adults, and female youth in particular.

Mozambik restaurant-chain group chief executive Manny Nichas highlights that: “South Africa needed more entrepreneurs than ever before. With sustained weakness in the economy, continued pressure on consumers and a growing numbers of job cuts, reliance on the usual notion

of traditional employment amounted to nothing. Small to medium enterprises are the absolute key to re-igniting growth in South Africa” (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020a).

Manny Nichas was responding to low economic growth experienced in South Africa in the last quarter of 2019. South Africa was declared a ‘junk’ by Moody Investors Service. “A weak economy and an unreliable power sector” was cited by Moody Investors Service as the causes to junk status. In just three weeks before South Africa embarked on lockout as mass quarantine against coronavirus that was robbing global economies of deaths of her labour forces; the total shutdown has also crippled the global economies; and hit hard the South Africa economy that was already in a ‘junk’. This paper supports Nichas’ notion of improving the country’s economy through development and support of entrepreneurship among its citizens.

This study has adopted unemployment definition by Cloete (2015: 513) that defines unemployed as people “who are available for work and are looking for work, but cannot find paid work”. Majority of the South Africans, men and women, old and youth are affected by unemployment, and female youth in particular. The situation in South Africa is very scary and troublesome that the majority of the South African female youth are faced by scourge of unemployment; and the only source of income for those with children is child grant. Due to high levels of unemployment in the country, it is very difficult for youth to be assimilated in the labor market, particularly female youth who are less skilled and low educational levels. Cassim & Oosthuizen (2014) outlines a lack of employability of unemployed youth resulting from “low levels of education; dropped out of school; a lack of literacy, numeracy and communication skills; little work experience; a lack of financial resources to enable mobility to areas where there is demand for labor; and a lack of strong networks or social capital that allow them to source job opportunities, and tend not to have sufficient”

Majority of the South African women youth are faced by scourge of unemployment; and the only source of income for those with children is child grant. According to 2010 Labor Force survey “women are concentrated in sectors with low wages and low productivity” (Filmer & Fox 2014) are dearly. On the other hand, the aforesaid factors affect unemployed women youth more than men counterparts, because of women’s child rearing responsibilities. Research reveals that “care responsibilities are having negative impacts on mothers” (www.odi.org) and the future prospects in labor market and entrepreneurship. Such child rearing responsibilities deny many of unemployed women youth the mobility to search for job opportunities in towns and cities, as the man counterparts are doing. Despite the fact that “women’s migration has increased since the end of apartheid...due to improved work opportunities for women” the burden of child care responsibilities increases due to ongoing declination in marriage and cohabitation rates (Hall et al., 2015). Unemployed women youth are equally burdened by child care responsibilities. The primary objective of the study is to examine the experiences and reflections of women youth on the scourge of unemployment; and how entrepreneurial development and support can address their unemployment status and enculturate them in entrepreneurial activities.

BACKGROUND

Statistics South Africa defines unemployment as the situation in which “individuals between the ages of 15 and 64 are without jobs at the specific time, but looks for work” (Department of Communication and Information System, 2020, 1). Unemployment is defined as

people looking for jobs, excluding the discouraged ones, stands at 27,7% with 6,7 million South African (Statistics South Africa 2019). The expanded definition of unemployment stands at 38.5% with 10 million people (Statistics South Africa 2019). In the global labor force of 3,5 billion, 1,877 billion of them are unemployed, and South Africa has added a share of 7,6 million to such a global unemployment (International Labor Organization (ILO), 2020). One of long-term strategy was proposed by Thobejane & Thaba-Nkadimene (2017: 83) “that entrepreneurship education...is required to curb growing negative effects of youth bulging in South Africa”. The current situation of unemployment in the country, caused government to initiate streamline of regulations as youth short-term intervention programs.

South African government has enacted legislations and initiated interventions programs to address youth unemployment, however, the socio-economic issues that were experienced by youth prior 1994 are still prevalent (National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), 2011). Limitations in mitigation of adverse socio-economic issues that affected South African youth prior 1994, in 2011, and in 2020 is the clear indication of a lack and inadequacies in the design or implementation of the comprehensive youth policies, namely Youth Policies 2012-2016; and 2015-2020.

The aims of the National Youth Development Agency Act 54 of 2008 aims to (1) develop an Integrated Youth Development Plan and Strategy (YDPS) for South Africa; (2) develop guidelines for the implementation of an integrated national youth development policy and make recommendations to the President; (3) initiate, design, co-ordinate, evaluate and monitor all programs aimed at integrating the youth into the economy and society in general; (Government Gazette, No: 31780, 2009). In 2010 the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) amendment Act was enacted; and in 2011 it passed the parliamentary processes and it was implemented (National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), 2011: 09). Indeed, the Integrated Youth Development Strategy (IYDS) of South Africa 2012-2016 was formulated as compliance to NYDA 2009 and 2012; and was implemented.

South Africa is one of the few countries in Africa that has developed and attempted to implement a comprehensive youth policy over the past few decades. Despite all this, limited success has been recorded to date; youth are still affected by similar socio-economic issues as they were in 1994. The Department of Labor aimed at creating an enabling environment for job creation through the Employment Services Act that was passed in April 2014. The top four purpose of the Employment Services Act was to “(1) promote employment, (2) improve access to the labor market for work seekers; (3) provide opportunities for new entrants to the labor market to gain work experience; and (4) improve the employment prospects of work seekers, in particular vulnerable work seekers (Government Gazette No. 37539, 2014).

Research reveals that women experience a higher unemployment rate than men; and they are less likely to participate in the labor market (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018). This statement was hindered again in ILO 2020 report that highlights that women are more likely than men to be unemployed in large parts of the world”, instead those who are employed are doing menial jobs mostly in informal sector, and not decent jobs (ILO, 2020). This report further highlights that women lack of access to decent jobs is hindered by culture dictated gender roles and labor market discrimination.

The South African women who are black, young and live in rural areas are highly exposed to the risk of unemployment than any other category. Unemployment leads to vulnerability of black rural women (Mhlanga, 2018), and the effects of unemployment coupled with burden to support and care for their children, hit them very hard. Unemployed rural female youth are found in this circumstances that lowers their quality of life. Nemali (2006) reveals that rural female youth of Tshiheni village in Limpopo Province are most vulnerable to unemployment because of lack of job opportunities, low levels of education and skills, and that they are experience socio-economic hardships that manifest in the form of health challenges caused by psychological stress. This study further reveals that “majority of unemployed rural female youth are “not self-employed, but rely on families and child grants for support”. This situation prevails when global community continue with their commitment for gender equality and improvement to women participation in education and labor, as means to reduce poverty and boost economic development in pursuit to achieve United Nations Development Goal 8 target 8.5 (ILO, 2020).

If unemployed rural female youth look at government as ‘employer of last resort’, then the unemployment circumstances surrounding them and their daily experiences is not about to be resolved because unemployment is becoming a permanent phenomenon in South Africa. Unemployment and circumstances that caused majority of the Black South African to be less educated and lack skills required in the labor market, were goal attainment of apartheid government, that needed blacks to be its servant. And the government of the day has desperately failed to combat unemployment and provide quality education and labor related skills to Black South Africans.

The country is persistently in a down swing economic growth due to perennial slow economic activities (Mama, 2019). People in developing countries uses employment to move out of poverty and closes inequality gap. However, the case is different with the South African rural women youth, because they are still affected by triple challenges facing the previously disadvantaged group, that are the remnants of apartheid, namely, unemployment, inequality and poverty (Modiba, 2019). The primary objective of this paper is to examine the experiences and reflections of women youth on the scourge of unemployment; and how entrepreneurial development and support can address their unemployment status and enculturate them in entrepreneurial activities. Two questions were raised, namely, ‘what are your experiences of unemployment as a South African youth?’ And ‘what is the level of entrepreneurial development and support did you receive?’

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

The purpose the study was to explore the experiences and reflections of women youth on the scourge of unemployment; and explore how entrepreneurial development and support can address their unemployment status and enculturate them in entrepreneurial activities. In order to advance the purpose of the study, two main research questions were formulated, namely:

To what extend does lack of job opportunities affect Lepelle-Nkumpi unemployed female youth?

What intervention strategies are put in place to support and prepare unemployed female youth into entrepreneurship spaces?

LITERATURE REVIEW GREECE AND SPAIN ALSO EXPERIENCE THE SAME CHALLENGES OF HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT.

“The continued high rates of youth unemployment in South Africa present a serious risk to the promotion of an inclusive economy and society...Importantly, the nature of youth unemployment is such that it continued to affect African and female youth most, and is highest for those living in rural areas, townships and informal settlements” (Graham et al., 2018).

The extract displays current status of main employment, and the scourge of rural, township and informal settlement’s unemployed female youth. As indicated above, unemployment is not only a South African phenomenon, however, a global challenge (United Nations, 2013). Greece and Spain also experience the same challenges of high youth unemployment. South Africa and United Kingdom (UK) experience similar trends on youth and main unemployment rates. In South Africa youth unemployment is rocketing at 63%, with main unemployment at 27.7%. UK also shares the same trend of high youth unemployment rate than main unemployment rate. The challenges that deny the global community an opportunity to be active economic participants range from “job instability, few job opportunities, low skills development and advancement, and joblessness” United Nations, 2013).

Unemployed youth is characterized by a lack of employability due to low levels of education, dropped out of school, no literacy, numeracy and communication, coupled with little work experience (Filmer & Fox 2014/ Cassim & Oosthuizen, 2014). Department of Communication and Information System (2020) further identifies the causes of unemployment in South Africa as the global recession of period 2008-2009; surplus of unskilled and low skilled job seekers; job reservation for minority of population; legacy of apartheid and poor education and training; mismatches of labor demand with labor supply; demands of higher wages by trade unions; lack of intent for entrepreneurship; and Department of Labor (2013) added slow economic growth to this list.

In pursuit for global reduction of gender disparities and unemployment gaps, ILO (2020, 12) recommends improved formal education; vocational training; and entrepreneurial programmes that support women’s transition to decent jobs. In support, Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Honourable Buti Manamela, singled out entrepreneurship and self-unemployment as “central solution to deal with youth unemployment” (Omajjee, 2016). Deputy Minister further made scariest uttering that “skills and education does not guarantee employment” (Omajjee, 2016). This uttering from cabinet minister cause panic to unemployed youth and adults, particularly in periods when the country’s low economic growth fails to create job opportunities. A member of South African cabinet displays situation of despair from Presidency Office for unemployed citizens and to unemployed black female youth in particular. Continuity in unemployment and the high rate at which this phenomenon grows indicates that the country fails to contain it, and government’s intervention strategies in creating sustainable jobs and attracting investment is their continuous struggle.

Since SMMEs are in majority, “their success is important for the creation of employment and the well-being of society”. Research reveals that small business fails at 50% rate while still at existence-survival stages without reaching success-maturity stages (University of Stellenbosch Business School. 2018). In the same study, factors that impedes entrepreneurial and business

success were identified as “lack of proper management capacity and training; lack of access to sustainable financial assistance; inadequate industry research; crime; business competition; lack Literature is reviewed to answer three important questions, namely, what is unemployment? How are possible causes and effects of women youth unemployment? How can entrepreneurship and self-employment mitigate unemployment and its effects?

Sustainable financial assistance; inadequate industry research. Majority of the South African women youth are faced by scourge of unemployment; and the only source of income for those with children is child grant.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is premised within interpretivism paradigm that informed the choice of qualitative case study research. In this study, interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods were used to examine young South African women’s “experiences, understandings and perceptions” (Thanh & Thanh, 2015) of unemployment situations. This study tapped from benefits of the interconnection between interpretivism paradigm and qualitative research that offers multiple interpretations of the ‘unemployment among young South African women’ phenomenon from different research participants (Hammersley, 2013, Pham 2018); deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell 2007); complex phenomenon is studied within their context (Creswell, 2007, Baxter & Jack, 2008); allows interactive interviews (Pham, 2018); and acknowledges subjective component in the research process (Chowdhury, 2014). Interviews and observation qualitative techniques were used to gather data from sixteen unemployed female youth who were purposively selected from Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The first research finding reveals that the female unemployed youth experience a lack of job opportunities as job seekers; and difficulties in entering labor markets because they lack job experience. This finding emerged from the research question, ‘what are your experiences of unemployment as a South African female youth?’ South African economic landscape fails to create jobs for its citizens and female youth in particular. Whereas in other developed economies, female workers and their circumstances are accommodated through job streamlining to meet their needs. This will be in line with International Labour Organization 2016 Practical Guideline that emphasizes on adhering to “reasonable adjustments as an essential component for promoting diversity and inclusion at the workplace and the right to equality in employment, vocational training and education” (ILO, 2016). In trying to get solution to youth bulging that African states are facing, and South Africa in particular, Thabo Mbeki Foundation (2019: 36) stresses that “4IR-related policy should be cross-cutting and should take into consideration the hindrances to youth fully participating in the economy” as means to address the challenges to youth empowerment and inclusion.

The 21st Century Workplaces policies should focus on the needs of workers, and how they retain them. This will respond to employees needs that they “will require a reasonable accommodation at some point in the employment cycle...the need for a reasonable accommodation may arise from family responsibilities for children, parents or other dependents”

(ILO, 2016). However, in developing economies such as South Africa, that is still battling with creation of employment for its citizens, accommodations for female youth that is still outside of labour force, becomes a far-fetched dream. Instead, low economic activities that the country experiences, shrink business's and public sector's activities; have negative direct influence on labor markets; and result with retrenchments and non-creation of new job opportunities. The South African labor market in particular, are saturated for menial and less and highly skilled jobs in social and humanities and economic. However, there is high demand for highly skilled labor who are graduates in technological, computer-laden and scientific fields. The country needs to focus in such areas if it needs to address its triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

The current situation is very bleak to majority of South African who are drop out of schools; and without matriculation certificate. The basic education that is characterized by "substandard facilities with unqualified teachers who cannot impart basic skills like reading, writing, and mathematics is not enough" (Thabo Mbeki Foundation, 2019). Furthermore, poor public education that caters mostly the Black children, does not contribute much to production of graduates in technological, computer-laden and scientific fields. Instead schools are still lacking necessary pedagogical technologies; teachers' are still hooked in "traditional pedagogies instead of blending it with digital ones"; and that working conditions in schools are hostile to the 21st Century skills' teaching and learning (Lekgothoane & Thaba-Nkadimene, 2019). Similarly, Pholotho & Mtsweni (2016) reveals "resource-constrained schools in the Greater Tubatse Municipality are facing challenges of lack of access to electronic educational information and services". This discussion portrays how poor education contributes towards female youth unemployment in South Africa. The difficulties experienced by unemployed South African youth, and female unemployed youth in particular, are the results of low public education received during schooling years.

Only few unemployed youths are absorbed in informal and less paid jobs such as security officers, petrol attendance, cleaners, gardeners and house maids. One participant from drop-out of school category states that: "it is difficult to find employment if one does not have a required level of education or qualification required by the employer". Research supports this participant that low education levels; and lack or poor education have a negative relationship to employment opportunities (Tshabalala, 2014, Cloete, 2015).

Contrarily, youth unemployment was found to affect the educated female youth. The participant 7 a graduant and unemployed female youth indicates that: "I am a media graduants, with BA (Hons degree) as my highest qualification but unemployed. I have applied for internship and many advertised posts in media for the past five years, and all in vain. Majority of vacant posts are in technology, computer engineering and robotics. It is difficult to enter job market without 'market demanded knowledge and skills; and relevant job experience". Work capabilities and experience were pointed out as important requirement for securing a job opportunity, however, labour market demands dictate the successful placement of the incumbent. This finding is supported by (Mabiza et al., 2017) who stresses that the requirement of work experience by companies gives a greater impact on the job placement of newly graduated job seekers They further stress that the main dominating issue of unemployment is a lack of work capabilities and skills required by the companies.

Working experience that accompany vacant post recruitments; was identified by majority of participants as their enemy one to their employment opportunities. Participant 6 highlights that “Most companies require 5 to 10 years of working experience, and this is a challenge when one is still new from university. Such long services experiences of work experience, is a greater challenge to most of us who just graduated from colleges or universities. I know that Our president Cyril Ramaphosa is aware of this, but we need action or policy that will grant new job seekers equal opportunities in the labour market. In support, Julkunen (2009) and Van Aardt (2012) revealed they lack experience and skills and the that is a cause of youth unemployed.

The second research finding is inadequacies in entrepreneurial development and support spaces that are needed for entrepreneurial success. This finding emerged from the research question, ‘what is the level of entrepreneurial development and support?’

Participant 1 highlight that: “in two weekly projects I attended on entrepreneurship training, I realized after a time that the course content seemed good but not culturally and locally relevant to help a person from a village in establishing business within the same village. I then felt it was just a waste of time. Community-based entrepreneurship should bring social upliftment to rural communities and should consider “cultural values, shared resources, linkages, and mutual trust work for the community that is nurtured through close personal relations for the functioning of economic activities” Parwez, 2017). In order to consider the community culture and ethos, Wanniarachchi et al. (2018) recommends community based entrepreneurship (CBE) approach that is “an entirely different economic development approach from the traditional manufacturer's base”.

On addressing a topic entrepreneurship and “how technology can make South Africa a more equal country”, Moed (2018) highlights that “South Africa requires a solution today to remove itself from this vicious cycle, and technology can be an instrumental accelerator in this effort”. Participant 3 states that: “technology is highly used for module facilitation, and trainees were also expected to submit assignments online; and further participate in the online discussion forums. I succeeded in both programs, but I never participated in group discussion because of lack of connectivity in my village. I had to boarder a taxi or bus to nearby town for submission of my assignment using the services of internet cafe” Technology access and availability is a challenge in many rural communities in South Africa. In support the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) (2013) reports that “rural communities still “lags behind with regard to ICT access and in terms of economic development, such as literacy, computer skills and higher income”. The challenge to ICT access that is experienced by majority of South African living in rural communities in Limpopo is likely to be experienced by few people in Gauteng Province. This validate the pronouncement of South Africa as an equal society (Baker, 2019; Scott, 2019; Khadiagala et al., 2018)

Moreover, female unemployed youth in Limpopo Province that is highly rural, have less chances to becoming successful in their entrepreneurial endeavor due to level of support that is differentiated by location. Even the new developments and advancements to introduction of 4IR subjects is targeted to schools in provinces that are better off, and that were less affected by apartheid discriminatory laws. Participant 1 experiences challenges in her studies, that have potential to exist even in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

In pursuit of using technology to advance the South Africans, the Ministry of Communication and Postal Services hosted a one-day Conference under the theme “leveraging on digital platforms for 4IR creatives” the purpose was to “engages with creative industry on 4th industrial revolution opportunities...on the economic impact of digital platform optimization by the creative industries.” under the leadership of Minister Stella-Ndabeni-Abrahams and Deputy Minister Pinky Kekana (South African Government, 2019). Minister of Small Business Development Lindiwe Zulu stressed how the 4IR “will fundamentally alter the way we live, and relate to one another...is redefining how we function, as governments, business and society”. (South African Government, 2019). Minister Zulu further emphasizes a need for SMME’s to “embrace the relationships between technological capabilities and entrepreneurial opportunities” The three speeches indicate good wishes and intentions, that the ear want to hear, however, they are not yet changed into strategic action plans that influence SMEs’ policy, and develop and support entrepreneurial activities of unemployed female youth.

Whereas, the use of technology and tapping from 4IR is seen as a platform to improve entrepreneurship among Unemployed female youth, the promotion of entrepreneurial education that is integrated with technology, can become a long-term sustainable employment strategy; and the best strategy of snipping perpetual unemployment the country faces on its bud challenged, once for all. “Entrepreneurship education is widely promoted as an approach to addressing youth unemployment” (DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014). The triple E- strategy which the Department of Basic Education pilot, if its content is culturally driven and technologies used addresses localized features, then it will help address the scourge of unemployment in South Africa. South Africa needs to learn from India which has thriving economy because they brought it entrepreneurship in their poverty alleviation model. The Indian model of poverty eradication emphasizes education, employment and employability (3E) ecosystem; that has created “the enabling environment for the fourth E of entrepreneurship” that led reshaped their advancement to economic prosperity for all (Sabharwal, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of the study was to examine the experiences and reflections of women youth on the scourge of unemployment; and how entrepreneurial development and support can address their unemployment status and enculturate them in entrepreneurial activities. The study emerged with two main research findings, namely, firstly, a lack of job opportunities for job seekers, and difficulties in entering labor markets; and inadequacies in entrepreneurial development and support spaces that are needed for entrepreneurial success. As part of conclusion, this study recommends that government and private sector should create employment opportunities for women youth; and government enforce compliance to employment equity. Secondly, the level of entrepreneurial development and support that target women youth should be raised in all communities, to improve women youth in entrepreneurship.

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