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Graduate employment in South Africa: prevalence, characteristics and perceived causes

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Abstract

The prevalence, characteristics and causes of unemployment in the general population have been well researched in South Africa, however, the sub-population of unemployed graduates has been studied to a far lesser extent. In this mixed methods research, 2029 participants from the 23 public higher education institutions in South Africa were surveyed. The online survey was sent to approximately 20 000 participants via email, with an invitation to participate in the study and information on the study. The dependent variable was employment status; three categories described the employed and two categories described the unemployed. Survey results were analysed using frequency distributions, chi-squared analysis and binary logistic regression. Thereafter, ten Black, low socio-economic status, unemployed graduates were interviewed telephonically. The interview transcripts were analysed thematically looking for both variation and consistency. The results showed that unemployment in the sample was 5.1%. Black graduates, graduates of low socio-economic status and graduates with difficulty accessing resources showed the highest prevalence of unemployment. Having received career guidance was not associated with employment status. The perceived causes of unemployment were lack of resources available to look for a job, the lack of connections to the labour market and discriminatory recruitment practices.