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The impact of unemployment to jobless people : "how jobless people cope with unemployment in Zola Township, Soweto".

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Abstract

Although unemployment has been researched extensively amongst Black people in South Africa; very little work focuses on the lived experience and self-understanding of the jobless people living in poverty stricken townships. This study reports the findings of the research conducted to find out the impact of unemployment on jobless individuals. It aims to uncover how jobless people cope with unemployment in Zola township, Soweto. This poor township is the case study because of its popularity as a settlement where a number of high profile individuals emerged from rag to riches in the new dispensation.

The study looks at how the unemployed emotionally, physically, socially and financially cope with joblessness. Factors such as self-esteem, mental/physical health and life satisfaction were used as measures of how respondents cope with being unemployed. In addition to that, other variables such as gender, education, residence and length of unemployment were included to test the impact of unemployment in the respondents' lives.

This research adopted an ethnographic approach, using the method of in-dept interviewing as a principal technique of data collection. Moreover, the researcher also acted as a participant observer whenever the respondents were available at his disposal. Respondents were randomly selected with the intention of drawing an equal number of men and women. The researcher wanted the sample to be representative because since 1994, both men and women in SA townships have arguably, increasingly became bread winners and have been equally hard hit by unemployment. Therefore, a sample of 12 respondents, consisting of six men and women who dropped out before matric, failed grade 12, dropped out at tertiary level, as well as tertiary graduates were chosen.

In this study, analysis of field data was used to evaluate the impact of unemployment on these respondents, and interesting results emerged on how they cope with joblessness. The results showed that although unemployment has psychological impact on both men and women, male respondents find it more difficult to cope with

joblessness. The study shows that unemployment has more adverse effect only on social well being and behaviour of men more than women. Interestingly, emotionally and financially, results reveal that while both sexes don't experience difficulties, female respondents find more innovative ways to cope during this period.

The lessons of the study are outlined and recommendations are offered at the end of the report. The information and results from this ethnographic study can provide valuable insight to organizations, companies and most importantly to government for policy formulation.