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Exploring Decent Work for Unemployed Youth in South Africa

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MA by Coursework and Research Report

Organisational Psychology

Exploring Decent Work for Unemployed Youth in South Africa

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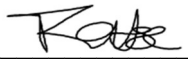
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DECLARATION

I, Thato Kalayamotse declare that that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report (Organisational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signed: 

Date: 03/06/2025

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ABSTRACT

This research focused on exploring and understanding the meaning of decent work according to unemployed youths with lower levels of education, living in an informal settlement in South Africa. Data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews with eighteen youths aged between 19 and 35, living in Setswetla – an urban informal settlement in Alexandra Township. The data was afterwards transcribed then analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. This study is qualitative and exploratory in design and provides a unique understanding of decent work through the experiences of the unemployed youths. These insights provide a deeper view of the meaning of decent work, rather than a more general perspective.

The study findings revealed that the youths associate decent work with comfortable and proper working conditions, including adequate working hours, job security, and opportunities for growth. Fair treatment, non-discrimination, and a sense of belonging, driven by positive interpersonal dynamics, were stated as key to the youths' perception of decent work. However, in a country with high rates of unemployment such as South Africa, many youths confirmed that they find themselves willing to compromise on what they consider decent work. Socio-economic factors, such as minimum wage, sustainability, and self-worth shape their willingness to accept a job, even if it does not meet ideal standards of decent work. The youths also mentioned partaking in precarious work due to desperation, often resulting in limited work volition. Unsafe working conditions that are harmful to health were frequently mentioned as the bottom-line limitations. Despite legal protections in South African labour laws, the high unemployment rate increases the risk of these laws being contravened as many youths are willing to engage in work that they know is not decent. Focusing on this calibre of youths has allowed for a more generous understanding of decent work. Furthermore, this research gave rise to the recognition that there are some systematic issues that need to be addressed, as well as some organisational changes that can improve the employment landscape for unemployed South African youths. The idea would be to focus on reducing risks of precarious work and ensure that youths have access to prospects that align with the concept of decent work. A final recommendation was that due to limited decent work research on marginalized populations, future research should focus on this area.

Keywords: Decent work; Unemployed youths; Urban informal settlement; Precarious work; Psychology of working Theory; South African labour laws; Bottom-line limitations.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the purpose of the current study but first gives a brief introduction of some of the terms used in conceptualising the research. These include decent work and its poor definition even by the coiners and users of the term; unemployment in South Africa, more specifically youth unemployment; precarious work and its bottom-line limits; as well as a brief overview of the South African Labour Laws relevant for outlining decent work. Furthermore, it outlines the statement of the problem which justifies conducting this study. This chapter culminates by presenting the research questions adopted by the current study.

1.2 Introduction

Work has always been and continues to be an integral part of human life. The concept of work can be traced back to ancient human civilisations, where the focus was on completing the most fundamental tasks related to human needs, for example, food, shelter, and child-care (Barley & Kunda, 2001). Work is still an important ground for survival and achieving basic human physical needs, through gaining an income for example (Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2009; Webster, 2005). Moreover, it is through work that individuals and groups develop feelings of meaningfulness, gain an assertion of personal values, form social identity, establish social cohesion, and have a general sense of belonging (Dodd, Hooley & Burke, 2019; du Toit, 2003; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Thatcher & Yeow, 2018). Even with the current call for work-life balance, work still occupies a large amount of time in an individual's life (Vyas, 2022; Gini, 2013). Dodd, Hooley, and Burke (2019) stated that according to the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT), having access to decent work will ensure that an individual's survival needs, social connection needs, and self-determination needs are fulfilled.

Although this is the case, sometimes individuals find themselves working in inhumane conditions (Duranty & MacMillan, 2012). Decent work is an initiative that was launched by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1999 as a reaction to the threat of inhumane conditions under which many workers toiled and was posed by the ILO to encourage lasting peace for workers based upon social justice thinking (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). Decent work is an international concept that can be traced back to the United Nations Declaration of Human

Rights which places the need for work as an essential part of human rights (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren & Diamonti, 2016). The declaration proposed that all individuals have the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable working conditions, and to protection against unemployment (Blustein, et al., 2016). Furthermore, as stated by Blustein, et al. (2016), it proposed the right to equal pay for equal work without any discrimination. Decent work also means the right to fair, favourable renumeration and social protection to ensure an existence, for each person and their family, which was worthy of human dignity (Blustein, et al., 2016). Finally, it speaks to the right for everyone to form and join trade unions for the protection of their interests (Blustein, et al., 2016). Building on this, the ILO Decent Work Agenda focuses on ensuring that both men and women work in conditions of adequate compensation, non-discriminatory access to personal and professional development, safety and security, social protection, freedom, fairness, and human dignity (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012; Fostervold, Koren, & Nilsen, 2018).

Despite the long history and widespread use of the term decent work, it still does not have a clear definition. Although the ILO coined the term 'Decent Work', even they define it in an ambiguous way (Blustein, et al., 2016). Some Global North and Sustainability Circles also poorly define this term as well, despite using it extensively (Blustein, et al., 2016). The ILO first defined Decent Work in 1999 as the sum of people's aspirations about the quality of work that is available to them globally (Blustein, et al., 2016; Pereira, Dos Santos & Pais, 2019). According to Dodd, Hooley, and Burke (2019) to promote social justice, employers and policy makers need to make Decent Work a priority. To improve the working conditions that were a threat to social justice peace and make decent work a priority, the ILO adopted a strategy by putting forward agreements relating to labour standards which all member countries should endorse and enforce in their own countries (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). These agreements were related to, but not limited, to the provision of a minimum wage, maximum hours of work per day or per week, and protection of workers against the effects of illness (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012; van der Ree, 2019). According to Deranty and MacMillan (2012) the ILO states three conditions that are seen as necessary for securing decent work for all. These include, the establishment of minimum labour standards, equality in the bargaining relationship, and employment generating economic growth (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012).

This third condition of the ILO definition already places South Africa on the back bench of securing decent work for all because of the country's high rates of unemployment (Bhorat, Lilenstein, Oosthuizen, & Thornton, 2020). Unemployment in South Africa is remarkably high and rising, especially among young people that are supposed to be just entering the world of work (Statistics South Africa, 2024; Cloete, 2015; du Toit, 2003; Hodge, 2009; Kingdon & Knight, 2007). The ILO (1999) defines unemployment as having not worked more than an hour in the past week but being available for work and actively looking for work. The definition of unemployment in South Africa comprises of individuals who are not employed but are available for employment and are aged 15 years and above (du Toit, 2003). Youth, according to the South African definition, are individuals aged between 15 and 34 (du Toit, 2003). To gain a sense of self-worth, self-esteem and to earn a living, an individual would sometimes need to gain mastery which they could achieve by engaging in work activities (du Toit, 2003). Considering the high rates of unemployment in South Africa among the youth, it is a considerable risk that some young people would find themselves doing work that has inhumane conditions (i.e., not decent work) just so that they could earn a living and have a sense of self-worth and self-confidence (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). Precarious work refers to employment that is insecure, unstable, and lacks basic protections, such as fair wages, job security, and benefits (Campbell, & Price, 2016). The high rates of unemployment affecting South African youth raises a lot of questions with regards to the extent youth are willing to do precarious work for the sake of earning a living, or to be respected/valued by peers and family and to just find a sense of belonging and self-worth by having a job or just to get some "work experience".

Precarious work can generally be defined as job characteristics that involve insecurities and exploitative working conditions (Campbell & Price, 2016; Deery, Kolar & Walsh, 2019). In its attempt to understand some of the bottom-line limits of participating in exploitative work, the current study uses this definition of precarious work as a counterpoint to work that would be considered decent (Bhorat et al., 2016; Lewchuk, 2017).

Although people may find themselves doing precarious work for specific reasons, there are some regulations and guidelines that govern the relationship between employers and employees in South Africa. This pertains and meets the first condition of the ILO definition of decent work (i.e., establishment of minimum labour standards). The aim of these laws is to promote balanced

and fair labour relations, protect the workers' rights, and ensure safe and healthy working conditions (Benjamin & Cooper, 2016). In other words, these laws are in place to ensure decent work. Each Act contributes to the above stated definition of decent work. Some of the essential labour laws in South Africa include:

- The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), which sets out minimum standards concerning working hours, leave, and other essential employment terms.
- The Labour Relations Act (LRA) which governs collective bargaining and dispute resolution between employers and employees or trade unions and ensures that no one is discriminated against for being a member of union.
- The Employment Equity Act (EEA) which specifies that employers must take steps to ensure workplace diversity and promote equal opportunities for all employees.
- The Health and Safety Act/ the Occupational Health and Safety Act which requires employers to provide safe working environmental conditions for their workers to ensure workers' safety and prevent workplace accidents and injuries.

Other laws also vital to the topic of decent work are the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (South Africa, 1998), which aims to develop and improve the competencies and skills of the South African workforce to improve productivity, and employment opportunities, therefore promoting economic growth and the National Minimum Wage Act 9 of 2018 (South Africa, 2018). This act was designed to promote fair wages, lessen income inequality, and to improve the stands of living for employees across South Africa (Benjamin & Cooper, 2016). There are some government-led initiatives and programmes that are specific to the youth and youth unemployment, for example the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), National Youth Service Programme (NYSP), and the Youth Employment Service (YES) (Dladla, 2020; Hilson & Osei, 2014).

As stated in the ILO website on the Decent Work Agenda, "there has been an urgency among international policy makers to deliver quality jobs along with social protection and respect for rights at work to achieve sustainable, inclusive economic growth, and eliminate poverty" (ILO, n.d., para. 3). Considering the laws and policies that govern employment, and to some extent unemployment, in South Africa, an important question arises: To what extent do the bottom-line limits on individuals' willingness to engage in precarious work conflict with South African

labour laws? Most importantly what does decent work even mean for an unemployed South African youth?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter explores and describes the literature that exists for each variable of the study, that is, decent work, unemployment, youth unemployment, precarious work, and the South African Labour Laws. It further discusses the literature that links some of these variables together. This chapter also outlines the theoretical framework that is used to conceptualise decent work, and its meaning to a young person living in a country with high rates of unemployment as are found in South Africa. Furthermore, the theoretical framework provides a succinct exploration of the different concepts that make up decent work to find its most fitting definition. The Decent Work Theory and the Psychology of Working Theory will both be explored. Lastly, the chapter outlines the research questions of the current study.

2.2 Decent Work

Over time, decent work has been defined as the sum of people's aspirations with regards to work. For example, this includes gender equality and fairness, personal growth and family stability, opportunities and income, recognition, and human rights (Pereira, Dos Santos & Pais, 2019; ILO, 1999; Blustein, et al., 2016). To define decent work, a lot of studies look at the working conditions in cases where there is believed to be a lack of decent work. These studies fail to look at all the conditions of decent work but rather only focus on the decent work deficit (Barford Coombe & Proefke, 2020; Pereira, Dos Santos & Pais, 2019). Pereira, Dos Santos and Pais (2019) state that the four main values of the ILO in relation to achieving decent work for both men and women (human dignity, freedom, security and equity (ILO, 2008) can be expressed through four strategic objectives: (1) promoting rights at work for fair labour practices; (2) creating and promoting jobs of acceptable quality and income; (3) improving and protecting social security which is useful in poverty eradication; and (4) advancing of social dialogue.

Although the ILO studies try to define decent work, there is still a lot of ambiguity with regards to this term's definition (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). To discuss what decent work means, a lot of studies focus on understanding decent work at a more collective level. For example, as a goal

for policy makers, the ILO Decent Work Agenda, and the UN sustainable development committee. In so doing, they perceive decent work as a means for social inclusion, social protection, and social justice (ILO, 2013; Dodd, Hooley & Burke, 2019; Taylor, Marsh, Nicol & Broadbent, 2017). A more individualised perspective is suggested in terms of defining decent work. To do so, decent work needs to be looked at more through the lens of psychology by specifically focusing more on an individual perspective of decent work (Blustein, et al., 2016).

Although the industrial/organisation psychology (I/O) and career/vocational psychology specialities have always looked at work at an individual level for more than a century, there has been a radical change in the world of work as evidenced by working conditions being increasingly overseen by market forces (Blustein, et al., 2016). According to Blustein, et al. (2016) this has created some levels of instability and insecurity therefore causing stress and torment for working people around the world. As an attempt to fix this, some government international leaders, public policy domains, and labour came up with some guidelines about the quality of work of all working individuals around the globe. These guidelines later became the basis for defining decent work (Blustein, et al., 2016).

Other scholars have also attempted to define decent work. For example, Duffy et al. (2024) use five components to try and understand what decent work means. This definition was developed based on standards established by the ILO (ILO, 2008, 2012). Duffy, et al. (2024) state that decent work is achieved when the working conditions for both men and women are: (1) safe both physically and interpersonally (for example safe from abuse; mental, emotional, verbal and physical); (2) when individuals work within hours that will allow for good rest and free time; (3) when the organisation that an individual is working for has values that match their own social and family values to allow for easy life-work balance; (4) when there is satisfactory remuneration for the work done; and (5) when all individuals have an equal access to adequate and affordable health care.

Considering that there are various definitions of decent work as stated above, the current study will focus on decent work from the ILO Decent Work Theory (DWT) perspective. This is because it encompasses most of the factors that other literature has pointed out and it explains the variables of focus in the study as well. This theory defines decent work as work that has conditions that have the capacity to improve the material wellbeing of labour for its employees

including advancement and maintenance of spiritual development, labour rights, labour standards, human dignity, job creation, and poverty eradication (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

2.3 Precarious work

Due to precarious work increasingly being viewed as the ‘new norm’ that social protections and employment must adjust to, situations where individuals are coerced into precarious work arrangements as an alternative to unemployment may arise (Rubery, Grimshaw, Keizer, & Johnson, 2018). At its core, precariousness refers to the instability present in employment situations, including factors like inadequate legal protection, low pay, high job insecurity, and limited control over working conditions (Campbell, & Price, 2016; Lewchuk, 2017; Rafferty, & Yu, 2010). This concept often aligns with the idea of poor job quality (Lewchuk, 2017). This phenomenon contributes to employment inequalities in modern capitalist societies (Campbell, & Price, 2016). Beyond the jobs, there is a focus on "precarious workers." These are individuals experiencing the effects of unstable employment situations, particularly among young people (Kretsos, 2010). In their work on ‘vulnerability in employment in South Africa’, Bhorat, Lilenstein, Oosthuizen, and Thornton, (2016) associate the term precarious work with vulnerability in the labour market. Workers can face vulnerability in various ways, e.g. working in the informal sector, receiving low wages compared to the cost of living, lacking a written contract, working in unfavourable conditions, lacking access to benefits, and experiencing job insecurity, etc (Bhorat et al., 2016).

Mosoetsa, Stillerman, and Tilly (2016) define precarious work from the concept of Guy Standing’s *The Precariat*, as a job that is lacking in the seven main forms of labour securities – labour market, employment, job, work, skill reproduction, income, and representation. These respectively include, adequate income-earning opportunities, protection against uninformed dismissals, opportunities to retain satisfactory employment and access to upward mobility, protection against accidents, illnesses, and gruelling working conditions, opportunities to gain and use skills, assurance of an adequate stable income, and a collective voice in the labour market (Mosoetsa et al., 2016). Race, gender, and citizenship have been identified as significant factors in precarious work in South Africa; i.e., practices like "regimes of contract" originated from apartheid-era laws and continue today through labour brokering (Mosoetsa et al., 2016). This is why it is important for every employer to adhere to the workplace regulations established

by the South African government to ensure the protection of basic rights, foster social justice, maintain economic stability, and safeguard the health and well-being of the country's workforce. Yet, it is also clear that some employers exploit high unemployment rates to circumvent labour protections and enable precarious work (Bhorat et al., 2016; Mosoetsa et al., 2016).

2.4 South African Labour Laws

Given South Africa's high rates of youth unemployment, 15-24 years: 62.4% and 15-34: 46.1% (Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2025), and the associated risks of youth engaging in precarious work, there is a need for comprehensive labour regulations to safeguard the rights of young workers. These regulations are essential to prevent potential contraventions of labour laws and ensure that youth employment remains within legal boundaries, and that youth can have access to decent work opportunities.

There are regulations and guidelines that govern the relationship between employers and employees in South Africa. These regulations aim to promote harmonious and fair labour relations, protect the rights of workers, and ensure safe and healthy working conditions. The essential labour laws in South Africa are as follows:

- Employment Equity Act – The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (EEA) was introduced in South Africa to address historical inequalities and align with global employment trends, moving away from discriminatory practices of the past, particularly those rooted in apartheid policies (McKinney, & Swartz, 2021; Oosthuizen, & Naidoo, 2010; Steenkamp, 2023). Enacted to uphold Section 9(4) of the Constitution, the EEA prohibits unfair discrimination on various grounds, including race, gender, age, and disability, in line with the country's commitment to fostering equality and inclusivity in the workplace (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998; McKinney, & Swartz, 2021; Steenkamp, 2023). Basically, the purpose of the Act is to safeguard workers' rights and ensure they are protected against any form of discrimination perpetrated by their employers (Oosthuizen, & Naidoo, 2010; Steenkamp, 2023). The recent amendments to the Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998 seek to enhance opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups, including marginalized racial and gender communities, by improving their representation in the workplace (Steenkamp, 2023). Consequently,

individuals from these groups may experience improved employment prospects and advancement opportunities in their careers (Steenkamp, 2023). Coupled with Affirmative Action (AA) programmes, and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) legislation, the Employment Equity Act (EEA) contributes to the realization of decent work by fostering a work environment free from discrimination (Steenkamp, 2023). Through these measures, workers can access fair wages, benefits, job security, and opportunities for personal and professional growth, thus promoting equity and inclusivity in the workplace (McKinney, & Swartz, 2021; Steenkamp, 2023).

- Labour Relations Act – The purpose of the Labour Relations Act extends beyond workplace protection to include promoting economic development, fair labour practices, peace, democracy, and social development by following the guidelines set out in the Constitution and by organizations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Ferreira, 2005; George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, & Tihanyi, 2016; Johnstone, 2022). The Act regulates the organisational rights of Trade Unions and addresses matters such as strikes, lockouts, workplace forums, and alternative dispute resolution processes (Ferreira, 2005; George et al., 2016; Johnstone, 2022; Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995, 1995). It provides a framework for setting wages and addressing issues important to both employees and employers (Ferreira, 2005). The Act encourages negotiation between workers and management to solve problems and allows for strikes and lockouts as part of this negotiation process (Ferreira, 2005). Furthermore, employers are required to share information needed for negotiation, and the Act introduces workplace forums where elected employees can discuss matters with management and make joint decisions (Ferreira, 2005; Johnstone, 2022). This act protects workers and promotes decent work by including employees in the negotiations of the terms and conditions of employment. This places employees in a better and acceptable position to negotiate for employment that provides fair wages, job security, social protection, and opportunities for personal and professional development. According to the Decent Work Theory and the declaration set out by the United Nations of Human Rights, attempting to describe decent work, everyone has the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of their interests (Blustein et al., 2016; Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

- Basic Conditions of Employment Act – The Basic Conditions of Employment Act aims to enforce fair labour practices by establishing and regulating the fundamental conditions of work across various aspects of employment (Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997, 1997; Ferreira, 2005; Luvhengo, & Thomas, 2019). This excludes members of the National Defence Force, National Intelligence Agency, South African Secret Service, and unpaid volunteers working for charity organizations. (Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997, 1997). These conditions include working hours, leave entitlements, minimum wage, overtime pay, and termination procedures. (Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997, 1997; Ferreira, 2005; Luvhengo, & Thomas, 2019; Tshehla, 2015). The act regulates the maximum number of working hours per week, mandates terms for rest periods and meal breaks, and outlines rights to annual, sick, maternity, and family responsibility leave (Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997, 1997; Ferreira, 2005; Luvhengo, & Thomas, 2019; Tshehla, 2015). Additionally, the BCEA sets the minimum wage that employers must pay and governs the conditions for overtime work, including rates of pay, it also provides guidelines for the termination of employment, specifying notice periods, severance pay, and dismissal procedures (BCEA No. 75 of 1997, 1997; Ferreira, 2005). Furthermore, the Act requires employers to provide written employment contracts to their employees and maintain records related to employment details (BCEA No. 75 of 1997, 1997; Ferreira, 2005). Overall, the BCEA aims to safeguard the rights of workers, promote fair labour practices, and promote the wellbeing of employees (Ferreira, 2005). By setting these basic standards, the act provides a legal framework that aims to prevent exploitation and unfair labour practices, therefore ensuring that workers are protected and experience decent working conditions.

Other noteworthy acts include the following:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act – Broadly speaking, the purpose of the OHS Act (No. 85 of 1993) is to ensure the health and safety of individuals at work, including the use of machinery and equipment. The act is also set protect individuals other than those directly involved in work activities from health and safety risks associated with workplace activities (Maseko, 2016; OHS Act No. 85 of 1993). Additionally, it

establishes an advisory council for occupational health and safety and addresses related matters (OHS Act No. 85 of 1993). The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) mandates employers to provide safe working conditions for their workers to prevent workplace accidents and injuries (Maseko, 2016; OHS Act No. 85 of 1993). Employers are required to ensure a safe and healthy work environment for their employees and are responsible for providing appropriate training and protective equipment (Maseko, 2016; OHS Act No. 85 of 1993). There are specialized laws that apply to certain industries or professions, such as the Mining Health and Safety Act or the Nursing Act (Ncube, & Kanda, 2018). By promoting a culture of safety, empowering employees, and holding employers accountable for providing a safe and healthy working environment, this act helps protect workers and ensure decent work.

- Skills Development Act – Although it may only do this partially, this act aims to address existing imbalances and reduce the problem of structural unemployment (Ferreira, 2005; Mohlala, 2011). The Skills Development Act has an eightfold purpose, this includes (1) developing the skills of the South African workforce, (2) enhancing investment in training and development, (3) fostering learning environments in workplaces, (4) promoting participation in learnerships, (5) advancing employment opportunities for historically disadvantaged individuals, (6) maintaining training quality in workplaces, (7) facilitating job seekers in finding work, and (8) regulating employment services (Ferreira, 2005 ; Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998). The act ensures this by establishing an organised framework to formulate and execute national, sector-specific, and workplace strategies aimed at skills enhancement of the South African workforce (Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998). It integrates these strategies into the National Qualifications Framework and oversees the financing of skills development through a levy-grant system and a National Skills Fund (Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998). Because of this, people are enabled to enhance their capabilities and remain competitive in the job market, this increases their employability and job security, contributing to decent work conditions (Mohlala, 2011; Mosoetsa et al., 2016). Furthermore, by regulating employment services and promoting job seekers' access to training and employment opportunities, the act facilitates the matching of skills with job requirements,

further supporting decent work outcomes (Cohen & Moodley, 2012; Mlatsheni & Ranchhod, 2017; Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998).

- National Minimum Wage Act – The purpose of the National Minimum Wage Act is to address the urgent challenges of high unemployment rates, poverty, and inequality in South Africa (Adelzadeh, & Alvillar, 2016; Bhorat, & Stanwix, 2021; National Minimum Wage Act No. 9 of 2018). With over half of the population living below the poverty line and facing low wages, the Act aims to close the wage gap, particularly between genders, and lift people out of poverty (Adelzadeh, & Alvillar, 2016; Bhorat, & Stanwix, 2021; National Minimum Wage Act No. 9 of 2018). Despite the country's low economic growth, the Act is viewed as a necessary intervention to support vulnerable workers and improve economic conditions, with the potential to contribute to economic growth under the right circumstances (Adelzadeh, & Alvillar, 2016; Bhorat, & Stanwix, 2021; National Minimum Wage Act No. 9 of 2018). In conclusion, this act sets the minimum wage for workers in South Africa to protect workers from being exploited, by ensuring that they receive fair compensation for their labour (Bhorat, & Stanwix, 2021). This, in turn, helps reduce inequality and low wages, thereby improves overall quality of work and promotes dignity and well-being among workers, contributing to decent work (Blustein, et al., 2016; Deranty & MacMillan, 2012; ILO, 2008; Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

Finally, there are some government-led initiatives and programmes that are specific to the youth and youth unemployment. These include:

- Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) – a government-led initiative that was established under the Unemployment Insurance Amended Act, No. 32 of 2003 to which contributions from both employers and employees provides benefits to employees who lose their jobs or their beneficiaries, thereby mitigating the negative economic and social impacts of unemployment (Unemployment Insurance Act No. 32 of 2003). The fund provides temporary financial relief to employees who become unemployed or are unable to work due to no fault of their own. To qualify, employees must have contributed regularly to the UIF fund (Olivier, Dupper, & Govindjee, 2011).
- Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) – a government initiative aimed at providing temporary employment opportunities to unemployed individuals, particularly

those from vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and people with disabilities (Hlatshwayo, 2017). The program focuses on creating labour-intensive projects in sectors such as infrastructure development, environmental conservation, and community services (Hlatshwayo, 2017). Its primary goal is to alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment, and enhance skills development among participants while contributing to the country's socio-economic development (Hlatshwayo, 2017).

- National Youth Service Programme (NYSP) – a government initiative designed to engage young people in various community development activities while promoting active citizenship and leadership skills (Chauke, Malatji, & Obadire, 2021). The programme aims to empower youth by providing them with opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and civic engagement (Chauke, Malatji, & Obadire, 2021). By involving young people in community service and nation-building efforts, the NYSP aims to contribute to positive social change and address challenges faced by local communities (Chauke, Malatji, & Obadire, 2021).
- Youth Employment Service (YES) – an initiative aimed at addressing the high levels of youth unemployment by providing young people with access to work experience and skills development opportunities (Velelo, 2023). The programme encourages businesses to participate by offering paid internships, learnerships, and job placements to unemployed youth aged 18 to 35 (Velelo, 2023). By engaging with the private sector, government, and other stakeholders, YES aims to create sustainable employment opportunities for South Africa's youth population, ultimately contributing to economic growth and social development (Velelo, 2023).

Labour laws are every important for protecting employees' rights and ensuring fair treatment in South African workplaces. The collective impact of these acts directly translates to the conditions used in defining decent work. However, they alone are not enough to guarantee decent work. This is because, even though labour laws provide a legal framework for employment, their enforcement can be challenging, especially in countries where regulatory bodies lack resources or face corruption (Mackett, 2020; Theron, 2016). Furthermore, labour laws may not address evolving forms of precarious work, such as gig economy jobs sufficiently enough, because they fall outside traditional employment structures and regulatory frameworks (Mackett, 2020; Stopforth, 2023; Theron, 2016). Additionally, socio-economic factors such as

inequality, discrimination, and lack of access to education and training can undermine the effectiveness of labour laws in promoting decent work in South Africa.

The above labour laws, while extensive and focused on worker protection, show mixed effectiveness. The South African labour laws and other related legislation establish robust frameworks, such as the CCMA and Labour Courts, for resolving workplace disputes (Joseph, 2016). These frameworks emphasize conciliation and arbitration as primary mechanisms. However, studies highlight challenges, such as delays, high costs, and limited access for workers in the informal sector, which undermine the effectiveness of these mechanisms (Joseph, 2016; Bhorat, Pauw & Mncube, 2009; Mboh, 2012). For example, while the CCMA handles many cases, procedural inefficiencies and the complexity of labour laws can make it difficult for employees to fully benefit from protections (Bhorat, Pauw & Mncube, 2009). Additionally, some reports suggest that despite progressive policies, employers can circumvent labour laws, especially regarding informal sector workers or through noncompliance with labour standards (Joseph, 2016; Bhorat, Pauw & Mncube, 2009). This discrepancy between policy and practice raises questions about enforcement and accessibility

2.5 Unemployment

The issue of unemployment continues to be one of the most significant challenges in South Africa, with various factors contributing to its continuation, including structural issues, economic fluctuations, and disparities in education and skills development (Bhorat, et al., 2020; Kwenda, Benhura, & Mudiriza, 2020; Wakefield, Yu, & Swanepoel, 2022). For example, currently South Africa has undergone a transition from an economy mainly dependent on agriculture and mining to one centred around services like banking and business (Bhorat, et al., 2020). The services sector represents 61% of GDP and accounts for 71.7% of total employment, the share of agriculture with regards to GDP stands at 2.2% (ILO, 2019). In terms of both value added and employment, the services sector has become the main driver of economic growth, while industries such as agriculture, mining, and manufacturing have declined (Bhorat, et al., 2020). As a result, most employment opportunities are found in industries that need specific skills, leaving many people without work, especially those with fewer skills (Bhorat, et al., 2020). This has led to very high levels of unemployment in South Africa, a country where a significant portion of the

population falls in the low skills category, i.e., not having attended post-secondary or tertiary education (Brunello, & Wruuck, 2021).

In line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) guidelines, a person is regarded as unemployed when they are at the appropriate working age but: (1) they are not working; (2) they are currently available for work; and (3) they are seeking work. In the second quarterly report of 2024, Statistics South Africa defined unemployment in two different forms: the official definition and the expanded definition. According to the official definition, unemployed individuals are those aged 15–64 years, who (1) were not employed in the reference week, (2) actively sought work or attempted to start a business in the four weeks prior, (3) were available for work during the reference week, or (4) had not actively sought work in the past four weeks but had a job or business to start at a definite date in the future and were available (Stats SA, 2024). Under the expanded definition, unemployed individuals are those aged 15–64 years who (1) are not employed in the reference week, (2) are available to work but do not actively seek work either due to discouragement or other reasons (Stats SA, 2024). A "discouraged work-seeker is a person who was not employed during the reference period, wanted to work, was available to work/start a business but did not take active steps to find work during the last four weeks, provided that the main reason given for not seeking work was any of the following: no jobs available in the area; unable to find work requiring his/her skills; lost hope of finding any kind of work" (Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2023, p. 18).

According to Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), South Africa's unemployment rate has seen some fluctuations. In the fourth quarter of 2021, the official unemployment rate stood at 35.3%, representing a significant challenge for the country (Stats SA, 2021). By the second quarter of 2024, the official unemployment rate had decreased to 31.9%, a notable improvement compared to the same quarter in 2023, when it was recorded at 32.6% (Stats SA, 2023; 2024). This represents a 0.7 percentage point drop, with the number of unemployed individuals decreasing by 72,000 to 7.8 million. Additionally, unemployment based on the expanded definition, which includes discouraged job seekers, decreased by 0.9 percentage points to 41.2% in the second quarter of 2024 compared to the first quarter's 42.1% (Stats SA, 2024). While these declines in the unemployment rate are encouraging, they highlight the persistence of a high unemployment rate in South Africa, significantly above the global average

of around 6.0% (WPR, 2021; 2022). As of the first quarter of 2025, South African youth unemployment rates are among the highest globally, with youth aged between 15 and 24 being at 62.4% and youth between 15 and 34 at 46.1% (Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2025). This shows the ongoing severity of the unemployment crisis in the country and the need for targeted policy interventions to address this critical issue.

Unemployment has been found to affect both an individual's psychological health as well as physical health (Wanberg, 2012). Psychologically speaking, according to Jahoda's latent deprivation model (1982, 1987), as referenced by Wanberg (2012), unemployed individuals do not have an opportunity or are deprived of benefits such as income, time structure, social contact, sharing of common goals, status, and activity. This deprivation may lead to experiences of lower psychological health by unemployed individuals (Wanberg, 2012). According to Wanberg (2012), the stress that is associated with being unemployed may end up in a manifestation of some physical symptoms and sometimes suicide. Furthermore, unemployed individuals may experience lower physical health because they cannot afford healthy food, good health care, and other necessities (Wanberg, 2012). Being employed is at the centre of the decent work paradigm. This is to say, to experience decent work an individual needs to first have gainful work (Fields, 2003). The current study is more interested in what decent work means for the unemployed, considering that unemployment is a major issue in South Africa, and unemployed youth in the urban areas of South Africa are often overlooked when it comes to decent work and unemployment research (Mokofe, 2024). As a result, it is important to focus this research on the unemployed youth because due to the shortcomings they face in finding work, they may be at a higher risk to engage in precarious work. Furthermore, because of what decent work means to them as youth from a country in an unemployment crisis, they may find themselves unaware or oblivious to the fact that some labour laws are being violated. This could be because the unemployed young people with little to no knowledge about South African Labour Laws and their rights when it comes to the workplace, would be more willing to overlook their bottom-line limits when it comes to exploitation at work, more so if they do not know these bottom-line limits.

2.6 Youth Unemployment

We currently live in an era that is youth saturated. More than half of the present world population (7 billion) are people under the ages of 30 (UNESCO, 2013). Young people, according to the globally recognized/ accepted definition, are people between 15 and 24 years old, and according to the South African definition are people between 15 and 34 years old (du Toit, 2003). Youth are at a very essential time in their lives where they are beginning to assume their economic independence and generally discovering their aspirations and place in society (Sparreboom & Staneva, 2014). According to Barforrd, Coombe and Proefke (2020), an estimated number of 1 billion young people will enter the labour market between the years 2015 and 2025. Out of this 1 billion, only 40% are likely to find jobs considering the current conditions (Barforrd, Coombe & Proefke, 2020).

South Africa's youth face persistent labour market challenges, with youth unemployment rates surpassing the national average (QLFS, 2022). In the first quarter of 2022, when the data for this study were collected, the youth unemployment rate was notably high, reaching 63.9% for individuals aged 15-24 and 42.1% for those aged 25-34. Despite a relatively lower unemployment rate among graduates, youth unemployment remains a significant concern across educational levels. In Q1: 2022, the unemployment rate for young graduates (aged 15-24) was 32.6% and 22.4% for those aged 25-34. Despite the vulnerability of youth in the labour market, there were positive developments in the third quarter of 2023 (QLFS, 2023). The total number of unemployed youth (aged 15–34) decreased, there was a decline in the youth unemployment rate by 1.9% from 45.3% in the second quarter of 2023 to 43.4% in the third quarter of 2023 (QLFS, 2023).

According to Cloete (2015), some of the reasons for a heightened youth unemployment rate in South Africa are due to lack of experience by youth looking for jobs, wrong ways of job searching, lack of proper career guidance in school, and population growth. One study in the Limpopo province confirmed that young people are worried that the government is reluctant when it comes to job creation for them (Mokgohloa, 2006). Young people in South Africa are at a risk of experiencing some psychological and physical health issues caused by unemployment (Wanberg, 2012). As an attempt to “get on” in life, young people may find themselves doing precarious work that may even be a violation to the South African Labour Laws.

In discussions about youth unemployment, research primarily focuses on aspects related to the youth themselves, such as their skills, education, and geographical location (De Lannoy, Graham, Patel, & Leibbrandt, 2020). There is a lack of information when it comes to the employers' behaviours and attitudes regarding hiring young people (De Lannoy, et al., 2020). To elaborate further the challenges faced by South African youth in finding employment, this review will focus on six challenges:

- Education attainment and low skills level - while completing high school still holds value in the job market, the real benefits are seen with higher education qualifications, i.e., young people with higher education generally have better chances of finding employment faster (Mlatsheni & Ranchhod, 2017).
- Aspirations, perception of opportunities, and reservation wages - Urban youth frequently find that their career aspirations do not align with their educational attainments, i.e., they express aspirations for professional and office-based positions associated with socio-economic advancement, economic security, and stability (Babson, 2014; Odora & Naong 2014). However, in terms of wage expectations, youth are willing to accept wages lower than the determined minimum wages because of the realization that they need to gain work experience (De Lannoy, et al., 2020).
- Lack of information - young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds encounter information gaps starting from school, where limited career guidance is available (De Lannoy, et al., 2020). Due to inadequate guidance and support after high school, they continue to face challenges in accessing reliable information on job applications, CV writing, and further education opportunities (De Lannoy, et al., 2020). Therefore, these young people often resort to ineffective job search strategies, leading to high effort and costs with limited success, contributing to increased discouragement and potentially making them vulnerable to cybercrime (Alexander, 2010; De Lannoy, et al., 2020).
- Geography and costs of job-seeking - limited income, compounded by location and high transportation and data expenses, emerges as a significant factor contributing to youth unemployment, particularly for individuals residing in townships on the outskirts of cities or in underdeveloped rural areas (Ardington, & Hofmeyr, 2014; Kwenda, et al., 2020; Mlatsheni & Ranchhod, 2017). These locations are distant from job hubs and lack reliable and affordable transportation options for job seekers (De Lannoy, et al., 2020).

- Lack of work experience - Lack of work experience is often regarded as a barrier to employment. Youth who gain work experience during high school are at an advantage to transition more smoothly into the workforce (Mlatsheni & Ranchhod, 2017). However, this highlights the potential for policy interventions to facilitate early labour market connections for youth without compromising their education (De Lannoy, et al., 2020).
- Social capital, defined as networks facilitating access to information, primarily through informal connections, significantly influences job availability and access (De Lannoy, et al., 2020). Studies show that informal networks, often friends or family, coupled with active job seeking, play a crucial role in job acquisition (e.g., Abel, Burger, & Piraino, 2020; Burger & Von Fintel 2014; Giugni, Lorenzini, 2017).

2.7 Theoretical framework

2.7.1 The Decent Work Theory (DWT)

According to the Decent Work Theory (DWT), there are six main principles that are useful when describing decent work: (1) work opportunities; (2) freedom to choose; (3) productive work; (4) equity in work; (5) security at work; and (6) dignity at work (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) advocates 'decent work' as the major revolutionary agenda (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). According to Nizami and Prasad (2017), decent work not only includes labour rights, labour standards, human dignity, job creation, and poverty alleviation, but also includes conditions at work which improve the material wellbeing of labour as well as spiritual development. The ILO's core labour standards include freedom of association, freedom from discrimination, freedom from free labour, and freedom from child labour. As well as looking at human development in a conceptual way as an attempt to try to understand the quality of life of people, decent work is an effort to understand the quality of life of workers in the workplace (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

Decent work has had very wide conceptualisations (Richard et al., 2003). The first dimension is that of work opportunities, which refers to the need to create job opportunities for all people who want to work and can find work (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The second dimension is in reference to freedom; the freedom to choose the job one wants to do and not having any work forced on them, as well as freedom to join workers' unions (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The third dimension

as stated by Nizami and Prasad (2017) is that of productive work, which not only benefits individuals and their families, but also encourages sustainable development of enterprises and countries. As the fourth dimension, Nizami and Prasad (2017) referenced equity in work, which further infers fairness in work for people from diverse backgrounds. Security at work is stated as the fifth dimension of decent work: this is concerned with the health, pensions, and livelihoods of workers (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The final dimension of decent work as stated by Nizami and Prasad (2017) is that of dignity at work: this is concerned with treating workers with respect and giving them the opportunity to voice their concerns.

Philosophically speaking, decent work is an agenda that lies in the realm of labour economics, despite the resolutions of the ILO (Nizami & Prasad 2017). Institutionalism places emphasis on internally generated drives (intrinsic motivation) (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). That is, working hard at a job for pride in work well done rather than for monetary rewards (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). According to Kaufman and Hotchkiss (2006), institutionalists also emphasize the importance of equity and fairness on human behaviour. They further point out that preferences are not given, but rather shaped by and changed within the economic system. The agenda of decent work lies within the realm of realism rather than institutionalism because its efforts are to assess the real conditions at work (Nizami & Prasad 2017). Primarily, the philosophy of decent work bridges the gap that exists between the philosophy of human development and labour economics (Nizami & Prasad 2017). Therefore, it can be referred to as the general application of human development approaches on labour economics, specifically labour's work conditions (Nizami & Prasad 2017).

When focusing on the theoretical contributions different researchers and authors have shed light on the variety of ways the decent work agenda can be assessed both subjectively and objectively (Nizami & Prasad 2017). Some of the prominent work on the 'theory of decent work' as stated by Nizami and Prasad (2017), focuses on its conceptual clarity, conceptual dimensions, and suggestions for indicators and indices.

Conceptual clarity

The concept of decent work is multidimensional. According to Nizami and Prasad (2017), there are two components of decent work: (1) the ILO's core labour standards and (2) universality – decent work for all. According to this notion, all individuals who work should have rights at

work, and the normal societal standards need to be followed to avoid deprivation or exclusion at work (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The promotion of decent work goes beyond its trade-offs of economic growth/ development, fair treatment, decent hours, security, and social dialogue at work, it also includes its humanitarian way of viewing work (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). This is to say in promoting decent work, the way the global economy works should be changed so that the benefits of work are also experienced by the worker, not just the customer/consumer (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). This has a potential to foster social and human progress/development as well.

Conceptual dimensions

According to Ghai (2003), decent work can be viewed through four dimensions: (1) the employment dimension – this focuses on the working conditions, remunerative work, as well as employment opportunities; (2) the social security dimension; (3) the basic rights dimension – which specifically sheds light on discrimination at work, elimination of child and forced labour, and freedom of association; and (4) the social dialogue dimension – this includes economic fairness, participation at the national level, and collective bargaining. There is a clear relationship between decent work, human development, and economic growth (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

2.7.2 The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT)

This theory's main aim is to understand the impacts of economic limitations and experiences of ostracism in career development, and it places acquiring decent work as the main variable within the model (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). The main assumptions of this theory are that: (1) work is an important aspect of mental health; (2) when it comes to the psychological nature of working, no one person should be privileged epistemologically over the other; (3) when studying work as a psychological concept everyone that is working and wants to work around the globe should be included in the study; (4) work and non-work related experiences of people are closely intertwined in most cases; (5) work refers to efforts made in the marketplace including caregiving work which is often overlooked; (6) work has the potential to fulfil the need for survival and power, the need for social connection and the need for self-determination; and (7) the historical forces that shape the contemporary aspects of working need to be studied to fully understand the psychological nature of working (Duffy, et al., 2016).

The primary goal of PWT is to promote inclusiveness and equity in career development, viewing access to decent work as a fundamental human right essential for positive functioning and meaningful lives (Blustein, Kenny, Autin, & Duffy, 2019; Duffy et al., 2016). Blustein, et al., (2019) and Duffy, et al. (2016) emphasize the inseparable link between work and the individual's cultural, familial, and social context, focusing on inequalities across social identities, they expand the definition of work to include unpaid caregiving roles. Duffy et al. (2016) developed this theoretical model focusing on predictors and outcomes of decent work, defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as meeting minimum standards for job functioning. Economic constraints and experiences of marginalization were identified as key predictors of reduced access to decent work (Blustein, et al., 2019). PWT suggests that the limited freedom to occupational choices and limited career, which help explain the above relationship, result from social and structural forces, such as discrimination (Duffy et al, 2012; Blustein, et al., 2019). According to this theory, decent work fulfils survival, social connection/contribution, and self-determination needs, promoting job satisfaction and general well-being (Duffy et al., 2016).

The majority of the research using the PWT and DW theories has been on educated employees and not the indented target groups (marginalised populations), however, the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) has been applied in the South African context to explore the concept of decent work among blue-collar workers, as established by Kekana, Koekemoer, and O'Neil (2023). In their study, they revealed that both objective dimensions, such as job resources and working conditions, and subjective factors like fairness and the opportunity for skill mastery are important in describing decent work (Kekana, Koekemoer & O'Neil, 2023). The application of the PWT in a South African context shows its relevance in understanding how structural and cultural factors shape work experiences in South Africa, particularly for marginalized populations.

2.7.3 The Psychodynamics of work Theory

Through the work of French theorist, Christophe Dejours' psychodynamic approach to work, it is possible to include a comprehensive content of work as a movement in the field of the decent work campaign (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). Following Dejours' work, three areas emerge in which the content of work can be understood to complement the ILO's Decent Work campaign:

(1) work is an individual activity (individual capacity level); (2) Work is a cooperation (collective work level); and (3) work is a political culture (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012).

The Psychodynamics of Work Theory (PWT) explores how individual psychological processes interact with workplace dynamics, emphasizing work's potential for fulfilment and meaning as a fundamental human right (Brunoro, Bolis, Sigahi, Kawasaki, & Sznelwar, 2020). PWT underscores the influence of broader contextual factors like cultural background and social identities on individuals' experiences at work, as explained in the previous paragraph (Brunoro et al., 2020). The Psychodynamics of Work Theory seeks to describe diverse workers' experiences and addresses gaps based on social identities and economic privilege, providing a framework for understanding workplace psychological dynamics within broader social contexts, i.e., individual, corporation, and political culture (Brunoro et al., 2020; Deranty & MacMillan, 2012).

2.7.4 Theory used in this study

Several theories exist that explain the concept of decent work as discussed above. The current study will focus on the Decent Work Theory because it provides a framework for the specific variables discussed in the study. It supports the current study because through it, research questions that will guide this research in a more coherent manner are formulated. Furthermore, this theory emphasizes the importance of decent and dignified work for individuals' functioning and well-being, which aligns well with the objective of understanding what decent work means for young unemployed people. By exploring how these youth perceive and experience decent work within their socio-economic context, this research can provide valuable insights into the challenges they face and potential paths for improving their perceived experiences/ and or experiences.

2.8 Rationale for the research

One of the concerns that may emerge from the above information is the violation of South African Labour Laws with regards to unemployed youth considering being involved in working conditions that are exploitive. In their study, Masdonati, Schreiber, Marcionetti, and Rossier (2019) found that work volition mediated the negative link between unemployment, low education, and decent work. Which means that they found an inverse relationship between unemployed youth with low education and their ability to attain decent work. Furthermore, they

found that the impact of being unemployed and having low education on the ability to obtain decent work is influenced by the person's sense of motivation and willingness to engage in any work-related activities, regardless of whether they were decent or not (Masdonati, et al, 2019). As it relates to the current study, this may mean that because of their perceived lack of freedom in terms of work choice, due to a variety of factors, and a willingness to work to earn a living and some self-worth, some South African youths may find themselves involved in non-decent work activities (or be strongly considering engaging in non-decent work).

As reported by Lam, Leibbrandt and Mlatsheni (2008), youth unemployment is a global issue. Of the unemployed youth worldwide, 47% are aged 15 to 24 (ILO, 2004). According to the Department of Statistics South Africa, youth in South Africa continue to be disadvantaged with an unemployment rate that is higher than the national average and higher than most countries internationally. The Quarterly Labour Force Survey reported that the South African youth unemployment rate was at a staggering 65.5% in the fourth quarter of 2021 (Sats SA, 2021). Youth unemployment has been a huge concern in South Africa for many years (du Toit, 2003) especially for youth aged 15 to 24. In the first quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate for youth aged between 15 and 34 was 43.2% as compared to 59.0% for youth aged 15-24 (Stats SA, 2020). The statistics at the time of data collection for this study, as reported by Statistics South Africa show that for the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate was 63.9% for youth aged between 15 and 24 (Stats SA, 2022), this is an unemployment rate that was increasing for this group at the time the data were collected. The unemployment rate was 42.1% for youth aged between 25 and 34 years, while the current (at the time) official national unemployment rate for all age groups sat at 34.5% (Stats SA, 2022). These high rates of unemployment have, to some extent, led to young people completely withdrawing from the labour market or becoming inactive (Oosthuizen & Bhorat, 2005). There is evidence suggesting that during job searching, some members of minority groups, such as Black people, women, and young individuals, may face discrimination. (Wanberg, 2012).

As has already been discussed by du Toit (2003), Dodd, et al. (2019), Thatcher and Yeow (2018), and Wanberg (2012), work does not only assure that an individual gets wages and earns a living, but it is also through work that an individual can determine where and how to live, so it is very important to their social wellbeing. It is also through work that an individual can establish

their sense of identity, feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, and even self-fulfilment (du Toit, 2003; Dodd, et al., 2019; Wanberg, 2012). As evidenced by many studies (e.g., Blustein, Lysova, & Duffy, 2023; Bothma, & Roodt, 2012; Fryers, 2006; Inanc, 2018; Pierce, & Gardner, 2004), the only work that could lead to this type of self-fulfilment is decent work. This is work that ensures that youth are being remunerated fairly and satisfactorily, that they are safe both interpersonally and physically, that they have access to adequate health care, that they work hours that are not exploitive, but allows them to have free time to rest, and that their organisations' values matches their own (Duffy, Allan, England, Blustein, Autin, Douglass, Ferreira, & Santos, 2017). The above is supported by both the ILO's decent work agenda and the South African labour laws in general. The ILO decent work agenda suggests that individuals should be empowered and supported through decent work and social protection and ensure the voices of the poor and marginalised are heard (ILO, n.d.). The South African labour laws aim to protect workers from exploitation and ensure that they work in fair and just conditions, for example, the Employment Equity Act prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, or disability (*Employment Equity Act No. 55, 1997*).

However, given the high unemployment rate and the ease with which organisations and employers can ignore labour protections in South Africa, to what degree do young people find themselves doing work that is not decent for the sake of avoiding unemployment? What does Decent Work even mean to these young people? This study attempts to understand the above questions especially for youth living in an informal settlement in South Africa, aged between 18 and 34 years. The qualitative nature of this study will help in understanding, at a deeper level, the actual experiences of the unemployed youth with regards to decent work and being an unemployed youth in South Africa (Struwig and Stead, 2001). Moreover, a lot of research on unemployment in South Africa is put into numbers rather than human experiences of unemployment (Kingdon & Knight, 2003). The focus of this study will be on youth that are disadvantaged with regards to available opportunities for job searching, and youth that did not go to university.

When it comes to youth unemployment research in South Africa, the focus has mostly been on the youth that went to tertiary institutions, and acquired a certain degree (Cohen & Moodley, 2012; Lam, Leibbrandt and Mlatsheni, 2008; du Toit, 2003; Cloete, 2015). The current study is

important because it focuses on a different category of youth groups. This is youth with lower levels of formal education, who are heavily affected by the unemployment crisis in South Africa. They are possibly more affected because job opportunities and job search information in general is limited for them compared to the youth that went to university since they had access to the internet and to more networking opportunities (Mokgohloa, 2006).

Moreover, because of their level of education, these young people may not have had as much freedom in choosing their work as would someone that has a higher level of education (Vilhjálmsdóttir, 2021). Autin, Williams, Allan and Herdt (2022) and Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, and Autin (2016) stated that people are more likely to secure decent work when they have freedom to make occupational choices because work volition can assist in resisting the social and contextual pressure to engage in non-decent work. This study will be pivotal in understanding the nuances associated with South African youth without formal tertiary education, and their consideration of participating in non-decent work. Furthermore, in their Psychology of Working Theory, Duffy, et al. (2016) suggest that economic constraints and marginalisation experiences reduce people's ability to secure decent work across the lifespan. This study focuses on youth that are more likely to experience marginalisation and economic constraints.

With regards to decent work, most research focuses on the employed population (ILO, 2013; Cohen & Moodley, 2012). Most of the studies, for example, Azangweo, S. (2022); Gibb, S., & Ishaq, M. (2020); Johns, M., & Raikes, L. (2019); Shrestha, P. (2022); and Winchenbach, A., Hanna, P., & Miller, G. (2019), are about the perspectives of employees on decent work. There is also not enough qualitative research done that focuses on decent work and the youth unemployment crisis in South Africa. Although there is qualitative work on blue-collar workers and decent work (Kekana, et al., 2023). There are several laws that provide different kinds of protections and entitlements to the employed population in South Africa, however, there is no explicit law involving the unemployed (Bhorat, 2007). Some of the policies, procedures and laws regarding youth unemployment could also be clearer, and enforced and reinforced more (Hilson & Osei, 2014).

It is important for the current study to be carried out as there is a need for information regarding decent work and unemployment in South Africa. This is especially true regarding youth with lower levels of formal education, living in less developed societies, and most likely to experience

marginalization. Data gathered through this study could provide significant knowledge which could be the basis for the continued attempt to reconstruct and recover the South African economy. This could be achieved by building a more inclusive and diverse labour market, that places corporate social responsibility at the core. This is an area the current study could shed light into.

2.9 Research questions

To fulfil the purpose of the study, this research aims to explore, and possibly answer the following questions:

1. What does decent work mean according to the unemployed South African youth in an informal urban area? Specifically:
   (a) What conditions are youth willing to consider as decent work when unemployed?
   (b) Are young people willing to consider work as decent if they are not adequately paid?
   (c) Are young people willing to consider work conditions decent if they are not safe and adequate for them to do their work?
   (d) Are young people willing to consider work as decent when it is forced upon them?
   (e) Are young people willing to consider work as decent when they are not treated fairly, and their opinions are not respected at work?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter the researcher will describe in detail how the current study was carried out, i.e. the outline of methodological procedures that were applied. This chapter starts by discussing the research design that was used and its motivation. It then outlines the sampling and data collection procedures that were undertaken. For descriptive purposes, frequencies of the demographic characteristics of the sample will be provided in this chapter. Next, the review of the data analysis procedure is provided. Lastly the chapter gives an overview of ethical considerations and a discussion around reflexivity.

3.2 Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was used for this study because the researcher used data that they collected in the present over a short period of time. According to Lindell and Whitney (2001), a cross-sectional research design is used in studies that are carried out at one time point or over a short period of time. A qualitative and exploratory research approach was used in this study. Qualitative research is usually open and unstructured and does not necessarily rely on any theory to provide an outline of the research because it is all about understanding the topic being studied from the participants' point of view (Struwig and Stead, 2001). Furthermore, Blanche, Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) state that a qualitative research approach is best suited for exploring and getting an in-depth understanding of people's perceptions, cultures, lifestyles, and behaviours. Although novelty cannot be known in advance, exploratory research in social science encompasses an attempt to discover something new and interesting by working through a situation or a research topic (Swedberg, 2020). The current study takes on a qualitative exploratory design for the above-mentioned purposes. New insights and understandings of the meaning of decent work from the point of view of South African unemployed youth in an informal settlement in an urban area, with low levels of formal education are required. As a result, unemployed youth could begin to feature in conversations and further research on decent work in South Africa. This approach uses primary data which the researcher collected from these individuals whom at the end of the data analysis, the researcher hopes to have something new, innovative, and valuable to discuss about them.

3.3 Sample

Participants of this research were eighteen youth in an urban informal settlement area in South Africa (Setswetla, Alexandra) aged between 19 and 35. This area was selected because it offered the researcher convenient access to participants who met the inclusion criteria. These were youth that were actively searching for employment and were available for work at the time of the interviews but were not employed. In his review of a variety of studies, Mason (2010) generally stated that any sample size between 15 and 60 is large enough for a qualitative study if the researcher has unlimited finances. To ensure data saturation, the researcher achieved a sample size of 18, which was deemed sufficient as no new data or themes emerged, indicating that saturation had been reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The inclusion and exclusion criteria were

based on how long the participants have been unemployed (more than 3 months but less than 5 years), their educational background (never attended a higher education institution), and whether participants had been actively searching for work in the past four weeks. The participants were selected using a non-probability sampling approach, particularly the purposive sampling method where selection was based on the researcher's judgement based on the population of interest and study purpose. The researcher accessed participants through an area where her supervisor was already working on a project with a different population. This existing connection provided the researcher with access, established rapport, and a level of trust within the community, which made it easy to reach youths that met the inclusion criteria. According to Suri (2011) this type of sampling strategy is best for qualitative research because through it, the researcher can make the most out of the small population of interest and get a better understanding and more clear-cut outcomes.

All the eighteen participants reported that they were actively looking for work and that they were currently available for work. The length of unemployment varied in terms of the last time some participants had an informal job and the last time they had a formal job, that is, some participants would only consider the last time they had a permanent job. For example, when the researcher asked how long they have been unemployed, one participant gave the following response:

"Many years, but I work for piece jobs, since I had my matric, I never have a permanent job."

(Youth 18)

"Seven years now. I was in a learnership for 12 months working as a security back in 2019."

(Youth 10)

With regards to age, the sample was slightly biased towards the 19 to 24 age group as more participants were aged between 19 to 24 years (50.0%). In terms of gender, most participants were female (77.8%). All participants, except for three had Matric/ Grade 12 as their highest level of education. Of the three, one had Grade 11 as their highest level of education, two had a Diploma and a Higher Certificate from a technical college. All the participants were Black South Africans. Table 1 below shows frequencies of the demographic characteristics of the sample. A detailed table presenting additional participant information is included in the results section.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Demographics	Response	N	%
Age	19 - 24	9	50.0
	25 - 29	5	27.8
	30 - 35	4	22.2
Gender	Male	4	22.2
	Female	14	77.8
Race	Black South African	18	100
Education	Less than Matric	1	5.6
	National senior certificate (Matric)	15	83.2
	Higher Certificate	1	5.6
	Diploma	1	5.6
Length of unemployment	Less than 1 year but more than 3 months	8	44.5
	1 to 3 years	4	22.2
	4 to 5 years	6	33.3

3.4 Procedure

Interviews were conducted on the selected unemployed youth in Setswetla, which is an urban informal settlement area in Alexandra Township in South Africa. The researcher initially met with the community leader and explained the purpose of the research, upon which the community leader recommended and organised all the eighteen eligible participants. After voluntarily agreeing to participate, semi-structured interviews, were conducted with each unemployed youth in a mutually convenient, private setting (usually the Community Leadership Forum office). This place was selected to ensure safety, comfort, and privacy for both the researcher and the participants. Although there was some outside noise, the levels were low enough for the voice recording device to capture the interview smoothly and effectively, without any distractions from this outside noise. The use of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C) allowed for more flexibility, according to Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport (2005). Flexibility is important because the researcher was able to probe interesting concepts as they were being voiced and therefore was able to gain a fuller understanding. The purposes and context of the interviews were explained to participants before the interview commenced. The consent to voice-record the interview was also obtained, this included the participants reading the participant

information sheet and the consent form and signing it. It is important to note here that participation in these interviews was voluntary. The eligible participants who agreed to participate met with the researcher on the days the researcher went to Setswetla depending on their availability. English was the primary language of communication, which most participants were comfortable with. Minor language differences did not pose significant challenges as participants were willing to speak in Setswana, Sotho, or Pedi, which are languages the researcher could understand. The interviews, which took 30 to 40 minutes, were conducted on four different, non-consecutive days. On the first day, five interviews were conducted, followed by seven on another day, then three on another, finally three more interviews were conducted. In these last interviews, the researcher realized that no more new data was being shared, and that the data saturation had been reached.

3.5 Measuring Instruments

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were be utilized to collect data, in a face-to face setting. Using these was helpful because it allowed the participants to discuss decent work and unemployment beyond the questions (see Appendix C) posed to them by the interviewer (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Blanche, et al., (2006) mentions that interviews allow for the interviewer to get to understand the participants intimately in the way they think and feel. To conduct these semi-structured interviews, there were some predetermined questions which allowed for probing when the opportunity presented itself during the interview (Vos, et al., 2005). These questions formed a flexible guideline which structured the process loosely without leading or restricting the participants.

The semi-structured interview questions were formed on the basis on the Decent Work Theory (DWT). This is because one of the six dimensions proposed by this theory alludes to creating job opportunities for all as an important aspect of decent work (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). Since my sample is youth that are unemployed and looking for job opportunities, this theory seemed most relevant as it would be vital to see whether in their exploration of what decent work means, the participants would consider work that creates opportunities for them as being decent work. Furthermore, the DWT aligns with the research objectives, and framing interview questions based on this theory would allow for a nuanced understanding of decent work from the

perspective of the youths. Additionally, the DWT offers clear and well-defined concepts that can be operationalised into interview questions.

A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix C) containing twenty-one open-ended questions, covering the following areas, was used as a guide:

1. What does decent work mean to you? Specifically with regards to:
    - Working conditions youth are willing to consider as decent when unemployed.
    - The remuneration youth would consider appropriate to qualify work is decent.
    - The level of safety and security at work that would deem it as decent.
    - Would work be considered as decent if youth were forced to do it.
    - What kind of treatment youth expect at work for them to consider it as decent.

The interviews were voice- recorded with permission from the participants and observational notes were also made by the researcher during the interview. These notes captured non-verbal cues, contextual details, and initial reflections, which were later used to complement the transcribed data during thematic analysis. The questions were inductive in nature, and the interviewer was conscious not to guide the participants to talk about specific areas believed to be relevant for the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

The search for patterns and meaning, as well as making sense of participants' shared meaning is at the centre of qualitative data analysis (Flick, 2013). In this process of qualitative research, the data analysis occurred concurrently with the last phase of data collection and the beginning phase of transcription. The voice recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim into a typed Microsoft word document, then the transcriptions were checked against the voice recordings to make sure that all the data had been captured accurately. From there, data were analysed using thematic analysis which, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is a flexible and useful method which can provide rich and detailed data through analysing and reporting themes (patterns) within the data. The transcribed data were condensed using both in-vivo inductive and in-vitro deductive coding. In-vivo codes arise directly from the participants, meaning they are the terms articulated by the participants themselves, while in-vitro codes are terms formulated by the researcher to characterize a concept discussed by the participant (Carcary, 2011). Because the study's focus

was on understanding participants' meaning of decent work, a greater emphasis was placed on the words of participants to gain understanding of their perspectives. The researcher was able to achieve this by looking beyond the semantic layers of the participants' words, by looking further into their implicit meanings. At the latent level, thematic analysis involves interpretative work, where the researcher examines the theorised underlying ideas and conceptualisations, and how they inform the semantic content of the data (Braun, Clarke, 2006). The step-by-step guide to analysing data using thematic analysis started off with the researcher looking for and noticing patterns of meaning and issues of interest in the data, which even happened during data collection, and it ended with reporting the meaning and content of these patterns/ themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013; 2019) and Blanche, et al. (2006), the process of qualitative research places no strict boundaries between data collection and data analysis. In Thematic Analysis, data analysis tends to merge with the last phase of data collection and the starting phase of transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2013). Every time during the transcription phase (both typing and reading) new understandings of the data became evident to the researcher. This ensured an enlightening and engaging analytic journey, towards generating themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2019) and Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield (2022), themes do not emerge, so they cannot be searched and discovered, therefore, they can be wrong if not unified by a central idea. The process of Thematic Analysis is not a linear process, but more a recursive process, where there is a lot of going back and forth as required (Braun and Clarke, 2019). There are six phases that Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013; 2019) propose could be helpful as a step-by-step guide through analysis. These are: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data; (2) generating first codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) revising themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2013; Byrne, 2022). Below is a description of the above phases of thematic analysis and how they were followed:

3.6.1 Familiarization with the data

As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019) during the process of data collection one can already identify appropriate information that may be pertinent to the research questions, even before data analysis. Part of the first phase of data analysis included the researcher familiarising herself with the data. This, as stated by a lot of Thematic Analysis literature (e.g. Byrne, 2022; Braun and Clarke, 2012), started during data collection and transcription. The researcher

engaged in the process of data familiarization by reading and re-reading through transcripts and listening to audio recordings. Moreover, the researcher took down notes of initial ideas or what stood out for her, and thought may be helpful in bringing about important themes. It was vital here for the researcher to go through this second layer of immersion to become intimately familiar with the data and gain a deeper understanding of the information the participants were providing. The researcher followed the process as highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019) and Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield (2022).

3.6.2 Generating initial codes

The next phase of the process included the researcher beginning to generate initial codes. She did this by identifying descriptive labels for pieces of information that capture what was interesting in the data and could be relevant to the research questions. Codes were central to what later became themes, generating them was the first systematic part of the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2022). The researcher coded each interview separately and equally by going through the transcripts and identifying different patterns, then highlighted in assorted colours ideas that seemed significant. The comments function on a word document was also used for this process. Through this, she produced short descriptive labels that represented each of these ideas (see Appendix D), these labels later clustered together to build and generate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019).

3.6.3 Generating Themes

After the researcher was satisfied with coding, that is, once she realised and decided that the codes were rich, nuanced, and not made of single words (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019), she began the third phase of Thematic Analysis. This is where the researcher identified the bigger patterns of meaning or shared ideas and concepts that cut through the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022). As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019) and Byrne (2022), she did this by looking through the codes developed and began clustering them according to their shared patterned meaning. At this stage, the focus shifts to the interpretation of grouped meaning across the dataset, instead of interpretation of individual data items within the dataset (Byrne, 2022). For the researcher, phases two and three were almost blended together. This is because as data was highlighted and codes were being generated, she could already notice that there were similarities and connections between the smaller more precise codes that could be grouped

together into broader categories. She realised that these categories may eventually be the overarching themes that could provide an answer to the research questions. At this point, the researcher identified five potential themes, namely, comfortable, and proper work which is usually described to be government or office work, minimum wage renumeration, work security or being protected from work accidents/ hazards, current living situation leading to involvement in precarious work, forced work not being decent work. The researcher used five distinct colours to highlight all quotes connected to each potential theme. These themes were generated from one hundred-and-eighty-seven (187) codes, which were different explicit phrases from participants. The researcher then categorised these codes into twenty (20) different groups, this time with a bit more interpretation depending on the similar characteristics of these codes. From this the researcher was able to generate 5 themes. The researcher used thematic mapping to visually represent the categories. This helped the researcher to generate the themes easily and visualise the relationship between different themes, but more importantly it helped with categorising the many codes into more manageable categories.

3.6.4 Reviewing potential themes

Once the researcher had a list of categories and codes and identifies candidate themes, she went back through the data to identify whether each of the potential themes were good themes. This is the review and refinement phase made up of checking themes in relation to the codes and the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022). This is also where the researcher checked whether the identified theme was rich enough, whether a particular theme said more than one thing about decent work, that is, whether there was a central organising concept of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As stated by Byrne (2022), the researcher had to ask herself the following questions during the reviewing process: (1) Is this a theme or a code?; (2) Does this potential theme tell something important about the data set and the research questions?; (3) What are the boundaries of the candidate theme?; (4) Is the theme thick - is there enough meaningful data to support it?; (5) Is the theme coherent? During this process, the researcher had to discard or collapse some of the codes because they did provide positive answers to the above questions, for example, they only had a single manifestation of the central organising concept. Because of this, the researcher generated three of the potential themes as codes. This process took place at two levels. First, the relationship between the data items and codes that inform each theme was

reviewed (Byrne, 2022). Second, the researcher reviewed the themes in relation to the data set – whether they gave the most fitting interpretation of data as it relates to the research questions (Byrne, 2022).

3.6.5 Defining and naming themes

The researcher utilized the previous phase of reviewing themes to really think about the themes, what ideas they are about, and capturing that in appropriate names. In this phase of the Thematic Analysis process, the researcher focused not just on naming the themes, but also on defining each theme. In doing this, she was able to have more clarity regarding what the theme was about, its boundaries and the central idea. Just as in the previous phases, the researcher followed the process as highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012). It is at this phase of the analysis the researcher had to present a detailed analysis of the thematic framework where each theme and sub-theme are stated in relation to both the dataset and the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The themes of the current study as well as their abstracts are presented in Chapter 4.

Self-reflexivity was critical during this phase because the researcher began to examine how personal involvement in the phenomenon being studied may have an impact on the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). More on reflexivity will be discussed below where the researcher demonstrates how she maintained an introspective stance throughout.

3.6.6 Producing the report

This is the final phase of the step-by-step guide to thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012, 2013). By the time the researcher reached this stage, she had done a lot of writing already, however, she utilized this phase to bring everything together in a logical, coherent, and meaningful way. This is to say this part of the analysis did not necessarily occur at the end but was interwoven into the whole process (Braun & Clarke, 2012). All the discussed phases of thematic analysis above culminated in the production of this research report. The report addresses the pre-set research questions, which are the meaning of decent work on (but not limited to) working conditions, renumeration, safety and security, work-life balance, informal networks, growth and development, work volition, and fairness and equality.

3.7 Reflexivity

Due to the nature of reflexivity, this section is written in the first person. By its nature, qualitative research is subjective (Roulston, 2010). As the researcher, I understand that some of my beliefs, prior experiences, educational background, assumptions, and values may have an influence on this research. As a result, through the data collection, analysis, and writing this report, I drew attention to my own thoughts and feelings. I did this by keeping a reflexive diary. I used this to write down my reflections with regards to the participants' comments during the interview, as well as my own thoughts during the data analysis process. I made sure that as soon as the interview was completed that I would take reflexive notes about what I learnt from the data I had just collected and noted down any feelings and emotions. Finally, I developed and continually edited my subjectivity statement: who I am in relation to decent work and youth unemployment.

Furthermore, I used the transcription process as an opportunity to be reflexive, as it was stated by Shelton and Flint (2019) that the interview transcription process can serve as a good prospect for the researcher to explore their positionality with regards to the phenomenon and the people experiencing it. It was during the transcription and data analysis processes that I found myself doing a lot of introspection and taking down reflexive notes regarding the ideas prevalent in the data and my interpretation of these ideas.

As a young, Black female, from a low-income family who was unemployed at the time the current study was conducted, I had to maintain an awareness of any bias I could have regarding how I stated the purposes of the study, and what I hear versus what the participants were saying. Unemployment is a pressure I felt and could closely relate to. Therefore, I had to make sure that my emotions did not get in the way of the objectivity of the research. I did this by being aware of my thoughts and emotions and reflecting on these as I noted them on the reflexive journal.

My educational background as a student psychologist and my working experience in the field of counselling and community development, had the potential to influence my personal tendency to want to help. Had I not been cognisant of this and ensured that I remained partial and tried to maintain my role as a researcher, not a counsellor or a fellow Black unemployed youth, it could have had an enormous impact on the way the participants understood the purpose of the research.

I must note here that it was exceptionally hard to draw the lines between these roles that are now a part of who I am. This was especially so when one of the participants started to cry when talking about their current living situation.

However, the familiarity between the researcher and the participants, with regards to race, age, class, and the unfamiliarity with regards to educational background and work experience seemed to allow for an opportunity for good rapport building. As a result, participants were more expressive and open to giving examples as the researcher probed. There was also a difference in language. This was not much of an obstacle as the participants were willing to speak in languages I could understand (Setswana, Sotho, and Pedi), besides English which most of them were not comfortable with.

Reflexivity did not end during the data collection phase. Further reflections took place during the analysis phase. As the researcher, I interpreted the data and I generated, reviewed, named, and defined the themes of the current study. I aimed to remain objective by focusing on observable behaviours, environmental context, and neutral reflections in the field notes however this position could have still led me to make interpretations that reinforced my own personal views, for example, what can be regarded as decent work. Maintaining awareness of this allowed me to remain objective and concentrate only on the content conveyed by the participants. The notes I wrote down during the interviews were used to support the interview data without imposing personal interpretations.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethics form was completed and permission to conduct the study was sought from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical). According to Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2001) autonomy is one of the ethical considerations through which participants should be shown respect, respect for their right to be knowledgeable about the study, the right to choose freely whether they want to take part in the study, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time they feel like it without punishment. All the above were taken into consideration in the current study. Participation was voluntary, if participants wanted, they could stop their participation at any time, additionally, they could withdraw from the study at any time including withdrawing any statements that they had already made.

Participants were provided with enough information about what they are getting into (the risks and benefits involved in participating) in the participant information sheet to give informed consent, see Appendices C and B. Consent to be interviewed was signed consent. Confidentiality was taken into consideration. Participants were assured that their participation and responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and that no identifying information would be traced back to them by using pseudonyms in the report. Data collected were stored in a file in a password-protected computer and only the researcher and her supervisor had access to it.

Because of the nature of the topics discussed, some of the participants became overly emotional and felt stressed during the interview. However, the researcher was well equipped to assist appropriately. Because of her counselling background from undergraduate, the researcher acknowledged the participants' emotions and expressed empathy. She was also able to adapt the interview such that the following questions were more sensitive to the participants' emotional state. For the participant that cried, the researcher practiced silence to allow them to process their emotions, the researcher respected the participant's boundaries and only allowed them to continue when they were ready to. Finally, the participants were provided with information about free support services and counselling resources where they could seek further professional assistance.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter provides findings drawn from the unemployed youth regarding decent work. The demographic characteristics of each participant are presented in this section. The themes that were generated during the data analysis process are presented. This will be an outline of all the categories that the initial codes were grouped into, along with example code quotes. The generated themes are listed and a brief introduction of the final themes that were generated are organised in this chapter. An in-depth discussion of the generated themes will follow in the discussion chapter. Some visual representations are used to help make sense of the data.

4.2 Participants demographics

To give context to the study findings, a brief introduction of the participants is presented below. Participants were all youth aged between 18 and 35 years, none of them had a tertiary education qualification. To protect their identity, they will be referred to as Youth 1, 2, 3, etc. The Table 2 below presents each participant's gender, age, level of education, length of unemployment. Following that, is a discussion of what each youth said decent work means for them.

Table 2: Participants' demographics

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Level of education	Length of unemployment
Youth 1	Female	21	Higher certificate	9 months
Youth 2	Male	28	Diploma	1 year
Youth 3	Male	22	Grade 12	2 years
Youth 4	Female	30	Grade 11	5 years
Youth 5	Female	31	Grade 12	3 years
Youth 6	Female	20	Grade 12	9 months
Youth 7	Female	28	Grade 12	6 years
Youth 8	Female	20	Grade 12	10 months
Youth 9	Female	19	Grade 12	10 months

Youth 10	Female	25	Grade 12	7 years
Youth 11	Female	28	Grade 12	7 months
Youth 12	Female	21	Grade 12	10 months
Youth 13	Male	20	Grade 12	10 months
Youth 14	Female	23	Grade 12	5 years
Youth 15	Male	27	Grade 12	3 years
Youth 16	Female	31	Grade 12	11 years
Youth 17	Female	35	Grade 12	14 years
Youth 18	female	22	Grade 12	12 months

4.3 Findings

The aim of this study was to find out what decent work meant to unemployed south African youth living in an informal settlement. Further, the study aimed to find out under what conditions these youth were willing to work. The study aimed to determine how any of these would contravene South Africa's labour laws. The following specific research questions guided the achievement of the above aims:

1. What does decent work mean according to you?
   (a) What conditions are youth willing to consider as decent work when unemployed?
   (b) Are young people willing to consider work as decent if they are not adequately paid?
   (c) Are young people willing to consider work conditions decent if they are not safe and adequate for them to do their work?
   (d) Are young people willing to consider work as decent when it is forced upon them?
   (e) Are young people willing to consider work as decent when they are not treated fairly, and their opinions are not respected at work.

4.3.1 Meaning of decent work

To supplement the description of the demographic variables of the study participants above, the researcher deems it valuable to present each participant's interpretation of what constitutes decent work in this section. This approach provides nuanced insights into individual perceptions, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how factors such as socioeconomic background, cultural context, and lived experiences influence conceptualizations of decent work.

By including these perspectives, the study captures the subjective dimensions of decent work, which complement the broader demographic analysis and grounds the findings in participants' unique realities.

Youth 1 said decent work is whereby one is treated fairly and equally, where their rights are valued and they are respected, not mistreated because of colour or race.

Youth 2 mentioned that he never heard of the words decent work put together. He stated that all he knows is he wants to create work for others and not do work, he mentioned that only government work is decent work because it is only there that people get paid well, and people can work with matric, and that in other companies like private ones, if you don't have qualifications, you can only be a cleaner.

Youth 3, after a very long pause and cues that could only indicate deep thoughts and difficulty in answering the question, defined decent work as "laws that can be used at your work".

Youth 4 said they had no idea what decent work is.

Youth 5 defined decent work as an okay job, she mentioned that it is hard to define decent wok because she is not working, that if she had a job, she would be able to explain it because she would see the challenges indicating non decent work first hand.

Youth 6 stated that decent work is work where one feels comfortable, and they are treated equally.

Youth 7 said maybe decent work is when someone gets registered work, they mentioned that they do not really know what it could mean.

Youth 8 mentioned that decent work is comfortable work.

Youth 9 said decent work refers to proper work.

Youth 10, doubtfully, said decent work is work that is right for a person, work that will help a person survive for a long time.

Youth 11 stated that decent work is work like nursing, working at labour, social work or working in an office, basically government work where people have benefits, life covers, and pension funds unlike working in a shop.

Youth 12 mentioned that decent work is a job that they would like to do, a job that they have always wished to do, a job that would make them feel comfortable doing it.

Youth 13 said they did not understand what decent work means.

Youth 14 was hesitant to answer because they said they did not have a full understanding. However, they mentioned that it is work that is perfect and right.

Youth 15 said it is work that is right, where they will work proper and be able to enjoy.

Youth 16 stated that they think it is work that is right, where colleagues have a good relationship with each other.

Youth 17 said work where there is diversity, and people can work well together is decent work.

Youth 18 referred to decent work as work that is situated under government, where one, their children, and family members will get insured for many years to come. They mentioned that working in a shop is not decent work, because that job does not pay that much

4.3.2 Decent work conditions

Before going into the discussion of the generated themes, the researcher found it essential to present some of the raw data that emerged from participants' responses regarding their perceptions of decent work. These excerpts illustrate the foundational ideas that informed the thematic analysis, and the subsequent themes discussed in detail in Section 4.3.3 below.

The youths articulated various working conditions that they considered characterizing decent work when one is employed. These encompassed factors such as good payment, safety at work, effective communication, respect at work, good leadership, appropriate working hours, harmonious interpersonal dynamics with colleagues, and comprehensive contractual agreements.

Youth 2: "*Good payment. It's not like I'm after money but if you are doing something good for someone else, you have to get something in return. Because now I can work for maybe R1900,*

but if I am doing something which is memorable to you, like if I am going to pack up this whole room and put it nicely, you're going to realise that I need to pay this guy more decent money. Decent work is… ha-ha, I don't like the word decent work, but I'm going to answer that thing okay. You need to be like, the relationship with your employer or employee, like it should always be good, and you know…like I should be happy to go to work, not feeling like I'm going there for money."

Youth 3: "*I expect there to be safety at work, then there should also be communication during work so that we are more productive. And there should be respect at work.*"

Youth 9: "*Mmhhh… firstly the amount, and before working they should give me a contract and on the contract, I should expect maybe how they are working and whether they are giving me leave so that I should know whether to sign the contract or not. Because most of the companies, let's say maybe you agree how to work there and after a while you tell them you have a funeral at home, they will not allow that.*"

Youth 10: "*Where you work with people that don't shout at you, where you work well with people, and people like each other and there are no fights/ arguments*".

Youth 11: "*Work where you will work without any pressure, unlike in a shop where you work under pressure and you work the whole week, in a decent job I'd say working Monday to Friday and be with my children during the weekends*".

4.3.3 Generated themes

As discussed under above, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and generate themes from the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews. A total of five (5) major themes were generated from this data analysis process. Figure 1 below presents the five broad themes that were generated as well as the sub-themes under each of them. These themes are, comfortable and proper work (3 sub-themes), socioeconomic factors (3 sub-themes), participation in precarious work (2 sub-themes), sense of belonging (1 sub-theme), and occupational health and safety risks (1 sub-themes). These themes will be used to answer the research questions. The word document where initial codes were generated was used to develop these broad themes. As Braun and Clarke (2015) mentioned, themes are generated, they do not emerge, so the researcher

made sure that rigorous coding procedures were followed to systematically identify patterns and concepts within the data, facilitating the deliberate construction of themes aligned with the research objectives. These themes are discussed in detail below.

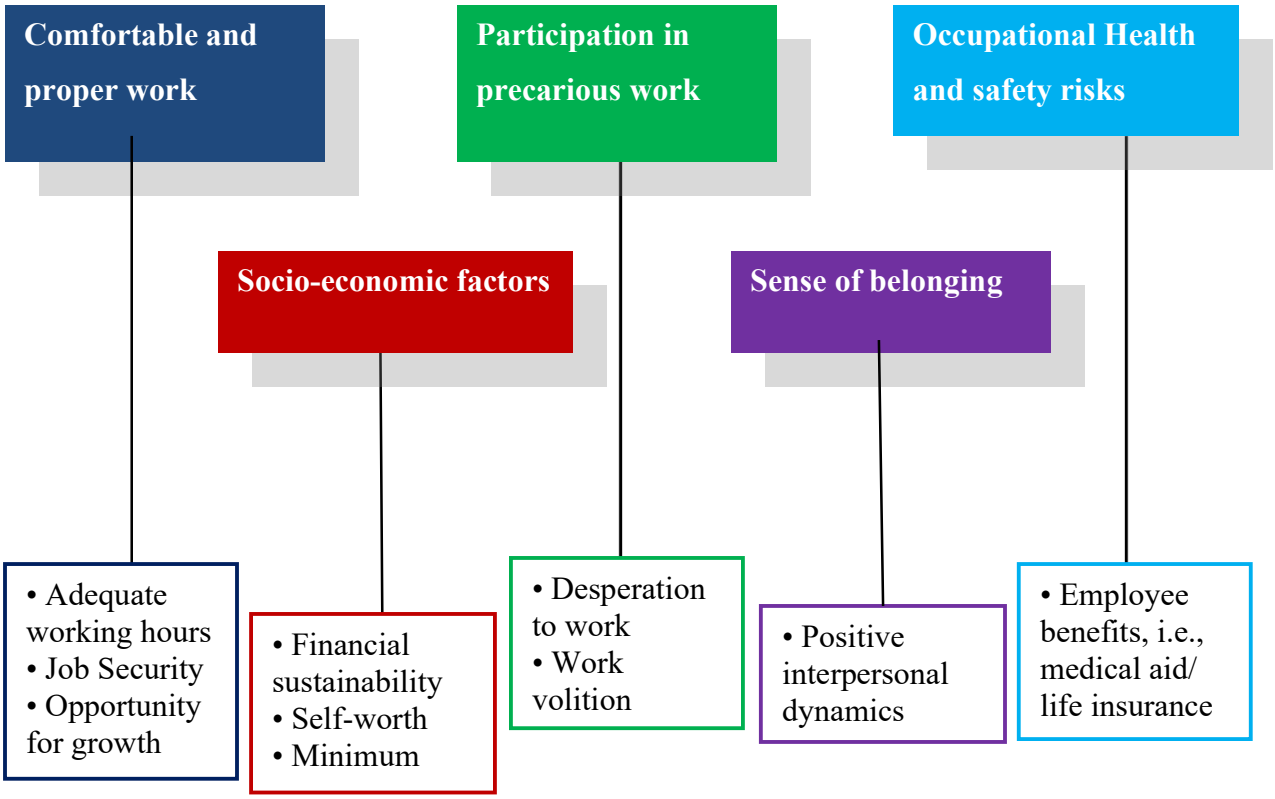


Figure 1: Generated themes and sub-themes

4.3.3.1 Comfortable and proper work

A comfortable and proper work environment is a fundamental aspect of decent work, as highlighted by the participants. This theme includes various factors that contribute to a job being perceived as fulfilling, secure, and conducive to well-being. Participants emphasized that a job should not merely be a means to earn an income but should also provide stability, purpose, and a sense of dignity. Work conditions were identified as a key determinant of comfort, with many respondents stating that their working environment should be structured in a way that allows them to perform optimally without experiencing undue stress or pressure. Factors such as

workplace policies, job security, career progression, and workload distribution significantly influenced whether participants perceived their work as comfortable and proper.

4.3.3.1.1 Adequate working hours

The participants emphasized that a decent job should have clearly defined working hours that do not impinge upon personal time. Many agreed that an eight-hour workday was ideal, allowing them to maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. Excessive and unpredictable working hours were widely criticized, with some noting that long shifts without proper compensation led to burnout and dissatisfaction.

Youth 1 noted, *"I shouldn't work for long hours. The hours I will be given should be the ones that will satisfy me and allow me to have time for my family."* Others echoed similar sentiments, indicating that work should not dominate their entire lives. However, there was acknowledgment that financial necessity sometimes forced individuals to accept extended work hours, though they did not consider it sustainable or desirable in the long run.

4.3.3.1.2 Job security

Job security emerged as one of the most crucial aspects of decent work. Many participants equated stability with dignity, explaining that uncertainty about the continuity of their employment led to significant stress and financial instability. Participants frequently mentioned government jobs as the benchmark for security, as these positions were perceived to provide long-term stability, benefits, and fair treatment.

Youth 2 explained, *"Maybe if I am working in government, it could be right because in government work the job will be forever."* Others expressed frustration with temporary or contract-based jobs, noting that these roles provided neither stability nor benefits. There was a general consensus that a secure job allowed employees to plan for the future, invest in their skills, and provide for their families without constant fear of unemployment.

4.3.3.1.3 Opportunities for growth

A job that provided opportunities for growth was deemed a distinctive feature of decent work. Many participants emphasized that being trapped in an entry-level position with no prospects for advancement was demotivating and undesirable. They wanted work

environments where they could upskill, be considered for promotions, and receive mentorship.

Youth 3 shared, *"If I start as a cleaner, I shouldn't be a cleaner forever. If there are opportunities, I should be able to apply and move up."* Youth 11 explained, *"There should be workshops and training programs to help employees grow within the company. Just telling someone to start working without guidance or training is not decent."*

For some, the absence of growth opportunities was a major deterrent, leading them to leave certain jobs or refuse certain work offers. Youth 9 reflected, *"I cannot work at a place that gives me stress. I should be happy to be there, and part of that is knowing that I can grow professionally."*

4.3.3.2 Socio-economic factors

The participants in this study predominantly come from economically vulnerable backgrounds, with many facing financial instability and limited access to sustainable employment. The majority have completed Matric (Grade 12), with very few holding higher certificates or diplomas. These economic realities heavily influenced participants' perceptions of decent work. Many participants viewed work as a means of securing financial stability, yet they were often forced to compromise on working conditions due to economic necessity. Employment was not only seen as a way to earn money but also as a reflection of one's self-worth, a means to achieve independence, and an opportunity to contribute to household income.

4.3.3.2.1 Financial sustainability

Decent work was closely associated with financial sustainability. Many participants sought jobs that would provide enough income to sustain themselves and their families, but the reality of the labour market often led them to accept employment that barely covered their expenses. Some respondents expressed a willingness to work for low wages in the short term, with the hope of securing better opportunities in the future.

Youth 4 stated, *"I don't have a problem with a small salary, as long as I get money. I will budget for it well, as long as something is coming in."* However, others emphasized that a wage that barely covered their expenses could not be considered decent. Participants

frequently noted that their economic circumstances sometimes forced them into accepting precarious work that did not align with their aspirations.

4.3.3.2.2 Self-worth

Fair compensation was closely linked to participants' sense of dignity and self-worth. Many participants believed that being underpaid signified a lack of respect from employers and made them feel undervalued. Several respondents stressed that their salaries should reflect the level of effort and skill they put into their work.

Youth 5 shared, *"The effort I'm going to put into that company should be worth what I am paid. If my salary does not reflect my effort, it is not decent work."* Youth 2 added, *"Decent work means I am respected and valued for what I do."* Participants indicated that when wages were too low, they felt powerless in the workplace, with little leverage to negotiate better conditions.

4.3.3.2.3 Minimum wage

Participants had different views on what constituted an acceptable minimum wage. Some considered the national minimum wage as an acceptable starting point, while others viewed it as insufficient. The struggle to find employment often led some individuals to accept wages below their expectations simply to avoid unemployment.

Youth 5 noted, *"R3500 going down is fine since that is South Africa's agreement."* Youth 16 added, *"If I do get a job, I have been struggling to work so I won't choose. They say choosers are not beggars."* Many expressed frustrations over the limited bargaining power they may have when negotiating wages, highlighting how economic vulnerability made it difficult to demand better pay.

4.3.3.3 Participation in precarious work

Although stable employment was the preferred option for many participants, financial desperation often compelled them to accept precarious work as a means of survival. The need to provide for themselves and their families left them with little choice but to engage in jobs that were unstable and unpredictable. These jobs were typically characterized by high levels of

insecurity, where contracts were either short-term or non-existent, leaving workers vulnerable to sudden termination.

4.3.3.3.1 Desperation to work

For many participants, economic instability meant that they could not afford to be selective about job opportunities. They often accepted roles that were physically demanding, underpaying, or offered little security simply because they had no alternatives. Participants frequently expressed that despite knowing these jobs were exploitative, they took them out of necessity rather than choice.

Youth 1 explained, *"I'm desperate, so any amount is better than nothing because I need to support my family."* Youth 15 reflected, *"Sometimes you have to do a job by force just to put something on the table."* The need for survival often outweighed concerns about working conditions, leading many to accept employment that they otherwise would not have considered.

4.3.3.3.2 Work volition

A central theme among participants was the lack of autonomy in their employment choices. Many felt that financial desperation forced them into undesirable jobs, stripping them of the agency to seek meaningful and fulfilling work. Voluntary employment was considered a crucial component of decent work, and participants associated coercion – whether economic or social – with non-decent work.

Youth 5 shared, *"Forced work is not decent work. If you're forcing me, it means we are fighting."* Others stated that while they might accept undesirable jobs out of necessity, they did not find them fulfilling or dignified. Some expressed frustration at having to choose between financial survival and their well-being, highlighting the structural inequalities that limited their employment choices.

4.3.3.4 Sense of belonging

A workplace that fosters a strong sense of belonging is crucial for both job satisfaction and overall well-being. Many participants emphasized the significance of feeling respected, valued,

and included in their work environment, as this directly influenced their motivation and commitment to their jobs. They expressed that when people at work feel recognized for their contributions and are treated with respect and dignity, they would consider that work as decent.

Participants also highlighted that workplaces that encourage open communication, mutual respect, and a sense of camaraderie among colleagues create a more supportive and cohesive atmosphere. Environments where collaboration is encouraged, and teamwork is prioritized were viewed as decent work environments. A sense of belonging at work was seen as a fundamental factor to decent work because it leaves employees feeling secure, motivated, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to their work.

4.3.3.4.1 Positive interpersonal dynamics

Participants highlighted the role of supportive colleagues and fair treatment by management in shaping their experience at work. Some emphasized that a friendly, respectful, and communicative workplace helped them feel more engaged.

Youth 6 stated, *"Working as a group sometimes, where you help each other, is important."* Youth 5 added, *"We should treat each other as friends and family since we work together every day."* However, others noted that workplace relationships could also be a source of conflict if not managed well, stressing the importance of professional boundaries.

4.3.3.5 Occupational health and safety risks

Safety in the workplace emerged as a fundamental component of what participants considered decent work. Many expressed concerns about hazardous working conditions, including exposure to physically demanding tasks, unsafe machinery, and environments that posed risks to their health and well-being, describing those conditions as non-decent. A key issue raised was the lack of proper protective equipment, which could leave a worker vulnerable to workplace injuries and occupational illnesses. Some participants noted that work that does not provide essential safety gear, such as gloves, helmets, or protective clothing, especially in physically intensive or hazardous industries was not decent work. Most participants identified such working conditions as a definitive bottom-line limitation, stating that they would refuse to work in environments that failed to meet basic safety standards.

4.3.3.5.1 Employee benefits, i.e., medical aid/ life insurance

Several participants noted that workplace benefits significantly influenced their perception of job quality. Many viewed medical aid, life insurance, and other safety measures as necessary provisions for decent work. Beyond physical safety, participants emphasized the importance of employer-provided benefits, such as medical aid and life insurance. They highlighted that in the absence of these protections, workplace accidents or health-related issues could leave employees and their families financially devastated. The absence of such benefits was seen as a sign that employers do not prioritize worker welfare, reinforcing the perception that those kinds of jobs are exploitative rather than decent.

Youth 7 explained, *"They should have a medical aid available for you so that you can easily access the hospital when needed."* Others emphasized the need for protective gear in physically demanding jobs, stating that without such provisions, workers were left vulnerable. Youth 8 shared, *"If an accident happens, I should be able to get proper medical treatment, not just be sent to a clinic."* Some participants also mentioned security concerns, stating that workplaces should have adequate safety measures such as security personnel and emergency response plans.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the study's findings, interpreting them in relation to existing literature on decent work and South African labour laws. It explores how unemployed South African youth in an urban area conceptualize decent work and the extent to which their experiences align with or challenge labour law protections. The discussion critically engages with prior research to assess how these findings contribute to broader academic debates on decent work, precarious employment, and youth labour market experiences. Additionally, the chapter outlines theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations of the study.

5.2 Introduction

The analysis of the results in chapter four identified that unemployed South African youth with lower levels of education, living in an informal settlement characterise decent work by 5 interconnected thematic groups and their associated sub-themes as provided above. A detailed discussion of the themes and subthemes follows below while answering the research questions. It is important to remember that this study aimed to address the question of what decent work means for these young people. Particularly whether young people would consider work to be decent if; (1) they were not adequately paid, (2) the working conditions were not safe and adequate, (3) work was forced upon them, and (4) they were not treated fairly, and their opinions were not respected.

The importance of work in meeting basic human needs and achieving personal and social fulfillment cannot be overstated. Work not only provides the means for survival and income generation, but it also plays a significant role in fostering meaningfulness, asserting personal values, forming social identities, and establishing social cohesion and a sense of belonging (Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2009). The concept of decent work, introduced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1999, emphasizes the necessity of fair, safe, and humane working conditions to ensure social justice and lasting peace for workers (Blustein et al., 2016; Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). The ILO Decent Work Agenda and the South African labour laws aim to ensure that all individuals work under conditions that are fair, secure, and conducive to personal and professional growth, with adequate compensation, safety, and social protection (Blustein et al., 2016; Deranty & MacMillan, 2012; Fostervold, et al., 2018).

The high unemployment rate among South African youth raises significant concerns regarding their participation in precarious work (De Lannoy, et al., 2020; du Toit, 2003; Mlatsheni & Ranchord, 2017; Mokgohloa, 2006). This reality poses critical questions about the willingness of young people to accept substandard working conditions for the sake of earning a living, gaining respect and self-worth, and accumulating work experience.

This discussion chapter will explore whether unemployed youths are willing to engage in precarious work, and if so, what are their bottom-line limitations. Further, it will explore how these experiences align with or contravene South African labour laws. More importantly, it will delve deeper into the youth's perceptions of what constitutes decent work in the context of their economic and social challenges.

As it has already been discussed throughout this report, it is quite challenging to define the term decent work, even the ILO who coined the term, the Global North, and other sustainability circles who widely use the term struggle to provide a clear definition of decent work (Blustein, et al., 2016). Similarly, most of the participants found it difficult to define decent work, the reasons they gave mostly were that they do not work, therefore they do not know how to clarify what decent work is.

Although this is the case, some participants were able to provide their own meaning of decent work, even those that found it difficult were able to provide their idea of what they would constitute as decent work if they were employed. The researcher was also able to use thematic analysis at a latent level and looked at the data beyond its explicit content to interpret the broader meanings and implications.

The findings of the study shed light on the complex interplay between economic and psychosocial dimensions of work, highlighting the concept of decent work in the context of unemployment.

The discussion is organized according to the primary research question and its specific sub-questions, providing an in-depth analysis of each aspect of decent work as perceived by the youths.

1. **What does decent work mean according to the unemployed South African youth in an informal urban area?**

The primary research question seeks to understand the overarching concept of decent work from the perspective of unemployed youth in informal settlements. Decent work, as articulated by the participants, encompasses several key elements including fair remuneration, safe working conditions, respectful treatment, effective communication, and harmonious workplace relationships.

Fair pay emerged as a critical component of decent work for the youths. The ILO defines fair remuneration as earnings that allow workers and their families to achieve a decent living standard. This perspective is echoed by Kalleberg (2011), who emphasizes that adequate wages are fundamental to workers' well-being and economic security. The youth's emphasis on fair pay underscores the necessity for wages that reflect the value of their labour and enable them to support themselves and their families effectively. Similarly, safety in the workplace is another paramount concern highlighted by the participants. The ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155) highlight the importance of providing a safe and healthy work environment. Supporting this is Amartya Sen's Capability Approach which posits that individuals should have the freedom to pursue lives they have reason to value, which includes the absence of undue risks in their work environments. Ensuring safe working conditions not only protects physical well-being but also fosters a sense of security and dignity among workers.

Respect and harmonious relationships within the workplace were frequently mentioned by the youth as essential aspects of decent work. These elements are integral to the ILO's framework, which advocates for respectful treatment and the elimination of workplace discrimination. Furthermore, Decent Work scholar Michael Reich (2015) highlights that respectful interactions and positive workplace relationships enhance employee satisfaction and productivity. For the youth in informal settlements, respectful treatment validates their contributions and promotes a supportive work atmosphere.

Participants highlighted that decent work is not solely about employment but also about the quality and conditions of that employment. This broader understanding reflects a perception that goes beyond mere job acquisition, emphasizing the sustainability and dignity associated with

work. This is supported by Blustein, et al. (2016), who argue that decent work should promote human dignity, psychological wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods, rather than focusing solely on employment status. Another emphasized the significance of job security and benefits: "*I would say something like nursing or working in the office, like government work... they have pension funds, they only have UIF*," illustrating the value placed on long-term stability and financial security.

Furthermore, the desire for meaningful and comfortable work was evident when a participant mentioned, "*I personally think decent work would be something that I'd like to do, something that I have always wished to do, or something that will make me feel comfortable doing.*" This aligns with Sen's Capability Approach by highlighting how meaningful employment enhances individuals' ability to lead fulfilling lives. Additionally, the emphasis on fair treatment and non-discrimination, as expressed in the participants' quotes, reflects the capability to achieve a life free from oppression and bias.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study, which draws on Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, supports this view by focusing on individuals' abilities to achieve the lives they value (Sen, 1999). By valuing not just the existence of employment but the conditions that allow individuals to thrive, the study aligns with Sen's emphasis on expanding people's capabilities and freedoms. For example, when participants spoke about government jobs offering better pay and security, they were highlighting how such employment opportunities enable them to pursue greater life choices and enhance their overall well-being.

a) What conditions are youth willing to consider as decent work when unemployed?

Through in-depth discussions with these youths, it became evident that decent work for them was multi-faceted, encompassing fair treatment and respect at work, favourable compensation, opportunities for growth, sense of belong, and the general feeling of comfort at work.

Many youths indicated the importance of being treated equally and with respect regardless of race or background when defining decent work. They shared that decent work for them involves respect for one's rights and non-discriminatory practices. Beyond being in an environment where they feel at ease, comfortable and proper work was described by some youths as work where an

employee won't have to stand for a long time, where there is adequate seating and workstations to allow them to perform tasks comfortably.

Similarly, the DWT emphasizes that decent work must provide individuals with opportunities for economic security, social inclusion, and personal dignity (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). In this study, participants identified job security, fair wages, growth opportunities, and safe working conditions as fundamental aspects of decent work, aligning with DWT's core dimensions. Additionally, Christiaensen and Maertens (2022) referred to decent work as work where the employees feel physically and psychologically supported, with ergonomic workspaces, a respectful and inclusive culture, clear expectations, and access to necessary resources. Additionally, the ILO Decent Work Agenda emphasises that both men and women should work in conditions of social protection, freedom, fairness, and human dignity (Blustein, et al., 2016; Deranty & MacMillan, 2012).

Furthermore section 6 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of South Africa (BCEA) mentions that no employer may discriminate against an employee or job applicant on grounds of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language, birth, or any other arbitrary ground. This Act emphasizes fair labour practices and mandates fair treatment of employees, which inherently includes respect in the workplace. It supports the protection of dignity, equality, and freedom from discrimination. The Occupational Health and Safety Act of South Africa (OHSA) mandates employers to provide workplaces that are safe and without risk to the health of employees, this includes ensuring ergonomic workplaces to prevent injuries and promote employee wellbeing.

Additionally, many youths stated having opportunities for growth at work. The youths expressed that decent work is the type of work that offers avenues for personal and professional development. They believe that in decent work, employers or supervisors must prioritize communication and mutual respect when providing feedback if employees are underperforming. They stated that this will allow them to correct their mistakes and grow. The youths also emphasised the importance of being heard, stating that they would consider a job that offers them an opportunity to share their ideas and opinions about improving the workplace as decent work. Decent work was further described as a job where one can move up within the organisation. The

youths felt that starting at an entry-level position, for example, should not mean being stuck in that role forever. Instead, they aspire for a job that would offer opportunities to apply for higher positions internally, i.e., progressing from a cleaner to a more advanced role. Youth identified a few additional essential markers of decent work that they would consider when employed. Salary increments and promotions were some of these markers, the youths explained that these would allow them to improve both their financial and professional standing over time. Opportunities such as being educated about one's role through proper trainings and workshops, was the most stated indicator of growth that would position a job as decent work. Youths stated that this would help them acquire new skills and gain confidence in their roles.

Likewise, many studies (e.g., Blustein, et al., 2016; Blustein, et al., 2023; ILO, 1999; Pereira, et al., 2019) describe decent work as a job that, among other characteristics, offers employees opportunities for growth. Decent work involves more than just meeting basic workplace conditions, it acts as a foundation for personal and professional development by enabling individuals to meet their needs for survival, social connection, and self-determination (Blustein, et al., 2023). According to Pereira, et al. (2019), decent work encompasses opportunities for personal development, career management and work-life balance. Decent work is seen as essential for improving overall quality of life, allowing individuals to pursue personal and professional growth (Pereira, et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in describing decent work, the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) emphasizes self-determination which is closely tied to personal and professional growth (Blustein, et al., 2016). Self-determination is fostered when employees have access to opportunities for autonomy and competence in their jobs (Blustein, et al., 2016). Blustein, et al. (2016) further state that career development within a decent work setting involves offering individuals chances for education, training, and access to resources that enable then to grow professionally. This is comparable to the work conditions that youths would describe as decent work if employed. Finally, Blustein, et al. (2016) align personal and professional development with the broader social justice goals of decent work, aiming to reduce inequalities by ensuring that marginalized groups have equal access to these growth opportunities. Fairness and equality when implementing these decent work conditions were frequently mentioned by youths when describing what constitutes decent work.

Contrary to some of the views youths had regarding decent work in the context of a job that offers opportunities for growth, career management research shows that responsibilities for career growth have shifted from employers to employees (Pereira, et al., 2019). Most of the youths believed employers were responsible for their growth at work. However, the shift described by Pereira, et al. (2019) states that employees were expected to take charge of their own careers and seek out opportunities for growth, acquiring new skills and navigating career paths independently. This shift is part of a broader trend in the workforce, where employees are seen as more autonomous and empowered to manage their own growth (Pereira, et al., 2019). This has created more pressure on employees even though it does offer greater autonomy, which is also regarded to as one of the components of decent work (Blustein, et al., 2016; Pereira, et al., 2019).

The Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) stresses the importance of using the workplace as an environment for learning and growth. The Act encourages employers to: (1) provide opportunities for employees to acquire new skills, (2) create opportunities for career advancement, particularly for historically disadvantaged individuals, and (3) use the workplace as a training ground where employees can gain practical experience and develop new competencies (Skills Development Act, 1998). Non-compliance with the Act can lead to financial penalties, loss of access to grants, and possible legal action or criminal charges for employers. For example, if employers fail to contribute to the Skills Development Levy, which is used to finance training and development initiatives, they may have to pay fines as stipulated in the Skills Development Levies Act (No. 9 of 1999). Furthermore, employers who do not offer training or do not submit workplace skills plans to their relevant Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), may lose access to grants and subsidies from the National Skills Fund or their SETA (Skills Development Act, 1998).

The Skills Development Act (1998) also calls for fair access to skills development and the compensation of inequalities through training and education, ensuring that all workers, especially those previously marginalized, have the chance to grow professionally. As stated in the Skills Development Act (1998), this focus on fairness in skills development aligns with the broader goals of improving employability, productivity, and the overall quality of work for employees. Additionally, the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) complements the Skills Development

Act by emphasizing equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment. This Act encourages employers to ensure fair access to training and development opportunities, especially for groups who were previously disadvantaged (Employment Equity Act, 1998).

However, when unemployed, many youths expressed willingness to compromise on some of these decent work elements due to financial necessity, though they did not perceive such jobs as truly decent. Some youths stated that they were willing to work even when the work was not comfortable or proper, i.e., no respect, inequality, and discrimination at work. Most of the reasons that were stated were that if there was a salary coming in, the work will be done, and sexual harassment was stated by most youth as a bottom-line limitation.

Despite these legal frameworks, there appears to be some disconnect between the law and practice, particularly among unemployed youth with lower levels of higher education. Some youths stated that they were willing to accept employment opportunities that do not provide avenues for personal or professional growth. This willingness to do work without developmental prospects was mainly due to the need for an income and to a certain degree a lack of understanding about their legal rights regarding career development. This acceptance of substandard working conditions could be seen as a contravention of labour laws, as employers may exploit this willingness and fail to comply with their obligations under the Acts. However, even the youths who said they would do the work acknowledged the lack of fulfilment it would bring them, referring to that kind of work as non-decent work.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that unemployed youth prioritize opportunities for growth, fair pay, workplace safety, respectful treatment, effective communication, and harmonious relationships as essential conditions for decent work. These conditions are consistent with the Decent Work Theory (DWT), which emphasizes the importance of work opportunities, freedom to choose, productive work, equity, security, and dignity (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

b) Are young people willing to consider work as decent if they are not adequately paid?

When exploring the specific conditions that unemployed youth consider essential for decent work, several factors emerged prominently. Fair pay emerged as a non-negotiable condition, with participants expressing that adequate compensation is fundamental to perceiving work as

decent. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that fair remuneration is a critical component of job satisfaction and perceived work quality (Kabeer, 2016).

This study reveals that while financial remuneration was crucial, non-monetary factors like safety, respect, and fair treatment were equally important. Participants emphasized the need for a balance between financial necessity and work quality. This finding is supported by the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT), which highlights the psychological impacts of work and unemployment on mental health (Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2016). Likewise, according to DWT, fair and sufficient remuneration is essential for work to be considered decent, as it ensures financial security and enhances well-being (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The findings of this study suggest that while some youths were willing to accept lower wages out of necessity, they did not view such work as sustainable or fully aligning with their expectations of decent work. This reflects DWT's claim that inadequate pay undermines a worker's ability to achieve long-term economic security and well-being (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

The findings indicate that insufficient pay significantly diminishes the perception of work as decent among the youth. Participants articulated that inadequate remuneration undermines their ability to support themselves and their families, thereby rendering the work unacceptable despite other positive conditions. This sentiment echoes the arguments presented by Labour Market Theorists, who assert that fair compensation is integral to the recognition and valuation of workers' contributions (Koekemoer, & Masenge, 2023).

Furthermore, the threshold for acceptable compensation varies among individuals, but the consensus highlights that without adequate pay, other aspects of the job are insufficient to deem the work decent. This highlights how important money and financial factors are to young people when judging the quality of a job.

From the responses, it is evident that the youth have diverse perspectives on what constitutes a decent wage. Many appear willing to accept low-paying jobs given their current circumstances. Several youths expressed a willingness to accept almost any amount of pay due to financial desperation and the pressing need to support their families. For some, even a low income would be acceptable if it allows them to provide for themselves and their loved ones, indicating a level of immediate survival needs. However, other youths indicated a desire for a minimum income

threshold, usually around R3,500 to R5,000, which they regarded as somewhat adequate for meeting basic living expenses and meeting the legal minimum wage.

Despite this range of perspectives, a common sentiment was the willingness to compromise on ideal wages due to the lack of alternatives, some youths prioritized job experience, learning opportunities, and future potential for advancement over immediate financial reward. This somewhat poses a risk for contravening the South African Labour Laws.

The National Minimum Wage Act, No. 9 of 2018 in South Africa ensures that workers receive a fair and decent wage, safeguarding low-paid employees from exploitation. The primary goal of this Act is to reduce poverty and inequality by setting a minimum threshold for wages across various sectors. To enforce compliance, the Act imposes penalties on employers who pay below the minimum wage, thus upholding workers' rights to fair remuneration. Adequate pay, as mandated by this Act, is a fundamental component of decent work as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO), ensuring economic security and protection from poverty for South African workers. Although some youth may be willing to engage in jobs they do not deem as decent, there are some laws that will hold the employers accountable.

c) Are young people willing to consider work conditions decent if they are not safe and adequate for them to do their work?

The findings of this study reveal a clear stance among unemployed South African youth: the willingness to accept work is significantly influenced by the safety and adequacy of working conditions. Predominantly, participants expressed a strong preference for employment in environments that ensured physical safety and security. This sentiment shows the fundamental role that safety protocols play in the perception of decent work.

Participants prioritized safety protocols, adequate equipment, and a healthy work environment, often citing past experiences where the absence of these elements led to detrimental outcomes. For instance, Youth 11 shared an incident where lack of protective clothing resulted in a serious injury, reinforcing the critical need for proper safety measures. Such experiences contribute to a heightened awareness and prioritization of safety among youth, aligning with Rubery et al. (2018) and Mosoetsa et al. (2016), who discuss the instability and precariousness of non-standard employment arrangements. These findings resonate with the broader literature on

occupational health and safety, which emphasises that unsafe work environments not only pose physical risks but also engender psychological stress, thereby undermining overall well-being (Siegrist, 1996). Furthermore, the DWT suggests that safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to decent work, as they protect workers from physical and psychological harm (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The study's findings strongly align with this principle, as many participants indicated that they would rather remain unemployed than work in unsafe conditions. Their perspectives emphasize DWT's argument that safety is a non-negotiable aspect of decent work, as the absence of proper working conditions can have severe consequences for worker dignity and well-being (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

Moreover, the adequacy of working conditions extends beyond physical safety to encompass the provision of necessary resources and a conducive environment for professional growth. Youths noted that adequate equipment and supportive work conditions enable them to perform tasks effectively and foster professional development. This perspective aligns with the Capability Approach, which posits that enabling individuals to achieve desired outcomes is essential for their development and satisfaction. The lack of such conditions not only leads to job dissatisfaction but also deters youth from seeking employment, even when financial incentives are present. This reinforces the notion that comprehensive workplace standards are integral to fostering a perception of decent work.

As discussed above, when it comes to safety, the adequacy of the working condition extends beyond just physical health or safety. Most youths mentioned job security as one of the conditions that makes work decent. According to them, job security extends beyond just having a job, it includes factors like clear employment contracts, good communication, and a supportive work environment. They mentioned that for work to be regarded as decent there needs to be clear communication at work, particularly meaning having someone to report to in case of challenges or disagreements. They stated that this could go a long way in ensuring security in their jobs since there will be reduced mistakes and limited misunderstandings, which usually lead to job loss.

Most youths described decent work in the context of a job that was stable and came with long-term contracts, with government jobs being an example of such due to their perceived permanence. The availability of formal contracts that specify work conditions, leave policies,

and remuneration was highlighted as an important aspect of job security. Without these agreements, the youths felt vulnerable to sudden changes or unfair treatment at work, particularly in terms of unfair dismissals. Youth 8 mentioned "…*there will be contract I guess, like in government work the job will be forever.*"

Similarly, Blustein, et al. (2023) state that stable and secure work is a key component of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Along with aspects such as adequate earnings, social protections, and safe work environments, job security was listed as one of the macro-level indicators of decent work (Blustein, et al., 2023). Precarious work, which is seen as undermining the goal of decent work is characterised by insecurity and instability in one's work (Blustein, et al., 2023; Mosoetsa et al., 2016). This therefore means that the presence of job security is necessary for ensuring a sense of decency in work (Blustein, et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Yan, Geng, and Gao (2023) mention that job security is a critical dimension of decent work as it ensures stability and contributes to overall well-being. According to Yan, et al. (2023), job security is more than just being able to keep one's work for a long time, it involves income security, work security, and benefits security. These aspects of job security are consistent with how youths described decent work beyond just job permanence. These aspects also align with the ILO's broader decent work framework, which aims to promote secure, dignified, and sustainable employment (Yan, et al., 2023). Coherent with the data, Yan, et al. (2023) reported that without job security, employees are more likely to experience stress, uncertainty, and disengagement, which may lead to higher turnover rates and reduced organisational productivity.

Finally, South Africa's Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 (1995) plays a crucial role in safeguarding job security, a key concern highlighted by the youth in the current study. The Act defines job security in a manner that resonates with the lived experiences of the youths interviewed, particularly their desire for stable and fair employment. Participants expressed that uncertainty regarding their job stability created significant stress, making security a vital aspect of what they considered decent work. According to the Labour Relations Act (1995), employees have the right not to be unfairly dismissed, reinforcing the principle that terminations must be based on a valid reason, be procedurally fair, and adhere to due process. This aligns with participants' expectations that job security means not being dismissed arbitrarily and having access to fair procedures when disputes arise. Many of the youths associated government jobs

with a stronger sense of stability, partly because they perceived these positions as adhering to structured dismissal procedures, as required by the Labour Relations Act.

The Act mandates a process of joint consultation between employers and affected employees before dismissal occurs, requiring efforts to explore alternatives such as retraining, internal redeployment, or severance pay (LRA No. 66 of 1995, 1995). This echoes the perspectives of participants who expressed frustration with jobs that offered no negotiation in the event of termination. For many, decent work is about more than just having a job—it is about being treated with fairness in situations of retrenchment or dismissal. Additionally, the Act provides remedies for unfair dismissals, including reinstatement, re-employment, or financial compensation. This reinforces the importance of fair treatment, which participants repeatedly emphasized as a critical factor in defining decent work. The possibility of reinstatement after an unfair dismissal aligns with the belief that job security should include mechanisms that protect employees from exploitation and ensure ongoing opportunities for work. Ultimately, the Labour Relations Act emphasizes many of the protections that the youths in this study associate with decent work. Their perspectives highlight that beyond mere employment, having protections against unfair dismissal, access to procedural fairness, and opportunities for recourse are key components of what they view as decent work.

Although most youths had these views and understandings with regards to decent work in the concept of job safety and security, some of them mentioned that they would still do the work even when job permanence was not guaranteed. Most of them however mentioned that the bottom-line limitation would be when the job puts their lives at risk of diseases or serious injury. The high rate of unemployment in South Africa was given as a reason for accepting jobs that are seen as non-decent, most youths find themselves in temporary jobs, casual contracts, or informal employment. Informal employment, which serves an alternative for unemployment, still falls outside the formal regulatory framework, where workers do not have formal labour contracts, social protection, or benefits (Asmal, et al., 2024). This means unemployed youths in an urban informal settlement in South Africa are faced with the double tragedy of non-decent work, despite their understanding of what decent work involves.

The willingness of some youths to accept unsafe conditions due to financial necessity introduces a nuanced layer to the findings. While the overarching preference is for safe and adequate work

environments, economic pressures compel certain individuals to compromise on these standards. This dichotomy highlights the tension between the desire for decent work and the immediate need for income, reflecting the precarious nature of youth employment in South Africa. It suggests that while safety and adequacy are prioritized, economic constraints can override these preferences, necessitating interventions that address both workplace conditions and economic opportunities.

This study affirms that young people in South Africa place significant emphasis on the safety and security of a job when evaluating the decency of work. While economic necessity can sometimes compel compromises, the predominant inclination is towards environments that ensure physical safety, job security, and provide necessary resources, and support professional growth. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on decent work and highlight the critical role of comprehensive workplace standards in fostering meaningful and sustainable employment for youth.

d) Are young people willing to consider work as decent when it is forced upon them?

The study reveals mixed responses, with some participants willing to engage in forced work out of necessity, while others reject it due to ethical considerations. This finding highlights the tension between financial necessity and the desire for respectful, flexible work conditions.

The concept of voluntarily engaging in work/ work volition is crucial to the perception of decent work. The study found that coerced or forced employment is viewed negatively and contradicts the essence of decent work. Participants associated forced work with exploitation, a lack of autonomy, and a lack of flexibility which are antithetical to the principles of fair and dignified employment.

This perspective is supported by the theoretical framework of voluntarism in employment, which posits that the voluntary nature of work consent is fundamental to its decency (Decent Work Agenda, ILO, 2017). Forced work undermines individual agency and can lead to adverse outcomes both for the worker and the broader community. Moreover, the DWT stresses autonomy and work volition as essential to decent work, arguing that work should be freely chosen rather than imposed (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). The study revealed that many participants associated forced work with non-decent conditions, as it undermines personal agency and

reinforces exploitation. This finding aligns with DWT's principle that work must provide individuals with a sense of control and self-determination, reinforcing the idea that coerced labour cannot be classified as decent work (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

As implied by the youth, forced work may pressure individuals to work long, gruelling hours. When it comes to adequate working hours, the youths expressed different perspectives on what constitutes decent work in terms of working hours. For many, adequate working hours was an important element of decent work, because this allows a balance between work and personal life, particularly time with family. A typical eight-hour workday was seen as ideal, with strong resistance to jobs that required excessive overtime or weekend work without proper compensation or rest. Several participants indicated that a decent job was one that offers weekends off or at least have a flexible schedule that limits weekend work. Having off-days and holiday leave was frequently mentioned, with many youths expressing the need for time to rest and recharge and to be with family, not forced to be at work during rest periods.

Consistent with the current research findings, in their research on the tourism industry, Winchenbach, et al. (2021) found that decent work includes, among others, reasonable working hours and adequate rest periods. They further discuss that deviating from this leads to issues like overwork, burnout, and job dissatisfaction among employees (Winchenbach, et al., 2021). Furthermore, ensuring decent work is tied to respecting working hour regulations and offering conditions that promote wellbeing and job satisfaction, which are important for maintaining dignity in the workplace (Winchenbach, et al., 2021). Furthermore, Blustein, et al. (2016) emphasised that the balance between work and personal life is a critical aspect of decent work. They highlight that decent work should allow workers to have sufficient time for rest, leisure, and family responsibilities, stating that this balance is crucial for overall life satisfaction and wellbeing (Blustein, et al., 2016).

Finally, the BCEA, 1997 (Act No. 75 of 1997) has some provisions regarding working hours. This Act states that the standard workweek is 45 hours with a maximum of 9 hours per day if the employee works five days or fewer per week, and 8 hours per day if the employee works more than five days a week (BCEA No. 75 of 1997, 1997). The BCEA No. 75 of 1997 (1997) further

states that overtime is generally limited to 10 hours a week and must be paid 1.5 times the employee's normal wage, or employees can agree to receive paid leave instead. The act further stipulates other rest periods such as meal breaks, and daily rest period of at least 12 consecutive hours between work shifts, and a weekly rest period of at least 36 consecutive hours, which should include Sunday unless otherwise agreed between employer and employee (BCEA No. 75 of 1997, 1997).

While this is the case, some youths stated that they would be willing to work longer hours or weekends, often motivated by the immediate need to support their families or by the pursuit of future opportunities. There were some that would only be willing to temporarily sacrifice time for a limited period only, also driven by need for income or to achieve specific goals. However, most of the youths firmly opposed working long hours due to concerns about physical and mental toll, particularly for women who must manage both household responsibilities and work. These individuals stated that decent work is work that provides a reasonable work-life balance, with sufficient time to rest and engage in personal activities.

e) Are young people willing to consider work as decent when they are not treated fairly, and their opinions are not respected at work?

The research question, "Are young people willing to consider work as decent when they are not treated fairly, and their opinions are not respected at work?" seeks to understand the relationship between fairness, respect, and the perception of decent work among unemployed South African youth. The findings from Chapter 4 reveal a unanimous emphasis among participants on the necessity of fairness, equality, and respect in the workplace as essential components of what they consider to be decent work.

All participants revealed that fair treatment was non-negotiable when evaluating the quality of work. Youth 6's assertion that employers should understand and assist employees during problems highlights the need for supportive and responsive management. Similarly, Youth 12 and Youth 14's emphasis on the absence of bias and the creation of a friendly, non-hostile environment further reinforce the notion that fair treatment is intrinsically linked to the dignity and respect that workers expect. These sentiments align with the DWT, which posits that dignity at work is fundamental to the experience of decent work. When young workers perceive that they

are treated with fairness and respect, they are more likely to view their employment as decent, enhancing their overall job satisfaction and commitment to their roles.

The PWT highlights the significance of respect and autonomy in fostering positive mental health and well-being among workers (Duffy, et al., 2016). The participants' emphasis on respect and the ability to have their opinions heard reflects this theoretical perspective. Respect in the workplace not only affects mental health but also influences job performance and retention. When young employees feel that their voices are valued, they are more likely to engage fully with their roles and demonstrate greater loyalty to their employers. This dynamic suggests that respect and autonomy are critical in shaping young people's willingness to perceive their work as decent, even in challenging circumstances.

Additionally, the DWT emphasizes that decent work must uphold fairness, respect, and social dialogue in the workplace (Nizami & Prasad, 2017). This study found that participants placed significant value on fair treatment, equality, and having their voices heard. When these aspects were absent, they viewed work as undignified and non-decent, further validating DWT's assertion that work should not only provide economic stability but also ensure social justice and workplace democracy (Nizami & Prasad, 2017).

The findings indicate that employers must prioritise creating fair and respectful workplace environments to attract and retain young talent. This involves implementing equitable policies, promoting non-discriminatory practices, and fostering open lines of communication. Employers who fail to address these aspects may struggle to appeal to the youth demographic, potentially exacerbating youth unemployment issues. For policymakers, the study underscores the need for regulations that ensure fair treatment and respect in the workplace. Policies that mandate fair labour practices and protect workers' rights are essential in establishing standards that define what constitutes decent work.

The emphasis on fair treatment and respect corroborates existing studies that highlight these factors as critical determinants of job satisfaction and perceived decency of work (Kalleberg, 2011; Siebert, 2018). However, this study extends these findings by contextualising them within the South African youth employment landscape, where historical and socio-economic factors may amplify the importance of fair treatment and respect. Unlike some studies that focus

primarily on remuneration and working conditions, this research foregrounds the psychological and relational aspects of work, aligning with the PWT's focus on mental health and well-being.

The willingness of young people to consider work as decent is significantly undermined when they are not treated fairly or when their opinions are disregarded. Fair treatment and respect are pivotal in shaping young workers' perceptions of decency in their employment, which relates to the voice as reflected in the ILO decent work agenda and decent work literature. Aligning workplace practices with the principles of DWT and PWT can enhance the attractiveness of jobs to youth, thereby contributing to the broader goal of reducing unemployment and fostering sustainable economic growth in South Africa. Employers and policymakers must recognise and address these fundamental needs to create environments where young people can thrive and perceive their work as genuinely decent.

5.3 Limitations of the study

The socio-economic context of high youth unemployment may have influenced participant expectations. Some participants may have perceived the interview as a potential job opportunity, potentially leading to biased or socially desirable responses. To address this, I implemented a more rigorous informed consent process, including a detailed explanation of the study's purpose and potential implications before each interview. However, the researcher employed this strategy after she had already interviewed a few youths, meaning there might be some biases in the data.

A key limitation of this study is the sample scope or representativeness due to the limited geographic location. Although the study reached saturation, the context-specific nature of the sample may limit the generatability of the results. The research was conducted in a single location, a small township in Alexandra, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations of unemployed youth in South Africa. While the study provides valuable insights into how young people in this community perceive decent work, their experiences may differ from those in rural areas, larger urban centres, or different economic regions. Additionally, the relatively small sample size means that the findings may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives among South African youth. Future research could benefit from a larger, more geographically diverse sample to enhance the applicability of the findings to different social and economic contexts.

Furthermore, the sample predominantly consisted of female participants (78%), potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to male unemployed youth in urban informal settlements. Future research should aim to achieve a more balanced gender distribution to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of both male and female youth in this context. Additionally, the overrepresentation of female participants may have skewed the results towards female perspectives, which may differ from those of male counterparts, particularly given the heightened marginalization experienced by women in many societies (Duffy, et al., 2019).

Time constraints posed a significant limitation to the scope and depth of this research. A more extended timeframe would have allowed for the incorporation of additional perspectives, such as those of youth with higher levels of education or those who are currently employed. This would have enriched the analysis by providing a more nuanced understanding of the diverse perceptions of decent work among young people. Furthermore, while the in-depth analysis conducted here was sufficient for the study's objectives, additional time could have enabled a more comprehensive and complex exploration of the collection of data, potentially uncovering deeper insights into the underlying discourses.

The utilization of multiple theories, while necessary to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomenon of decent work, also presented challenges in terms of maintaining a clear and focused research direction. A more streamlined approach, potentially centred on a single dominant theory, could have facilitated a more in-depth and coherent analysis.

Lastly, the researcher's personal experiences, which closely align with those of the participants, may have influenced the interpretation of the data, potentially compromising the objectivity of the findings. However, I addressed this through continuous reflexivity, maintaining a critical awareness of my own positionality and engaging in reflective journaling throughout the research process. This helped to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's own assumptions.

5.4 Recommendations

Findings of this study suggest several recommendations for future research and interventions. Further research should explore the perceptions of diverse populations within the South African context, including youth with higher levels of education and individuals residing in formal

settlements. A larger, more representative sample would enable meaningful group comparisons and enhance the generalizability of the findings.

The information gained from more similar research could help inform the government and youth rights organisations about any abuse in the workplaces young workers are likely to face. This is abuse which could be due to their lack of knowledge or desperation. Therefore, depending on the severity of these issues, which this study may be able to decipher as well, educational workshops could be formulated. Targeted seminars could educate youth about looking out for themselves and how they can recognize and report precarious work. Some more specific policies could be put in place to help protect youth in workplaces, as findings from this study could provide information pertaining to any contraventions of South African Labour Laws particularly on the selected youth group. This is because, most youths stated that they would knowingly engage in non-decent work for different reasons, socioeconomic situations being the main reason.

Once it is clearer what decent work means for this group of young unemployed South Africans, what the law states, and what protections are in place for young people, job creation for youths could be approached from a more informed angle. According to Bhorat, Asmal, Lilenstein, and Van der Zee (2018), **S**mall, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) were found to be a key component to drive inclusive growth and development in South Africa. As highlighted by the government, these kinds of businesses, which are located both in the formal and informal sectors, are important for job creation, innovation, and competitiveness (Bhorat, et al., 2018).

Furthermore, businesses of this nature that are in the informal sector are represented by relatively more females, youth, Africans, and low-skilled individuals (Bhorat, et al., 2018). With the understanding of African, low-skilled youth's perspectives of decent work, the agonizing issue of unemployment in South Africa could be dealt with from a different, possibly more practical direction. For example, Bhorat, (2007) suggested a dual (youth/ non youth) labour market and the significant increase of opportunities to informal economy as possible solutions for unemployment in South Africa. "The National Development Plan envisions that 90 percent of new jobs will be created by SMMEs in South Africa by 2030" (Bhorat, et al., 2018, p. 61).

Industrial psychologists could utilize the findings of this study to advance the ILO's decent work agenda by tailoring training programs to address specific skill gaps among young workers,

implementing mentorship and coaching programs, promoting positive workplace cultures, and advocating for stronger labour laws and regulations. By addressing these areas, industrial psychologists can contribute to the creation of equitable and fulfilling work environments for young people, aligning with the ILO's goal of promoting decent work for all.

5.5 Conclusion

This study sought to delve into the multifaceted concept of decent work from the perspective of unemployed youth in South Africa. By exploring their aspirations and experiences, the research identified key themes that shape their understanding of decent work. These themes included the desire for secure employment, fair wages, favourable working conditions, opportunities for growth, and a sense of belonging in the workplace.

The study's findings were interpreted within the Decent Work Theory, Psychology of Working Theory, and Psychodynamics of Work Theory. The DWT provided a framework for understanding the importance of work opportunities, freedom to choose, productive work, equity, security, and dignity. The PWT highlighted the psychological impacts of work and unemployment on mental health, while the Psychodynamics of Work Theory emphasized the interplay between individual psychological processes and workplace dynamics.

The current study's findings suggest that unemployed youth prioritize a balance between financial necessity and work quality, which is consistent with the DWT. The emphasis on fair pay, workplace safety, and respectful treatment is also consistent with the PWT. The study's findings on the importance of fair treatment, non-discriminatory practices, supportive leadership, and opportunities for growth are supported by the Psychodynamics of Work Theory.

While most youths expressed a willingness to knowingly engage in non-decent work due to socioeconomic pressures, they also articulated clear bottom lines, such as the rejection of hazardous working conditions, sexual harassment, and extreme forms of exploitation. These findings accentuate the complex interplay between individual needs, societal realities, and legal frameworks in shaping perceptions of decent work. Future research should further explore the evolving nature of decent work in the South African context, particularly as it relates to the changing landscape of work and the increasing prevalence of non-standard employment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent form

Appendix B: Participant information sheet

Appendix C: Interview schedule

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance Certificate

Appendix A

Consent Form

Exploring Decent Work for Unemployed Youth in South Africa

By

Thato Kalayamotse

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project. The researcher has explained to me what the research is about, and I understand what my participation will involve.

(Please circle the relevant option below).

I agree that:

My identity will remain confidential.	Yes No
The researcher will use pseudonyms in her research report.	Yes No
The interview may be voice recorded.	Yes No
The information I provide can be used for academic purposes by other researchers (subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained) in an anonymized format after this project has ended.	Yes No

Signature: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

My name is Thato Kalayamotse, I am a master's student in Organisational Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I am currently carrying out research on: Exploring Decent Work for Unemployed Youth in South Africa, under the supervision of Professor Andrew Thatcher. The objective of this research is to understand what decent work means for unemployed South African youth in an urban area.

I kindly would like to invite you to take part in a 30 – 45 minutes interview. This will include answering some questions about what decent work means to you as an unemployed youth in South Africa, and to what extent you are willing to work regardless of the exploitation and unfavorable working conditions. With your permission, I would like to voice record the interview. To ensure your identity is protected, this recording will be stored in a file on a password-protected computer and only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to it. Furthermore, if the information you provide gets used after this project has ended for academic purposes by other researchers, who would have also obtained their own ethics clearance, this will be done in a confidential way as I will be using pseudonyms in the report.

There will be no personal costs or any direct benefits from participation, but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from participation. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. If you want to withdraw from participating in the interview at any time, feel free to do so, you can either choose to stop completely or continue at another time. Also be informed that your contribution is voluntary. This study will be written as a research report.

For further information regarding the research project, either during or afterwards, feel free to contact me with the details provided below. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you can contact my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

Thato Kalayamotse

Researcher: Thato Kalayamotse, 1777672@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Professor Andrew Thatcher, andrew.thatcher@wits.ac.za

Appendix C

Draft Interview Schedule

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Gender:

4. Race:

5. What is your highest level of education?

6. How long have you been unemployed?

7. Are you currently available for work?

8. Are you currently actively looking for work?

9. What does decent work mean according to you?

- Describe working conditions where you would consider work as decent when employed.
- What is the minimum amount of money you would work for?
    - Would you consider that decent work?
    - If no, how much would you be willing to work for that you would consider decent?
- With regards to your safety and security, what kind of conditions would you consider to say work is decent?
    - Would you work in conditions even if they are not adequate enough for your safety?
    - What would be your bottom-line limitations?
- With regards to work and family life balance, could you describe working conditions or a job that gives you that allowance?
    - How many hours per day would you have to work to consider that work decent?
    - Would you be willing to do work that takes up all your time? Not giving you time to rest or to be with family or do other personal activities?
- With regards to informal networks at work, what type of work situation/s would you say qualifies that work as decent?

    - Would you do work where it is impossible for you to develop and maintain informal networks?
    - If yes, what would be your reasons?
- What type of growth and development focused conditions would you say work should have in order for you to say it is decent work?
    - Would you do work that does not have a potential for growth for you? Where you learn nothing new, and it does not create opportunities for you?
    - What types of opportunities should work make available in order for you to consider it decent?
- Are you currently in a situation where you would do work even if you were forced to do it?
    - How would this forced work help your situation?
    - Would you consider this type of work decent?
- What would you describe as fair and just in a work situation for you to say that it is decent work?
    - To what extent are you willing to do work even if you are not being treated fairly?

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAORG/22/07**
PROJECT TITLE:	Exploring Decent Work for Unemployed Youth in South Africa.
INVESTIGATOR	Kalayamotse Thato (1777672)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	13 July 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2024

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 11 August 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** K Milner
(Prof. Karen Milner)

cc: Prof. Andrew Thatcher (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

T.Kalayamotse
Signature

Date 15 / 08 / 2022

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES