

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

Youth unemployment rates in Botswana remain extremely high and usually exceed the national and adult unemployment rates. This is in spite of Botswana's famed overall economic growth. This study investigates factors that contribute to youth unemployment in Botswana and how unemployed youth are positioned as agents amidst these. It is based on the analysis of secondary data as well as individual interviews and focus group discussions with unemployed youth in Gaborone and Mogoditshane. Some of the highlights of this research are that poor performance at secondary school, a disconnect between education and labour market, precarious employment, weak networking skills, gender stereotypes, and lack of youth engagement in policy making contribute to youth unemployment. In this case, unemployment cannot solely be understood as the absence of jobs. The youth perceive the labour market conditions as overwhelming their agency. Their strength lies in the potential to articulate ideas that policy makers could use to bring about change. The research suggests, among others, putting in place strategies to create an environment for decent work, motivate students to learn, initiate educational and work programmes to change gender attitudes, and strengthen platforms for youth engagement.

Keywords: unemployment; youth unemployment; education; labour market; precarious employment; gender; Botswana

Introduction

The initial story of Botswana is one of massive poverty and an economy that did not promise to take off in 1966 when it gained independence. On Independence Day Botswana was in the bottom list of countries that were experiencing abject poverty and had undeveloped social and economic infrastructure. In a massive country the size of France, there was only a 12 km stretch of road network, 22 university graduates and 100 people who had completed secondary education (Acemoglu et al., 2001). Aside from subsistence agriculture and a few mining opportunities in South Africa, employment opportunities in the country were rare (Sechele, 2016a). The story of poverty and economic stagnation changed to one of economic boom following the discovery of diamonds in 1967. Since then, diamonds deposits are still being discovered and find a booming market in the developed world. In April 2019 Lucara Diamond Corporation recovered the largest diamond in the history of Botswana worth 1,758 carat at its Karowe mine in Letlhakane which superseded another rare find in the same mine in 2015 worth 1,109 carat. (Mining Review Africa, July 2019.) In June 2021, DEBSWANA, a joint venture between DeBeers (PTY) LTD and Botswana government, announced the discovery of a largest diamond in the history of its operation at Jwaneng mine worth 1,098 carat (The Guardian, 16 June 2021). Diamonds have become the mainstay of Botswana's economy. With a GDP per capita of USD 7306.50 in 2020 Botswana is classified by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country (Trading Economics, 2020). The government has used proceeds from diamond sales to develop roads, build schools and health infrastructure, and accumulate large sums of monetary reserves in accounts abroad (Acemoglu et al., 2001). For the sake of national unity, the first President of Botswana Sir Seretse Khama ensured that the proceeds are shared nationally without considering where the diamonds originated. Like all economies in the world, Botswana has been badly affected by the COVID19 pandemic resulting in its economy contracting by 8.9 per cent in 2020 (African Development Bank, 2021). However, a recent report by the Bank of Botswana has projected that the economy will grow by 8.8 per cent in 2021 due to the current sound financial environment and monetary policy (The Voice Newspaper, 4 March 2021).

Although Botswana stands out in the production and sale of diamonds in the world and overall economic growth, this has not significantly translated into employment creation. Overall unemployment rate in Botswana in the last quarter of 2020 was recorded as 24.5 percent

(Weekend Post, 15 February 2021). In the same period the unemployment rates for youthful age groups of 15-17, 20-24 and 25-29 were recorded as 61 percent, 43 percent and 31 per cent respectively (ibid.). Youth unemployment rates in Botswana usually exceed the national and adult rates. The creation of employment opportunities for youth has remained the central issue among policy makers and politicians. Several policies and programmes, such as youth development fund, out of school youth fund, and internship programme have been put in place, by the government and the private sector, to tackle youth unemployment (Diraditsile, 2021). Despite these initiatives, youth unemployment rates remain extremely high. It is very vital to undertake research to understand what really the main problem is. It is in understanding this problematic that appropriate responses can be initiated. This study therefore seeks to understand the factors that contribute to youth unemployment and the struggles that young people come across in their employment searches. The research studies the perceptions of unemployed young people on the ease finding jobs, captures what they articulate as hindrances to their entry into the labour market and how they are positioned as agents. While there has been research on factors that affect youth unemployment in Botswana, emphasis has been placed on the analysis of objective attributes of those not in employment. This study adds the subjective element by projecting the lived experiences young people. Therefore, the factors identified here are drawn from their job search struggles and encounters with labour market structures.

Policies towards Youth Employment in Botswana

Exactly three decades after independence, Botswana government formulated a national youth policy to address matters that concerned the well-being of young people, including tackling unemployment (Ministry of Labour and Home affairs, 1996). It proposed specific programmes that would improve young people's human capital and a national strategy that could boost the economy. The policy further proposed the promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship among young people as a way of creating opportunities to generate income in a more market-oriented way under the assistance of the government, private sector, and non-governmental organizations. As noted by Nthomang and Diraditsile (2016), despite its good intentions, 14 years later the youth continued to be unemployed, and their conditions could not get any better. The government had no way of monitoring and ensuring that what was on paper resulted into sustainable job creation (ibid.). As a response, the government came up with a revised version of

the national policy in 2010 (Ministry of youth, sports, and culture, 2010). The revised policy provides a framework towards addressing the integration of young people in the national economy as well as emerging issues such as, youth and environment as well as science and information technologies. It recognises that unemployment is a national problem that affects youth the most. Specific strategies to tackle youth unemployment suggested here include, revision of employment policies to ensure that they address youth matters, creation of labour intensive public works programmes that target young people in the form of creating a quota for their employment, giving preferences for young entrepreneurs in the tendering processes, changing the educational curriculum to align it with the needs of industry, as well as promotion of a partnership between the government, private sector, non-government organisations and young people in matters of job creation. In addition to these, the policy calls for the creation of youth micro-credit schemes to fund young people (aged 18 – 35 years) who intend to engage in self-employment. It further calls for harmonisation of all employment policies to ensure that they do not contradict each other to the extent of hindering young people from entering the labour market. In recognition that rural youth have limited employment opportunities (Siphambe, 2003), the policy proposes a bias in allocation of resources to the rural areas. While the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture oversees the formulation of the policy, its implementation requires the collaborations between various government ministries and departments. The contents of the policy are mere suggestions as opposed to an Act of parliament that requires each Ministry to comply with.

As one of the strategies to implement the recommendations of the national youth policies, the government of Botswana has come up with a Youth Development Fund to finance young people who wish to venture into self-employment. According to Sechele (2016a), funding is in the form of 50 per cent grant and another 50 per cent being a loan facility which is interest free. The Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Agency (popularly known as CEDA) has introduced a Young Farmers Fund since 2007 as a loan facility for those young people who wish to venture into agriculture (ibid.). In response to a call for the private sector to partner with the government, the Kgalagadi Breweries company runs a Kick-start grant programme to fund unemployed young people who wish to engage in viable self-employment projects (Diraditsile & Maphula, 2018). Aside from this one private initiative, the input of the private sector in the integration of young people in employment is almost non-existent. This means that the bulk of youth empowerment

efforts are initiated, implemented, and monitored by the government while the private sector is on the side-line.

Empirical Studies of Youth Employment and Unemployment

This part reviews literature on the factors that cause youth unemployment or affect young people's access to jobs. There have been several studies that focus on factors associated with unemployment in Africa including a few in Botswana. However, the studies are mostly quantitative and focus on the objective characteristics of those who are unemployed. The surveys analyse the relationship between unemployment and such variables as gender, education, age, and location. Others analyse the general growth in employment opportunities and point to failure by the economy to create jobs.

There is a consensus that age affects access to employment. In contrast to adults, young people are disadvantaged in the labour market. Youth unemployment rates are always higher than adult rates. According to the African Capacity Building Foundation (2017), in 2012 the unemployment rate for youth in Sub-Saharan Africa was at 12.8 per cent as compared to only 6.5 per cent of adults. In Botswana Sechele (2016a) found that highest unemployment rates are among those aged 12 -29 years which fall within the youth bracket and that those aged between 15-24 had rates that more than doubled the adult rates. It was further found that the rates of unemployment generally dropped with age (ibid). In the most recent population census (2011) it was found that almost 80 per cent of those who were recorded as unemployed were aged between 15 and 34 years (Statistics Botswana, 2014).

Whilst youth unemployment rates are high, gender differences are quite stark. Young women in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa experience higher levels of unemployment than young men (Kanyenze et al., 2000; Okojie, 2003; Mlatsheni and Leibrandt, 2004). In urban areas of Africa, where young men and women could find some paid work, most young men enter the formal job market which is more rewarding while young women are concentrated in informal employment and lower earning positions (Okojie, 2003). This view is supported by a finding by Diraditsile & Ontese (2017) on the lived experiences of unemployed young women in Mahalapye, Botswana. The employment histories of young women in this study revealed that they once worked in low paying occupations such as being petrol station attendants, shop assistants in Chinese shops

and restaurants. However, this study did not investigate how these young women might have lost their jobs. A study by Sechele (2016a) found that female unemployment rates in Botswana are higher than male unemployment rates for all age groups. He therefore concluded that being female reduces the chances that one may find employment in Botswana's labour market and that the inverse is true for males. Accounting for high female unemployment rates in Botswana, Matandare (2018) cites traditional gender stereotypes that a woman's role is childbearing and care for other family members and not in the labour market.

Location also matters in the analysis of employment and unemployment. In Africa, urban unemployment rates are always higher than those of rural areas (Okojie, 2003). It is most likely that in rural communities, young people assist their parents in agricultural activities and are counted as employed. Another possibility is due to urban bias in distribution of employment opportunities fuelling rural-urban migration. This means that young men and women do migrate to where jobs are perceived to be available (urban areas), thus contributing to urban unemployment. The rural areas might, as well, be constituted by discouraged workers, who do not count as jobs seekers. While the general African picture is correct, in some Southern African countries there are more chances of finding employment in the urban areas by young people than the rural areas (Brixiova & Kangoye, 2013). In Botswana there is a positive relation between unemployment rate and poverty rates. Highest rates of unemployment are found in rural areas where poverty is also rampant, whereas cities experience low rates of unemployment and poverty (Siphambe & Bakwena, 2017). In 2013 for instance, Gaborone city experienced 10 per cent unemployment and almost 15 per cent poverty rates whereas the rates for Ngamiland West (rural) were 30 percent and 75 percent respectively (ibid.). This phenomenon is also attributed to Botswana government's deliberate policy of urban bias in the allocation of development resources (Sechele, 2016 b). As a result of this bias, most of the jobs are created in urban areas where infrastructure is most developed than in the rural areas (Siphambe, 2003). The contribution of agriculture to both gross domestic product and employment creation in this country is very minimal, thus not many young people are absorbed in this sector. According to UNDP (2012) the contribution of agriculture to GDP in Botswana has dropped from 42.7 per cent in 1966 to 1.9 per cent in 2008.

Other studies point to a dislike of certain occupations or work by young people who then choose to remain unemployed. This is referred to as job selectivity. A study by Jacob (2011) on the causes of youth unemployment in Uganda has demonstrated that certain sections of the youth, especially those who are educated, tend to shun some low-level occupations with the hope of getting better jobs. However, among the factors identified, this was the least in terms of importance as only 4% of the sample stated so. This may not apply to many of the unemployed young people who are constituted by those with low levels of education and training. In many countries in Africa, which have experienced economic stagnation, and where formal jobs are not guaranteed, most young people cannot afford to be unemployed; they eke out their living in low level jobs, majority of which are in the informal sector (Okojie, 2003; Chigunta et al., 2005; Lugalla, 1997). While young people's engagement in low productivity employment and informal sector activities cannot be denied, in certain countries that have not experienced economic stagnation, such as South Africa, most young people are not found in the informal sector (Klasen & Woolard, 1997). Instead of engaging in low productivity activities in the informal sector, unemployed young people attach themselves to household members who are working or receive social security support. In Botswana, Siphambe & Bakwena (2017) also question why the youth in this Sub-Saharan country do not enter the informal sector and challenge researchers to study this factor to broaden our understanding of youth unemployment.

Youth unemployment can also be attributed to failure by the economy to create enough jobs to absorb the labour force. In the case of Botswana, the economy is based on mining, especially diamonds, which is capital intensive in nature in the sense of employing a small workforce to carry out production. Diversification into other commodities is quite minimal. According to Siphambe & Bakwena (2017), if the economy fails to generate enough jobs, the young people are less likely to get employed due to lack of experience and capital in the form of training needed to penetrate the labour market. He highlights that most of the unemployed youth in Botswana do not possess any training beyond secondary schooling (ibid.). However, the researchers do not seek to go into any details to account for why young people do not progress for further training. Could this be an issue of poor performance or the limited opportunities for training?

It is important to note that methods employed in carrying out studies highlighted in this

review lack agency in that they do not show how young people have experienced, and think about, the objective structural arrangements. They are based on speculations regarding how these variables or structural arrangements might affect young people's entry into the labour market. Using young people's voices and experiences would best clarify these features. It would also demonstrate that the factors are not solely derived from the standpoint of the researcher, but truly reflect the realities on the ground. This is the gap that this research intends to bridge.

Methodology

Sampling and sampling size

The research covered young people between the ages 15 -29 years, which is consistent with the Commonwealth definition of youth (Chigunta et al., 2005). The sample constituted 38 young people in Mogoditshane and Gaborone. In the absence of a sampling frame for unemployed young people, the study used purposive and snowball sampling to select participants. Using snowball strategy, the researcher entered a residence to identify any unemployed young person and requested them to participate in the interviews. The interviewee was further asked to locate any other young persons in similar situations in the neighbourhood. The researcher purposively selected low-income residences, where it was expected they would be more unemployed young people.

Research Methods

This study employs a triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative methods but leans more towards the latter. The quantitative aspect mostly applies in the background data, literature review to show the magnitude of unemployment, that exist largely in the form of secondary statistical data, or to clarify recurrence of some few qualitative categories. Primary data, which constitutes the bulk of this study, was collected using two qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews and focus groups, where the former is the main. As the research sought to use more interactive methods that give young people a voice to express themselves, these were found to be more appropriate. Because of the need to capture experience or dispositions (internal structures), the formatting of questions followed those used in a life story interview. The life story interview guide generally addresses themes/topics such as family and formative experiences, working life, adult family, and social life (Slim & Thompson, 1993).

The interview guide contained questions around demographics, previous work experiences, perceptions of the labour market, and experiences of unemployment. While this study has not covered employees, the approach nonetheless helps us to have a glimpse of what young people experience while in the formal and informal labour markets as employees. Questions which asked young people to reflect on how in the past they got, quit, or lost their employment, draw us to broader issues of the labour market covering employment and unemployment. Therefore, this study could serve as a precursor of a more detailed assessment of experiences of those in employment. Four focus groups with unemployed young people, two in Gaborone and two in Mogoditshane, were conducted. Participants were drawn mainly from a record of those who had participated in individual interviews and were selected based on vicinity to the identified venues. To ensure openness in discussions, the groups were segmented into sex groups. Discussed in these groups were mainly external constraints in the areas of education, job market, and self-employment. A digital recorder was used to capture individual interviews and data from focus groups. Data was then transcribed to produce transcripts from which themes were generated.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on the theory of structuration to understand the struggles that young unemployed people encounter in their employment searches and how they are positioned as agents. The theory suggests that in investigating social issues, researchers must pay attention to the role of structures and agency and their interlinkages. The two are seen as mutually constitutive and inform human action (Giddens, 1984). The structures may be existing opportunities and dispositions that are external and internal to agents respectively (Stones, 2005). They are the material levers that agents (in our case the unemployed youth) draw on or consider as they attempt to enter the labour market, such as changing requirements of the labour market, government policies, and general societal structures, and internal skills. Agency here constitutes the intelligible activities of the individuals and their decisions to draw on the available opportunities. As structuration sees individuals (agents) as active, and endowed with the capacity for thought, rather than being passive, unemployed young people are platform to briefly express their views regarding how the conditions of the labor market can be improved to facilitate their entry.

Presentation and analysis of limiting factors

Low levels of education, lack of training and poor academic performance

This study reveals how the young unemployed people have struggled to access jobs due to low levels of education arising from poor performance at secondary school, failure to complete schooling and lack of progression to tertiary education or training. Their educational credentials are captured in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1: Unemployed young people’s educational status/training by sex

Education	Male	Female	Total
None	2	0	2
Primary school	0	2	2
Junior secondary	5	8	13
Senior secondary	11	5	16
Higher Education	0	2	2
Other Tertiary	1	2	3
Totals	19	19	38

Training

Business management	0	3	3
Other Professional	1	4	5
Informal	1	0	1

The majority (76 per cent) of unemployed young persons are secondary school leavers. Another feature is that most do not possess any training; only three young unemployed people (8.6 per cent) in the sample have proceeded to tertiary institutions, with one having attained a university degree. The fact that many unemployed young people have not undertaken any form of training after completing their secondary or primary education means that they have only their general education to sell to the employers, which limits their employment opportunities. This is consistent with other labour market studies in Botswana (Central Statistics Office, 1998; Central Statistics Office, 2003; Siphambe, 2003). Young unemployed people in this study have confirmed that they have had difficulties entering the labour market because of their low levels of education and lack of training. They are aware that training would increase their employment chances and wish they had paid more attention to learning while at school:

It is not easy to find jobs these days and more so when one is not well educated. Most of the jobs which are advertised in newspapers require qualified people with degrees... (Godi: unemployed young woman, Mogoditshane).

...I really need to look for training opportunities seriously; it is the only way I can get out of unemployment. When you have training there are many chances of finding work here in Gaborone (Ricco: unemployed young man, Mogoditshane).

Aside from entry into the job market, the lack of training also limits young people's access to government self-employment funding programs that target unemployed youth. This study has found that young people who wished to undertake some self-employment projects could not access institutional funding because they lacked skills to develop business plans and proposals that are required by project sponsors.

From the perspectives of young people low levels of education and lack of training are attributed to poor performance in the final examinations held at secondary school. Thus, educational progression became one of the emerging themes in a conversation with unemployed youth in this study. When asked why they did not progress to higher levels of education or further training most answered this way:

I have not been able to proceed to senior secondary school because I failed my junior certificate with a grade D, which is not admissible. It seems as if I was too playful at school. Otherwise, I would have liked to proceed even up to the university (Gora, unemployed young man in Mogoditshane).

The main problem is that I failed my form five and have no money to enrol in private schools so I can improve my grades (Kese, unemployed young woman in Gaborone).

I want to proceed further but I am experiencing a situation whereby it seems as if it is impossible to do so because I have not performed well at BGCSE level. I got 28 points but most of training institutions require 30 points and above. So, this situation is worrisome (Molemo, Unemployed young man in Gaborone).

Young unemployed people revealed that while they were at school, they could not conceive how education is necessary for participation in the labour market as well as further training beyond secondary education. As a result, they lacked the motivation to learn and perform better in their studies. It has been only after failing to proceed to further education due to poor performance that they have reached a point of realising the significance of education:

Although I cannot change my situation now, I have learnt that education is the shield in life...I can only encourage my younger brothers and children to give more attention to learning because it is the key to successful living (Maele, Unemployed young man in Gaborone).

I think education is very important in life; I wish I had aimed to perform better when I was still at school. I can only advise young people to be serious with learning because it affects one's future careers. (Kgabo, unemployed young man in Gaborone).

I recall that when I was a child, my parents wanted me to value education more than anything else, but I decided to value having relationships with boyfriends. This is the reason why I couldn't complete my schooling and am in this mess of unemployment... (Shell, unemployed young woman in Mogoditshane).

While the excerpts above are more about self-blame, some young people blamed the educational system, particularly career guidance and counselling arrangements, for failure to motivate them to learn and connect their learning to the world outside school. According to Molemo, an unemployed young man in Gaborone, teachers ‘...never taught us a link between academic performance and further training and other challenges associated with life beyond

secondary schooling'. A conversation with a group of unemployed young men in Gaborone also revealed that career guidance lessons are not given the seriousness they deserve in that usually they are shorter than others. A participant in this group noted that '... when you have missed such a lesson, no one bothers you'. The lack of seriousness paid to these kinds of arrangements may be because career guidance and counselling subject is not examinable at secondary school. This finding suggests a need by the government and other educational providers to come up with strategies that motivate students at secondary school level to learn and perform better in tests and examinations. They also point to the need to link the educational system with the labour market. Once the issue of performance is fixed, young people would be enabled to proceed for training to acquire the skills that would improve their chances of employment.

Limited Opportunities for Formal Employment

One of the key issues that this study sought to investigate was the perceptions of unemployed young people on the ease of getting jobs in Botswana's labour market. In their view, a job seems to mean a formal job. Such jobs as police work, army work, chefs, office work as advertised in newspapers, accounting work, shop assistance (retail), which some of the unemployed young people were looking for are indeed formal ones. Drawing on their job search struggles; unemployed young people perceive that it is not easy to find a formal job in Botswana. Competition for few jobs that may be available is very high as reasonably all would want to have decent jobs:

The chances of finding jobs are very low. It appears there is shortage of jobs around town, and even form five secondary school leavers roam the streets like some of us who haven't completed our schooling (Boy-boy, unemployed young man in Gaborone).

There are very low chances of finding jobs. It appears as if jobs are not available, and there are too many people looking for jobs than the companies could employ (Sianga, Unemployed young man in Gaborone).

The chances are very low. I have been traveling around in Mogoditshane looking for jobs from companies as well as reading news papers to check if there are some vacancies, but have not found anything yet (Gora, unemployed young woman in Mogoditshane).

This finding validates speculations that shortage of formal jobs in Africa contributes to youth unemployment. The shortage is connected to the failure by the economy to create enough jobs.

Weak Job Search Connections

Limited job opportunities in the formal sector have given rise to the need to establish social networks through which jobs are obtained. Unemployed young people confirm that currently they do not have strong networks of people occupying strategic positions in the formal sectors that would connect them to prospective employers:

These days people are recruited based on connections; you need to know someone who is older than you who could put you through. As for me right now, I don't have anyone who can connect me to the employers... (Lily, unemployed young woman in Gaborone).

It is difficult to find a job these days unless you know someone who can connect you with their employers. (Poster, unemployed young woman in Mogoditshane)

It is very hard; you can only get a job through connections. That's what I have realized. You know, there are some people that I schooled with, and some of which got lower grades than I, who are working because probably the uncle is working for that company (Nono, Unemployed young woman in Mogoditshane).

When reflecting on how they got their jobs in the past, some unemployed people pointed out that it has been through social connections. They have observed that on many occasions, advertisements are done for the sake of it and are not really the means of getting jobs:

I worked in a fast-food restaurant which caters for parties and supplies BOBS employees with lunch during working hours... a close friend of mine who worked there negotiated with the managers so I could be employed (Modisa, unemployed young man in Gaborone).

A certain lady who is our relative here informed me that a certain friend of hers was starting a cab company and was looking for someone to work as a base operator. She asked if I would be willing to do the job. I accepted the offer. That is how I got employed (Lily, Unemployed young woman in Gaborone).

I worked as a shop assistant and as a teller in a Chinese retail store located at the Gaborone African Mall. A friend of mine, who also worked at the same of shop, connected me to her employer... (Onkeme, unemployed young woman in Gaborone).

A close friend of mine who was running a hair salon called me to join her and to fill an existing vacancy (Nono, unemployed young woman in Mogoditshane).

These findings point to the need by training institutions to offer networking skills to young people to enhance their access to the labour market. Career guidance teachers at school must take leave from this to teach networking skills. According to Fleming et al. (1996:5), 'networking, or connecting with people who may be able to help with career exploration or point to others who may help, is a learned skill that most students need to develop'. A typical curriculum may focus on skills, such as identifying who to network with, sharing one's interests and skills with others,

how to reach out or approach others, exploration of job and career options, and learning what the employers really want in a prospective employee (ibid.). It would be best for career guidance and counselling subjects offered in Botswana secondary schools to be made examinable and compulsory for students.

Precarious Employment and Unfavourable Working Conditions

This research has found that precarious employment contributes to youth unemployment through job quitting and losses. According to the ILO (2012), precarious employment refers to atypical work characterised by uncertainty, insecurity, short terms contracts, casual employment, and unclear employee relations. Employees in these kinds of work are unprotected and their rights are not recognized (ibid.). The employment histories of the unemployed youth in this study have revealed that they have had jobs that could be classified as precarious.

Table 5.3: Unemployed young people’s labour market experiences

Experience	Male	Female	Total
Never employed	10	3	13
Quit jobs	4	11	15
Lost jobs	5	5	10
Total	19	19	38

Table 5.3 above summarises unemployed young people’s labour market histories into three categories: never employed, those who had quit their jobs, and those who had lost their jobs. The results show that most of the unemployed youth are those who either quit or lost their jobs. Both job quitting and loses are indicators of the precarious nature of the labour market situation, which increases youth unemployment in Botswana. The former suggests that unemployment cannot be understood solely as the absence of jobs. These categories are worth exploring further to explain how and why they occur.

Job quitting: This research has revealed that young people quit jobs because of discontent with working conditions in formal and informal settings. As they do so, they contribute to youth unemployment. This is a significant finding in that in Botswana, no research has ever linked unemployment to job quitting. Gender differences are stark here in the sense that while young women quit their jobs because of irregular and low pay as well as exploitations by the employers, young men did so because they considered their work to be unsafe and hazardous.

Due to difficulties in finding decent jobs around Gaborone and Mogoditshane, some young women ended up undertaking some menial jobs in the informal sector, such as domestic service, which are unchallenging and do not provide them with adequate and secure incomes for a livelihood. Whilst an alternative could have been to change jobs, by searching for new ones while on the job, they were unable to do so because of tight working schedules:

After completing my form five I relocated from home to Gaborone to look for jobs. It was difficult to find one and I ended up working for some Indian neighbours as a domestic servant. I was taking care of the child, cleaning the house and yard, and washing clothes...it was low paying and unchallenging at the same time... I quit my job after working for one month so that I could have a chance to travel around the city to look for better jobs. Since then, I have not been able to find any job. (Neo, unemployed young woman in Mogoditshane)

I have worked on several occasions in the households as a domestic servant and changing employers frequently. My first job lasted for one month; second job three months; and third and last job lasted for one year and one month. I changed jobs because my employers did not pay me consistently; sometimes I would go without any payment (Sinah, unemployed young woman in Gaborone).

Despite their willingness to work, young women could not hold on to their jobs because their employers either did not pay them on time or not at all. This phenomenon is common in the informal sector, where jobs are insecure and unprotected. This was also the case with Emily (Mogoditshane), Poster (Mogoditshane), Lily (Gaborone) and Dyna (Gaborone). Emily was even advised by her parents to quit because her employers either delayed payment or never paid her full wages contrary to the employment contract they had entered: *'I quit this job on my father's advice and my sister gave me some money to enable me to travel to Kasane to look for other jobs'*.

Young men, however, quit their jobs for reasons to do with safety and poor employee relations; none mentioned low wages and irregular pay, as was the case with their female counterparts. This is most likely because they worked in construction companies, which are obliged to comply with minimum wage legislation in their relations with employees. However,

young men regarded these jobs as risky in that in some cases minimum safety standards are not observed. In other instances, the nature of work itself, such as working as a night watchman at construction sites, is hazardous for people who are still very young:

Yes of course, I worked for a certain building construction company as a labourer. I left the job after working for one month because the job was physically demanding for me. I felt that this is not the kind of work I can do for a long time without developing some health problems (Kebonye, unemployed young man in Mogoditshane).

Yes, after completing my secondary schooling I worked for a certain electrical company in Mogoditshane as a labourer for five months. I left the job because the supervisors were harsh on us and we were forced to work under unsafe conditions... (Kgabo, unemployed young man in Gaborone).

I was employed as a security guard in a construction company in Gaborone, but after one year I quit because the working conditions were bad (Ishmael, Unemployed young man in Gaborone).

In Botswana, it is illegal to subject young people aged less than 18 years to underground work, night work and any kind of work that is considered harmful to their health and development (Van Klaveren et al., 2009). The youth concerns regarding the hazardous conditions they are subjected to are very much consistent with the law. This raises a question regarding whether those charged with the task of overseeing implementation of these laws do adequately monitor the situation on the ground. It is also doubtful if workers are aware of the channels for reporting injustices.

Job losses: Young people lost their jobs either due to retrenchments or situations where they found short term jobs. In the case of job losses, precarious employment leads to involuntary unemployment. Gender differences are evident in the way employment was lost. Young women lost their jobs through retrenchments while young men worked in construction companies which normally employ workers on short term contracts:

I worked in a Chinese retail shop as a shop assistant for four months. I then left because I had found a better job at Dynamic Cash and Carry shop... At Dynamic Cash and Carry I worked for one and half years and then we were laid off... (Maipelo, unemployed young woman in Gaborone)

...I only worked for one month as a labourer in a building construction company. The job was for one month because they had a contract with the government to build a few classes... (Lele, unemployed young man in Mogoditshane).

The employment histories of young people, as presented here, point to the existence of indecent employment opportunities. The work that young people found seems to be intermittent,

low paying and generally unprotected. The youth are unable to cope with work that puts their lives and health at risk and cannot give them sustainable income. This calls for the government to come up with effective monitoring and inspection arrangements to ensure health and safety compliance and guard the exploitation of working youth and thus facilitating decent employment and their retention in workplaces.

Inadequate Working Experience

While training has become paramount in the recruitment of labour, some young people who have managed to go for training are discouraged by the changing requirements of the labour market, where preference is given to those who have many years of experience. While the government of Botswana has developed an internship programme to absorb some tertiary institutions in government departments for the maximum of two years, the youth have revealed that many employers require more years of experience:

Sometimes you find that you have graduated last year, and the employers want someone who has three to ten years of experience. What it means is that you end up just sitting at home waiting for ten years. It is discouraging when you qualify for a job, and you are told we need ten years from you. I mean what needs to be understood is that we learn from work... (Participant: Gaborone unemployed young men's focus group)

As for me the main problem that I am facing when looking for jobs is experience. Everywhere I submit my qualifications they tell me they want experienced people. Even the jobs that have been advertised need us to have five years of experience. Where will we get these many years of experience? (Participant: Unemployed women's focus group)

While others had thought about finding volunteer work in order to gain experience, they were not successful because of resistance by prospective employers, as noted by a participant in the female focus group in Gaborone: '...the companies just say to you, when you work with us even without pay, it is like you will get to know everything about us and there is nothing that would stop you from spreading confidential matters to people outside our work...' Moreover, those studying outside the country on government scholarship, such as medical students, are compelled to come back to Botswana immediately after graduation even though job opportunities are scarce. From the perspective of unemployed young people, since they do not have the capacity to change their situation, they would need intervention by the government to connect them with the private sector to gain experience. The internship program must have a committee that is composed of government officials and the private sector to ensure that graduates are absorbed in all sectors of

industry and not only government departments. The private sector must be persuaded to also contribute to the internship program by offering allowances to graduates who are attached to their institutions for work experience.

Gender Attitudes: External and Internal

In Botswana, gender is not expected to be a hindrance in as far as entry into the job market is concerned, as legislation that barred women to enter some occupations, such as those in underground mining and the army, had been repealed by year 2001. However, this research reveals that young people encounter both external and internal gender attitudes that hinder them from accessing jobs. It was found that young women are still being discriminated against by the employers who prefer men in occupations that were traditionally reserved for men. This means that young women must contend with these external attitudes in their job searches, and this puts them at a disadvantage relative to young men:

Those who want to work in construction companies are also finding it hard to do so because employers prefer men because they think women are not strong. At the same time in nursing these days when a man and a woman come at the same time looking for work they would just take the man and leave the woman....(Participant, Gaborone female focus group)

...I went to 'market' at the show ground and found there was a company that was constructing pavement. They said to me that paving is kind of a dirty job and wondered if I would be comfortable loading sand into a wheelbarrow. I said to this man that I would not mind that job. He then said, 'are you really sure that with such nice hair on your head you will be in a position to handle this kind of work?' (Shell, an unemployed young woman in Mogoditshane.

Unfortunately, despite her willingness to work, and the fact that the job seemed available, Shell was denied entry because the employer preferred males. It is also very important to note that while some men are entering certain occupations that were traditionally dominated by women, they emerge as an advantaged group because they are most preferred.

As an internal structure arising from socialisation, gender norms play a role in deterring some unemployed young people from accepting certain available jobs. They have an inbuilt understanding and knowledge of what constitutes jobs that suit their gender and those which belong to the other:

But at the same time, it is true that women cannot do certain activities. Jobs like building are just too hard for women. It is not easy for a woman to just throw up some bricks to someone who is at the roof of a house... (unemployed young woman participant, Gaborone focus group).

...I can do any job apart from working as a domestic servant in the households, washing dishes. It is women's job unlike being a labourer which is a man's job (Lele: unemployed young man, Mogoditshane).

By not taking jobs that are perceived to belong to the other gender, both young women and men continue to be unemployed, even in cases where employment opportunities are at their disposal. The findings point to the need to come up with educational and work programmes that aim to change gender attitudes. According to Dahl et al. (2021), coming up with programmes where both men and women work together in traditionally gendered jobs works out well in changing attitudes.

Assessment of Human Agency during Constraints

Drawing from the labour market experiences of unemployed young people in this research, it appears as if they are highly constrained agents. Unemployed young people here feel that most of the challenges they face are beyond their control; there is nothing they can do as individuals to minimise structural constraints to the labour market without external intervention by the government. Their constraints owe to the lack of resources and collective voice in matters self-improvement and labour market policy input.

One of the key constraints to labour market entry is their low levels of education and lack of appropriate skills. In the perspectives of young people, the only way to enhance their access to jobs is to improve their educational credentials. Although some could imagine attending evening classes and enrolling in private secondary schools to repeat a failed class to increase their chances of getting a job, they were unable to do so due to financial constraints:

...I think the only solution is to go back to school to improve my grades. I am stuck now because I don't have any sponsorship (Mekoro, young unemployed woman in Mogoditshane)

...I am currently looking for a job to enable me to save some money which I could use to further my education, possibly attending private evening classes, up to the level of form five (Sianga, unemployed young man in Gaborone).

Now I am busy looking for work and if I find one, I will supplement some of my subjects to increase my chances of admission. (Lily, unemployed young woman in Gaborone)

If I had resources, I would enroll for private education to improve my results. I am just hopeless now because I do not have any sponsorship; both my mother and father are late (Thuto, unemployed young man in Gaborone).

These financial constraints are worsened by their poor background and inability to find a proper job to finance their endeavours. None of the young people who imagined these possibilities were undertaking some evening courses, or correspondence to better their educational credentials. Their agency here is characterised by blockages. As their agency is overwhelmed, young unemployed people felt that their aspirations are not very realistic and could only need external intervention from organisations that are more resourced and powerful than them to effect meaningful changes that could improve their lot. A participant in the Mogoditshane male focus group noted that '*...the government is the only one that is capable of building schools where young people could be provided with skills training in something that could help them to survive*'.

Aside from educational constraints, young unemployed people are highly concerned that they do not have a collective voice in the form of a registered organisation that represents their views in matters of labour market policy. As a result, they perceive existing policies are drawn without their input and that their concerns are either unknown or do not reach the policy makers. A young women's focus group in Mogoditshane called upon the youth to come together to form a group that would connect them with the policy makers. Such platforms would also enable them to learn about government policy and be empowered to make meaningful changes in society. Unemployed young people perceive that their only strength lies in the potential to articulate their views in what they consider the government could do to improve labour market policies and conditions that favour them. The focus group forums gave young people a temporary platform to discuss and share ideas that the government and policy makers could consider in addressing their plight. These, among others, included development of second chance educational programs, enactment of legislation to ensure jobs are protected and promotion of international job search links by the government. It is important to note young people perceive that their power of agency lies not in individuality but collaborations between themselves, policy makers and any organisation that is concerned about their plight. Tackling youth unemployment successfully in Botswana must be seen as a collaborative project in which young people are involved and their voices are heard.

Conclusion

This research set out to study the factors that contribute to youth unemployment in Botswana by focusing on the lived experiences of unemployed young people. Despite the efforts by the government to outline strategies to tackle youth unemployment, as highlighted in the

national youth policy, young people continue to face major hindrances in their employment search and many either remain unemployed or are engaged in precarious, exploitative, and short-term employment that cannot sustain their livelihoods. Some of the factors include the scarcity of job opportunities, low levels of education and lack of training to fit in the labour market, gender, lack of understanding by young people of how the labour market connects with schooling, lack of work experience, and weak job search connections. It is apparent that the government lacks the capacity to implement or monitor the strategies that have been proposed in the National Youth Policy to address youth unemployment. Despite the policy's emphasis on partnership between the private sector and the government in the provision of targeted youth employment opportunities, there is very little evidence that the private sector has come on board. Youth engagement in the formulation of strategies to improve their lot is perceived to be minimal. While the youth perceive the labour market conditions as overwhelming their agency, they feel they have ideas that they can share with policy makers. These findings underscore the need to engage young people in the formulation of strategies to address youth employment. To address these constraints, the research suggests, among others, putting in place strategies to entice the private sector to participate in youth empowerment efforts (such as offering tax incentives and involving them in committees that oversee the implementation and monitoring of youth employment policies), strengthening platforms for youth engagement (such as holding biannual youth employment conferences), create an environment for decent work (including creating minimum wages that can help to escape poverty), motivate students to learn, initiate educational and work programmes aimed at changing gender attitudes, and equip learners with appropriate skills to fit not only in the local but global labour market. The research underscores the suggestion by young people that the government must explore entering into contractual agreements with other countries to create opportunities for Botswana youth to find jobs or set up businesses in the regional and global markets. One of the best practices is the support that Cuban doctors get from their government to find jobs across the globe, including Botswana. This would certainly reduce the number of unemployed graduates.

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