Psychological effects of graduate unemployment among Seventh-day Adventist youths in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative approach was to gain in-depth insight into the psychological effects of unemployment on youth graduates in Bulawayo. Unemployment is associated with psychological problems amongst the youth graduates in Bulawayo namely, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, anger, conflicts with family members and church members, substance abuse, lower attendance to church services, and gatherings as the individual develops feelings of apathy. As a qualitative approach, the researcher used a case study design with purposive sampling that resulted in the selection of ten participants due to the saturation of data. Bulawayo Seventh-day Adventist youth graduates were the target population. Ten unemployed youth graduates were chosen as the participants and semi-structured interviews were used as the research instrument. Data were analyses using the thematic content analysis approach, and presented in a narrative form where participants’ voices were heard through direct quotations. Findings obtained from the study indicated that the unemployed youth graduates are frustrated, their self-esteem is also affected some they now suffer from substance abuse disorders and depression. The study recommended that unemployed youth graduates must be empowered by entrepreneurship skills and capacity building programs.

Key Words: Psychological, graduate, unemployment, depression, self-esteem

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has been grappling with the problem of high unemployment among graduate youths for some time and the problem continues to worsen (Kanyenze, 2010; Zim-Stat, 2012). Young people, mostly those who have left colleges and universities are in a psychological predicament due to lack of employment, creating a condition called graduate unemployment. Zimbabwean youths’ psychological and behavioral development are generally affected. Firstly, graduate youths were even more enthusiastic upon completion of their studies and looked forward to putting their newly-acquired knowledge and skills to practical use at the workplace, but that has all remained just a daydream (Chibaya & Masekesa, 2014). Desolately, their hopes and ambitions have dreadfully evaporated and been replaced by choking frustration and despair. Moller (1991) asserts that the daily demands affecting the unemployed youth graduates namely identity in terms of employment and status can result in mental disturbances in particularly, depression, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, low self-esteem, lack of concentration, feelings of loneliness, less internal control and more external control, thinking that their lives are controlled by external forces. Former Health Minister, Parirenyatwa, is on record as having said that economic hardships, thus unemployment, coupled with drug abuse, has contributed significantly to the increase in people suffering from mental disorders in the country with statistics estimated at 1.3 million countrywide (www.dailynews.co.zw/2015/01/28). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the psychological effects of graduate unemployment among unemployed Adventist youths in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

1.1. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To explore the psychological effects of graduate unemployment.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. DEFINITION OF GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT

Graduate unemployment refers to a circumstance whereby the graduate youths, who are enthusiastic and proficient to work, find themselves disadvantaged of such opportunities in the existing job market (Chirisa & Muchini, 2010; Willemse, 2015). Unemployment in graduate youths is consequently a situation of dispossession which robs youths of the welfares of work and represents a dark era in their individual and psychological development. Thus, unemployment becomes a problem of graduate youths, and its effects are intuited more by youth as compared to adults. Bjarnason and Sigurdardottir (2003) observed that graduate unemployment is a condition in which a university or college graduate is unemployed or not able to get a job. Thus, the situation when somebody who has attained skill and knowledge in a certain field at a University or College of higher learning in possession of his/her certificate, diploma, and degree is having challenges to get employment. Unemployed graduates can be categorized into those who have never worked.
after graduation from the university and those who have lost their jobs thereby seeking re-entry into labour market (Fajana, 2000).

2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT

The experience of being unemployed is challenging, devastating, and stressful to the affected youths (Blyton & Jenkins 2010; Willemse, 2015). It is an experience that does not only affect the individuals but the entire households including the extended family members. Unemployment diminishes the affected individual’s self-esteem. Huppert (2009) observed that psychological well-being is the combination of being happy and living healthily. The notion of feeling happy does not only involve the positive emotions of happiness and contentment, but also includes emotions such as interest, engagement, confidence, and affection. The idea of living healthily in a psychological outlook requires the development of one’s ability, having control over one’s life, having a sense of concentration. For example, working towards esteemed goals, and familiarity with optimistic relations. According to Huppert (2009), maintainable well-being does not need individuals to feel good all the time and he highlighted that the experience of painful emotions for example disappointment, failure, and grief are essential for long-term well-being. Psychological well-being is on the other hand negatively affected when negative emotions are life-threatening or very long-lasting and interfere with a person’s ability to function in his or her life (Huppert, 2009).

Jenkins (1985) cited in Nzekwue (2008) that there is more than an arbitrary number of illnesses due to unremitting search for jobs and not succeeding. Studies have shown that 20% of the unemployed youth graduates report a worst-case of mental health for example increase in anxiety, depression, psychosis, and substance abuse (Jenkins, 1985 cited in Nzekwue, 2008). No one thinks that it will happen to him or her as most graduates wish to have a brighter future ahead. Amazingly they find themselves in streets roaming with their certificates in search of jobs and they do not find one. According to Jenkins (1985) cited in Nzekwue (2008) this causes mental derailment, the personality and relationship are eroded and the individual feels meaningless, hopeless, and ashamed.

Graduate unemployment is a solemn issue worldwide (Willemse, 2015). The graduate youth unemployment rate in South Africa increased from 13 percent in 1993 to 26 percent in 2007. Unemployment affected graduate youth’s psychological welfare, production, and social instability. The negative consequences of graduate youth unemployment for well-being have been well documented in South Africa (Creed & Watson, 2003; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg & Kinicki, 2005). Willemse (2015) observed the negative effects of unemployed graduate youth and their family. Negative effects include physical and psychological effects. Physical effects include an increase in headaches; sleep problems, hypertension; heart disease, and kidney disease. Psychological effects include increased hostility, depression, anxiety, stress, anger, lack of confidence, despair, and loneliness. Lack of employment among graduate youth cause diminution
in self-esteem, life satisfaction, aspiration levels, concentration, and personal identity of the unemployed graduate youth (Willemse, 2015). Unemployed youth graduates in South Africa experience family problems such as an increase in marital friction, family conflict, and a diminution in family cohesion. Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2004) showed that, although life satisfaction is moderately stable over time, unemployment affects this in the long term.

2.3. IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON SELF ESTEEM

According to Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) self-esteem are the entire value individuals put on themselves, their worthiness, and their capabilities. Consequently, high self-esteem refers to one being overconfident about him/herself and low self-esteem refers to one being less confident about him/herself (Baumeister et al, 2003). Committee on Psychiatry in Industry in the USA (1982, p.73) cited in Gonzo and Plattner (2003) observed that “the ability to work is an essential part of healthy self-esteem, and is vital for the good mental health of most of the people”. Therefore, the self-esteem of a person decreases because of being jobless, generally, people have the mentality that works is the only thing that makes a person valuable (Gonzo & Plattner, 2003; Winefield, Tiggeman, Winefield, & Golding, 1993).

Goldsmith, Veum, and Darity (1997) used the results of a longitudinal survey of youth conducted in the USA to find out the relationship between unemployment and self-esteem. The study established that the longer the unemployed youth graduates, the more they lower their self-esteem. Negative remarks from the family members, the community, or other people they get help from, can add to a sense of inadequacy. As time goes on these adjustments in self-esteem can lead one to view him/herself of no value. Some they end up having an external locus of control.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

The research philosophy or set of beliefs that inform the conduct and writing of this qualitative research is constructivism (Creswell, 2007). This paradigm helped the researcher to understand the context of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants. Thus, the constructivism paradigm enables the building of new theory through interaction hence generating new knowledge (Creswell, 2007). This study used a qualitative research approach. Struwig and Stead (2001:56), indicate that “. . . qualitative research allows the researcher to understand the participants’ thoughts, feelings, and viewpoints on certain issues. Babbie and Mouton (2001), defines the qualitative method as a naturalistic research method that describes and evaluates the performance of the program in its natural settings. Babbie and Mouton (2001:162) continue to explain that “. . . the strengths of qualitative research are the creation of trust and rapport with research participants”. This methodology reduces disbelief and distrust and allowed for an increase in trust and credibility between the researcher and the participants. The researcher opted for a qualitative study to influence methods of data collection that afforded her the opportunity to record and
understand the participants’ views regarding the psychological effects of unemployment on youth graduates.

The case study research design was considered the most suitable approach to employ in this study because it provides a methodical way to collect data or multiple perspectives rooted in a specific context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Yin (2003) defines a case study as a practical inquiry that investigates a modern phenomenon within its real-life context. The main aim was to understand participants in a social context by interpreting their actions as a single group or community, hence the case. The researcher opted for the case study as an action plan because it allows a lot of primary data gathering using multiple techniques. The case study also allowed the researcher to generate a diversity of participant perspectives over the phenomenon under study. With the case study approach, all collected evidence on the psychological effects of unemployment among Adventist graduate youths in Bulawayo urban area was interpreted to arrive at the best possible responses to the research questions. Consequently, this design allowed the researcher to gain a whetted understanding of the psychological effects of unemployment on graduate youths in Bulawayo urban areas. Yin (2009) notes that case study research design is criticized for cumbersome data, but the researcher of this study used qualitative data analysis using thematic methods based on sub-questions which assisted by sorting and classifying collected data into themes to gain a sharpened understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Sampling is the process of selecting a sufficient number of elements from a population, on which judgments about the whole population can be generalized (Cresswell, 2007). The researcher used non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling was utilized in this study and the best available people provided rich data on the research questions. Cresswell (2007) describes purposive sampling as selecting participants with a wide general knowledge of the topic or those who have undergone the experience. The researcher used an interview guide as a data collecting instrument. Data were analysed using the thematic content analysis approach, and presented in a narrative form where participant's voices were heard through direct quotations. To circumvent weaknesses that are inherent in non-use of software-based analysis, the researcher engaged in reflexivity (to deal with her own biases) and the researcher also enlisted the services of a colleague (who is a seasoned researcher) during segmenting and coding of data. The researcher dealt with the issues of trustworthiness of data through recording interview proceedings verbatim, prolonged stay in the field until data saturation, and member-checking before data analysis. The researcher respected all protocols of seeking permission. The ethical consideration of informed consent, confidentiality, and protection from harm was fully observed.

4.0. RESULTS

Figure 1.1 Theme 1: Unemployed youth graduates are frustrated and sub-themes.
4.1. Theme 1: Unemployed youth graduates are frustrated

Findings showed that the unemployed youth graduates now have low self-esteem because of being unemployed and their faces showed that they are very angry about their situation. The findings revealed that unemployment has affected them to the extent that they lack confidence in whatever activities they do. Findings also have shown that unemployment has damaged their life satisfaction in the sense that when they graduated they had huge expectations and thought their life would change only to find that there are no jobs instead there is retrenchment, now they have to depend on their parents’ money and this frustrates them as they cannot do anything. As evidenced by their verbatim statements below

Participant (1) revealed that

“There is the association between unemployment and mental disorders because of frustration resulting from disappointment as a result of not being employed, right now I cannot afford to buy myself a church hymn book and the bible of my choice because I don’t have money”

Participant (4) alluded that

“I now have low self-esteem especially when I know that I have wasted my parents’ money, now I am like those who did not attempt to go to university, my self-worth has been reduced”

Participant (5) said
“I value my self in terms of money, dress and social life, so obviously my expectations were high when I graduated, but because finding a job is all in vain, I cannot even participate at church because I am not confident enough”

Participant (6) said

“I see myself less confident and not worthy of much in life, I am not happy at all”

Such utterances have displayed that there is an association between unemployed youth graduates and self-esteem, as evidenced by the majority of the participants.

4.2. Sub theme 1: Unemployed youth graduates experience psycho-somatic disorders

The findings showed that the unemployed youth graduates feel sick with headaches, and have developed physical effects which include an increase in hypertension, heart disease and kidney disease. The findings revealed that the unemployed graduates cannot sleep thinking about their future which is not moving while some of their friends who do not have degrees are working, as evidenced by these quotes,

Participant (2) said

“I have a headache that’s not ending due to thinking much about being unemployed”

Participant (3) argued that

“There are things that are moving all over my body and I hear pain all over my body”

The above utterances may suggest that unemployment may lead to psycho-somatic disorders, as the majority of the participants stated that.

4.3. Sub theme 2: Unemployed youth graduates are depressed

The findings showed that unemployed youth graduates are always depressed and have even thought of committing suicide because of being unemployed also thinking about the wasted and sleepless nights they had when they were learning and this worsens their despair, also some of the participants stated that they abuse alcohol not because they want to, but only to ease or cope with their stress. The majority of the participants in the study revealed that they are depressed, as evidenced by their verbatim statements below

Participant (7) noted that

“Too much thinking in terms of how to make ends meet in a bleak future will lead to depression, I once thought of ending my life because I was sick and I did not have money to just buy the medication and as it is I still owe the hospital their money”

Participant (8) said
“I am depressed, seriously it is not good to spend years studying and then fail to obtain employment I am now a burden again to my parents.”

Participant (9) argued that

“To a greater extent being unemployed leads to stress, hence, now addicted to alcohol to get rid of stress, though it’s not allowed in our church doctrine, what stresses me a lot is I was deported from South Africa where I had gone to look for greener pastures to make ends meet.”

The above revelations may suggest that unemployed youth graduates are depressed, have low self-esteem, and frustrated; as the majority of the participants stated above.

5.0. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to gain in-depth insight on the psychological effects of graduate unemployment and the findings revealed that the majority of the participants stated that there is an association between unemployment and mental disorders, as they experienced mental disorders such as depression, substance abuse, somatic disorders and some being para-suicidal. The findings also discovered that their self-esteem was lowered as a result of being jobless. Majority of the participants stated that being unemployed affects their life satisfaction with regards to not being happy at all with the daily requirements, thus, these findings concur with Landy (1989) who found out that low self-esteem, self-blame and lack of confidence, as a result of being jobless, can negatively affect the outcome of job-seeking behavior.

These outcomes concur with Nzekwue (2008) who asserted that there are more than an arbitrary number of illnesses due to unremitting search for jobs and not succeeding, 20% of the unemployed youth graduates report the worst cases of mental disorders such as an increase in anxiety, depression, substance abuse, this cause mental derailment, the personality, and relationship are eroded and the individual feels meaningless, hopeless and ashamed (Nzekwue, 2008). Evidence from Zimbabwe indicates that there is an association between youth graduates’ unemployment and mental disorders. The Health Minister, Parirenyatwa (2015) as mentioned in the introduction of the study concurs that economic hardships, thus, unemployment, has contributed significantly to the increase in people suffering from mental disorders in the country with statistics at 1.3 million countries wide. These findings of this research concord with the findings of other researchers in different parts of the world and these findings were applicable in the Zimbabwean context of understanding the graduate unemployment and psychological effects.

6.0. CONCLUSIONS
Upon reflecting on the psychological effects of unemployment on unemployed youth graduates, the participants reported being experiencing the psychological effects due to their unemployment. The psychological effects that were revealed include the following, low self-esteem as a result of not finding jobs and not having money leading to lack of confidence, mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, para-suicidal, and substance abuse were revealed in this study. The study also revealed that the participants experienced more unproductive time spent, as they spent their day doing nothing productive. Participants reported that they regard work as very important to them considering that they are graduates and they have degrees.

6.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1.1. Recommendations for the Unemployed Youth graduates

- The researcher is recommending that the graduates should have a sense of self-employment that is being able to fit in any job since the university teaches them to be versatile in every aspect (emancipatory education).
- The researcher recommended skills development programmes for youth graduates (Capacity building programmes).
- Advocacy and lobbying for entrepreneurship skills

6.1.2. Recommendations for the Counsellors and Psychologists

- Awareness campaigns or workshops on the psychological impact of unemployment so that the psychologists and counselors can gain in-depth insight.
- Focused group discussion on the mitigating measures of unemployment.

6.1.3. Recommendations for the researchers and policymakers;

- The researcher recommends that the Government should help people to cope by finding other ways of fulfilling the needs satisfied by employment like entrepreneurship skills.
- The researcher recommends that more industries should be built to create employment that will accommodate a large number of people.
- The researcher recommends further studies on the social effects of unemployment on graduate’s youth.

7.0. REFERENCES


**AUTHORS PROFILE**

Grace Moyo is a Lecturer at Zimbabwe Open University and a PhD Candidate in Psychology with the University of South Africa. She graduated with a Master of Science in Community Psychology Degree from Midlands State University in Zimbabwe. Her current research interests are in the areas of community psychology, health risk behaviors, substance abuse, and resilience.