SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, HUMANTIES FACULTY

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

The impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment in a South African Township: given the limited access to the Labour Market.

A report on a research study presented to:

The School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

In partial fulfilment of the requirements

Master of Arts by Course Work and Research in Sociology

By

ANDISWA SIBONELO KHUMALO

STUDENT ID: 1698469

JANUARY 2023

DECLARATION

I, Andiswa Sibonelo Khumalo, declare that this research report is my own original work and where I have used the ideas and works of others, I have referenced these using the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style. The reproduction and publication thereof by the University of the Witwatersrand will not infringe any third-party rights. I have not previously in its entirety, or in part, submitted this research report for obtaining any other qualification at the University of the Witwatersrand or any other university.

Date: …13 JANUARY 2023……...

Signature: ……AS KHUMALO……..

DEDICATIONS

I would like to dedicate this research report to the following people:

- My late twin sister, Lwandiswa Zibuyile Khumalo

“Although you are no more, you will forever be a huge part of my life. For you and I have shared a womb and eaten from the same pipe. Thank you for always being my guardian angel and giving me strength to fulfill my dreams.”

- My late grandfather, Mr. BJ Khumalo

“Thank you for believing in me and always encouraging me to be the best that I can. You taught me that education was the key to my dreams and for that I will forever be grateful. Bheje esengome!”

- My Parents, Gugu Khumalo (Mom) and Zephania Mhlongo (Dad), thank you for allowing me to walk my own journey and make my own mistakes. Your Support is highly appreciated all the time, Ngyanithanda!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following for their contribution towards the success of this research project:

- My supervisor, Dr Ben Scully, without whose support this research project would not have been possible.
- My research participants, without whose candidness the data informing this research project would not have been possible.
- Gift Siphesihle Nzuza, oh my Beautiful Gift, thank you for making my journey to Johannesburg bearable. You have literally been a star, Ngyabonga Njomane ka Mgabhi.

ABSTRACT

South Africa has a significant youth unemployment problem. Youth unemployment has persistently worsened during the period of Covid-19 especially for those in remote, rural areas. While youth unemployment is high, it has worsened for women regardless of their educational attainment during and after Covid-19. Given the limited access to the labour market, this study explored the impact of higher education attainment on women's empowerment given the weak labour market and limited employment opportunities in the remote township of Bhekuzulu in the Kwa Zulu Natal province. The findings of this qualitative study revealed that although there are limited employment opportunities women from Bhekuzulu were still positive of future employment prospects as they believed that attaining higher education made them feel independent and empowered. The study thus concludes that higher education attainment remains important even during a weakened economy with a constricted labour market because, when young women are educated, they have knowledge and are in a better position off making informed decisions about their livelihood.

Key Words: Economy, Higher education, Labour market, Unemployment, Women's empowerment.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

Unemployment is a systematic problem across the world and women bear the heaviest of this brunt before and during covid-19. The situation is heightened for women in rural areas (Meth, 2011; Mtengwane, 2019; Simon et al., 2020). Stats SA (2021) reports that the unemployment rate for men is lower than for women. This unemployment and relative poverty are tied to the historical, political, social and cultural fiber of the country (Simon et al, 2020). Gender is thus a predictor for poverty and unemployment in South Africa.

In this situation of gendered inequality, it is important to ask how the position of women can be improved. Previous studies identify education as a tool for women empowerment (Sultana, 2010; Makharinge and Khobai, 2018). Sultana (2010) suggests that when women attain higher education, they stand a better chance of being employable. This allows them to earn an income, which in turn leads to poverty reduction. One of the main reasons identified to explain this link is the fact that education attainment improves employability prospects, thereby improving the economic situation of women (Sultana, 2010). However, in the South African context, and especially outside of the large cities, employment prospects for graduates are very limited, given the high levels of unemployment. This is mainly because of the less economic activities happening outside big cities. This raises the question of whether higher education attainment has the same empowering effects for those living in rural and remote areas as compared to those living in large cities given the context of South Africa's weak labour market.

Higher education can be defined as systematic knowledge and practical skills that are attained through training in specific fields that allow for the solving of theoretical and practical problems (Sharma and Afroz, 2014). Education is an essential tool for development and empowerment (Sultana, 2010). This is especially true in communities where women are less empowered and where social injustices are rife (Aref, 2013). Due to education being central to empowerment, this study will define women's empowerment as the strength attained by women through education and skills that allow them to make well informed choices regarding their personal lives, careers and finances and possibly result in employment

Women’s empowerment and social justice are of significance in South Africa as marginalized groups including women, have faced oppression during, before, and after the apartheid era. Sebola (2015) claims that gender disparities are linked to the history that discriminates against women. A study by Wittman (2012) suggests that South Africa is confronted with numerous social injustices which are linked directly to the country's history. Furthermore, Wittman (2012) states that these injustices are institutionalized forms of social injustices including racism and sexism, which were established and entrenched by the legacy of South Africa’s discriminatory past. To further elucidate this, research by Donaldson et al (2013) reveals that South Africa’s geopolitical, social, and economic landscapes have transformed following a change in government policies from the year of 1994. These changes have had several effects such as ideal opportunities and resources specifically to black South Africans living in Townships (Donaldson et al, 2013). Transformation of the country post 1994 introduced us to policies such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA). The EEA states that disadvantaged and marginalized groups such as women or people living with disability should be given first preferences in opportunities, however, these policies had shortfalls as they reproduced challenges such as corruption.

Research by Rogan and Reynolds (2016) suggests that South Africa has a low rate of participation in higher education. As a result, a huge number of young people are Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEETs). According to Stats SA (2021) 32, 4% of young people are (NEETs). This is a result of low schooling quality and post matric training that does not meet the majority needs of school leavers (Rogan and Reynolds, 2016). Graham et al (2019) suggests that graduate unemployment in South Africa forms part of the broader high levels of general unemployment. Stats SA (2022) reveals that graduate unemployment is sitting at 34.5% for those aged between 25 to 34 years of age while the overall youth unemployment rate sits at 74%. Black Africans, Coloureds, women and rural youth bear the heaviest brunt of unemployment, especially when they do not have a post-matric qualification (Graham et al, 2019).

Following the country's history of unjust treatment of vulnerable groups, particularly women, women's empowerment and social justice have been objectives in communities

(Gqola, 2017). Van Der Walt et al (2019) argue that because of South Africa's history, often, women became relegated to the status of housekeepers and nurturers of children. From a policy and legislative perspective, post-apartheid South Africa introduced national policies and legislation to respond to the need to empower women and create access in the workplace. These include the Employment Equity Act (No 55 of 1998) which played a major role in the empowerment of women as it states that people who have been previously disadvantaged, including but not limited to women, should be given an equal chance in terms of employment.

A study by Ranchhod and Daniels (2020) suggests that the labour market in South Africa is the primary institution used for determining socio-economic welfare measures. This suggests that the number of people who are able to attain formal employment via the labour market would determine the economic strength of the country and therefore determine the standard of living for those in and out of employment. In essence, those with formal employment would not need welfare assistance from the government instead they would contribute towards the government through tax for those in need of relief. Research shows that gaining access to the labour market in the form of formal employment is strongly linked with exiting from poverty, while losing employment could lead to falling into poverty (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2020). Covid-19 has had a negative impact on economic growth for over 170 countries across the globe and in that respect South Africa has not been spared (IMF, 2020). The South African economy has seen an overall negative decline of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 6. 4% in the year 2020 (World Bank, 2020). Poor economic performance has exacerbated the limited access to the labour market. By October 2020, more than 648 000 jobs had been lost in the formal sector (StatsSA, 2020). It is with this in mind that this study seeks to explore the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment, given the weak labour market and limited employment options.

Problem Statement

Research suggests that education is a propellant of women's access to social and economic opportunities (Sen, 1999, Sultana, 2010; Aref 2013; Indoria, Ram & Solanki, 2019; Soharwadi & Ahmad, 2021). Education has been identified as having the potential to contribute to women's empowerment (Sultana, 2010). Although this is the case, some studies show that even though women have access to education they are often denied better-paying jobs, economic opportunities and upward socioeconomic mobility (Witmann, 2012; Sebola, 2015). It is worth noting that black African women are the most vulnerable with an unemployment rate of 30% (Stats SA, 2020; Stats SA, 2021). Jain, et al (2020) observes a 40% decline in active employment in South Africa post Covid-19. Half of the 40% decline comprises of job terminations. This suggests persistent labour market challenges, especially because vulnerable groups such as black people and women are excessively affected (Jain, et al, 2020; Arndt, et al, 2020). The situation of labour market challenges is heightened for rural women. To add to this, Stats SA shows that in South Africa, 39.2% of female-headed families do not have employed members (Stats SA, 2021). To this effect, this study employed a qualitative approach in order to explore the impact of higher education attainment on women's empowerment given the limited employment opportunities in rural settings such as that of Bhekuzulu. This was done to unmask the persistency on women's higher education attainment in absence of financial freedom.

Research Question

What are the effects of higher education attainment on women empowerment in a South African Township given the given the weak labour market and limited employment options?

Sub Questions

- What are some of the challenges faced by young women from Bhekuzulu who seeking for employment, given the limited employment opportunities?
- For women who return to Bhekuzulu upon having completed their studies, what are the reasons for returning to the township?

Research Context

The study was conducted in Bhekuzulu, a township in a small town called Vryheid in northern KwaZulu Natal. According to Municipalities SA (2016) Vryheid has a population of approximately 47 365. Of this 47 365, Bhekuzulu township has a population of 6 619 of which 53% of this being women. The township is Zulu speaking, consisting of 95% of Africans and about 5% Coloured's. Of the population of Vryheid only 33.4 % of young women have a Grade 12 qualification and only 6.8% have a post matric qualification (Municipalities SA, 2016). The area of Bhekuzulu is an understudied area where no research has been conducted on the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment. In Bhekuzulu, attaining higher education is becoming more common as more young people are leaving the township to attain higher education. Unemployed graduates return home while waiting for employment while the others migrate to places with better opportunities such as Durban and Johannesburg. It is on the former group that this study focuses and seeks to explore the effects of higher education on women who facing the challenges of the labour market in Bhekuzulu and surroundings.

Fig 1.1 Map adapted from AfriGIS (2020

Research Report Outline

This introductory chapter of the report has provided an introduction, background and problem statement and research question of the study conducted on the impact of higher education attainment on women from Bhekuzulu. The remainder of the research report will be organised as follows;

Chapter 2 provides the literature review that is relevant to this study in subsections that have an introductory argument in order to help frame the research question or problem.

Chapter 3 provides a thorough overview of the research design and methodological practices used to achieve the study aim and objectives. The exploratory research design is discussed. Information also focuses on how research participants (fifteen young women) were purposively sampled and how thematic data analysis was conducted.

Chapter 4 begins by presenting responses relating to challenges faced by young women in pursuit of employment in Bhekuzulu and the reasons why they return to Bhekuzulu. The aforementioned create a setting for the main findings on the non-labour related benefits of higher education attainment on women.

Chapter 5 of the report provides the main findings and conclusions of the study conducted on the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment, given the weakened economy and less employment opportunities.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

The following section of the study outlines the literature review under three subheadings.

- The effect of higher education attainment and women's empowerment.
- Higher education attainment and employability.
- Higher education and poverty reduction.

These subheadings are derived from the main research question and some of the sub-questions so as to try and answer from a literature perspective what the study is seeking to investigate. The main research question seeks to unpack the impacts of higher education attainment on women's empowerment in Bhekuzulu, given the weak labour market and limited employment opportunities. The sub-questions look at the challenges faced by young women in Bhekuzulu when seeking employment and some of the reasons why they return to Bhekuzulu upon completion of their studies. This study notes that the nexus between education attainment and poverty reduction is not linear as one would presume it to be. Higher education may not necessarily lead to employment especially in the context of women living in rural areas which have been deeply affected by Covid-19.

Community development is rooted in development, empowerment and inclusion amongst other components. Education serves as the foundation of the above-mentioned components. According to UNESCO (2013) education is a human right as stipulated in international treaties and conventions. This is also the case nationally in South Africa as Education is a basic human right. According to Sharma (2017) women education is very important for the country to develop. Furthermore, Sharma (2017) opines that educated women are the women who yield positive impact on the society in which they live in, through contributions at home and in the professional fields. Looking at the context of Bhekuzulu as a rural community with more than 50% female headed households, women education is of significant importance. This is duly because women education in Bhekuzulu has the potential to not only eradicate poverty but also bring about economic transformation. This suggests that when looking at Bhekuzulu, women education is not a gender representation resolution as women are a marginalized group but rather an

economic redress and poverty eradication strategy as 50% plus households in Bhekuzulu are female-headed.

Murtaza (2012) corresponds with Sharma as he states that Education is regarded as the key factor in overcoming barriers faced by women such as dependency, oppression and unemployment. This is based on the idea that education enables employment and is also a basic tool for empowering women and bringing them into the mainstream of development. Women education has an important role in the development of nations (Murtaza, 2012). Additionally, Hassin (2018) points out that education is the foremost cornerstone for empowering women because it helps them to respond properly to their obstacles. Consequently, empowering women is the pathway for accomplishment of all the sustainable development goals (Hassin, 2018). This is conducive to the achievement of Sustainable development goals number 4(Quality Education), 5(Gender Equality), 10 (Reduced Inequality) and 16(Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). This is relevant in the context of this study as the above-mentioned sustainable development goals are to serve as a redress to marginalized groups, forming part of this is women and black women in particular and as Bhekuzulu is a black community with a larger population of women than men.

The effect of Higher education attainment on women's empowerment.

The general assumption from this study is that there is a direct link between higher education attainment and women's empowerment. This is based on the idea that when women are educated, they are at a better position of making informed decisions for their lives and in turn become empowered.

A study by Rahimian et al (2010) conducted in Tehran suggests that higher education is an effective instrument for empowering women. However, cultural roles cannot be overlooked due to the nexus between higher education attainment and women empowerment (Rahimian et al, 2010). This is because culturally, women have set gender roles such as nurturing, housekeeping and cooking which prevent them an equal opportunity to attaining higher education and in turn hinders women empowerment. In conceptualizing women's empowerment, Rahimian et al (2010) states that women's

empowerment is essential to eradicate world poverty and protect human rights. This concept entails the freedom, self-determination and power needed by women around the world as empowerment allows women the ability to be independent of men (Rahimian et al, 2010). Societal norms and standards can either directly or indirectly influence or limit women empowerment (Rahimian et al, 2010). The findings of the study by Rahimian et al (2010) thus revealed that the level of women empowerment in Tehran is determined by higher education attainment as well as organizational occupation. The translation of higher education attainment to women's empowerment cannot be divorced from employment as many researchers have revealed. Generally, the argument is that attaining a higher education qualification can result in empowerment as one would be at better position of being employed. However, this is not the case in rural areas with less economic activities and a more cultural setting. This is because there are lesser economic activities and in turn less employment opportunities. Additionally, areas with strong cultural dynamics tend to not forcefully prohibit women empowerment but they also do not promote it because they reside within views that box women to be submissive and stick within the domestic gender roles.

Research by Singh (2018) suggest that education is considered as a primary tool in the eradication of poverty especially in developing countries. Education and employment are important elements of women's empowerment in Western societies, so theorists believe that the same relationship may exist between these elements even in rural areas and townships (Rahimian et al, 2010). The notion here is based on the consideration that education has the power to end poverty through employment opportunities which bring about empowerment. A study by Singh (2018) reveals that it is actually the case in western or urban societies whereby women with higher education are more employable and as a result are living out of poverty and are empowered. However, this notion is questionable on rural communities because there are fewer employment opportunities. A study conducted by Singh (2018) in India revealed that quality higher education is a necessity in the hopes of channeling acquired education for employment as well as entrepreneurship purposes. Additionally, higher education helps capacitate people with certain knowledge and skills that are a requirement for job opportunities. The study by Singh reveals interesting facts that shed light on the fact that the transition from higher

education attainment to employment and empowerment is not linear rather, there are other aspects to be considered. These aspects include quality education which enables better employment prospects and the capacity building which enables entrepreneurship. This is essentially correct because having a higher education qualification does not automatically qualify you for employment, but you would have to be competitive towards other candidates. Also, with the weakened labour market, it would be ideal for those with capacity to branch into entrepreneurship and further enhance the labour market by creating employment opportunities for other unemployed women.

Research by Naz et al (2020) suggests that societies that are rife in patriarchy have a high number of women facing oppression. As a result, higher education in these societies is considered as a remedy to equip women in dealing with patriarchy and undue oppression (Naz et al, 2020). This study has used countries like Iran, India and Pakistan because of its distinct traditions and cultural beliefs towards the women's position in the society as well as patriarchy. This is because rural South Africa is also comprised of heavy traditional beliefs and cultural values including patriarchy which are similar to countries like India, Iran and Pakistan. These traditions and cultures include women being submissive to male structures and overly dependent on men while their responsibilities mainly rotates around reproduction, and domestic duties. In rural South Africa, women do not have equal rights to men as they are considered to be inferior because of their stipulated position in the society, for example in rural communities in South Africa as a woman you cannot address men nor have an opinion on societal issues because men still believe that a women's responsibility is to reproduce and do domesticated work. A study conducted by Naz et al (2020) in Pakistan revealed that although there is a strong existing connection between the attainment of higher education and women's empowerment, there are other benefits to higher education attainment. Naz et al (2020) conceptualizes women's empowerment as the ability of women to make decisions in their family, have political associations, financial autonomy and self-realization and trust. This is suggesting that women have no voice nor authority in their families simply because they are women. However, Naz et al (2020) notes that when women attain higher education they are at a better position to contribute towards the family decisions because they are regarded as having the education and knowledge. The benefits of women's

empowerment through higher education attainment therefore include decision making for oneself and the household, increased political participation, economic independence, respect, and self-esteem (Naz et al, 2020).

Research by Akala and Divala (2016) presents a theoretical exploration of gender equity on higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. Akala and Divala (2016) argue that although South African women played a crucial role in the struggle for political liberation, they are still peripheralised as their gains seem to not be commensurate to that of men. This is based on the findings that suggest that the majority of South African women continue to struggle accessing quality education (Akala and Divala, 2016). This is of course a direct contravention of the constitutional assurance of equality for all who live in South Africa. The South African constitution is meant to protect and promote the equal rights of all people despite their gender.

A study conducted by Moyo et al (2012) in Limpopo has revealed that although higher education has the potential to empower women, there is a need for addressing challenges faced by rural African women such as being subject to child-bearing, extreme chores and lack of resources. This could be done through capacity building interventions that have the potential to enhance the day-to-day experiences faced by rural women (Moyo et al, 2012). Moyo et al (2012) highlight that the concept of empowerment is very complex and multidimensional that different people interpret it differently. For one empowerment can be viewed as the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices where the privilege may have been previously denied. Women empowerment is thus defined as a process that enables women to redefine and expand their possibilities and existence in situations where they are prevented from doing so and are rather compared to men or oppressed (Moyo et al, 2012). From the study by Moyo et al, we can conclude that empowerment is a process that includes changes in power dynamics which allows for those who have been previously disadvantaged to be in a better social and economic position and make better decisions regarding their livelihoods. The study thus concluded that members of the society do possess knowledge on women empowerment, however, the creation of platforms for collective deliberations are necessary for a well-versed understanding of women empowerment holistically. Holistic empowerment is defined as

the consistent and measurable development in a person or group within a particular setup including but not limited to the economic, political, health, social and technological capabilities (Moyo et al, 2012).

The effect of Higher education attainment on poverty reduction

Generally, the assumption around higher education attainment and poverty reduction is that when you are educated, you stand a better chance of being employed and in turn can earn an income that breaks you out of poverty.

A study by Wanka (2014) in rural Limpopo, one of the poorest provinces in South Africa, revealed that poverty is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon which may be difficult to define. This is because the way in which poverty is defined, determines its measurement (Wanka, 2014). The measurement of household poverty in Limpopo can be assessed by low levels of education which are caused partly by inadequate school resources, insufficient basic services such as water and electricity and employment opportunities (Wanka, 2014). Although poverty is a worldwide problem, due to the specific nature of apartheid in South Africa which changed into being primarily based on legislative segregation, poverty significantly affects Africans, Colored's and Indians within the country (Wanka, 2014). This is due to the apartheid era denying equal access to quality education, employment, services and resources for African people, Indians, Colored's, women and people living with disability.

The research conducted by Wanka (2014) in Limpopo thus revealed that the nexus between the concepts of education and poverty is negative. This means that the higher the level of study by a woman, the less she is prone to poverty, whereas the more poverty stricken she is, the less are her chances of furthering her education (Wanka, 2014). This alone speaks to proximity towards available resources and indicates that women living in rural areas do not have the same equal chance to opportunities when compared to urban women. This is problematic because it suggests a continuous vicious cycle of poverty as women living in rural areas do not have easy access nor proximity to higher educational institutions. They often have to travel long distances and leave home so they could study, this is already a challenge as they might not have funds to even relocate to the cities. This means that curbing poverty for them is extra difficult because besides not having

access to higher education, they are also poor and cannot afford to relocate to cities. This translates to a dichotomous challenge towards access to higher education. To amplify the importance of higher education attainment in poverty reduction Kapur (2019) declares that education renders a significant contribution towards the development of poverty stricken and economically weaker communities. Education provides importance to well-being and independence to individuals through promoting social change, cultural, religious, political and economic changes. Although this has been the case for a number of years, there has been a total shift since the pandemic started. Access to the labour market has been a challenge for both the educated and uneducated. This is evident as the youth unemployment rate in South Africa has increased every financial quarter over the period of 2020 to 2021. At this point we can conclude that the accessing the labour market is difficult even in places with usually high economic activities such as the cities and that the situation is far more intense in rural areas.

Higher Education attainment and employability

Research by Archer and Chetty (2013) suggests that there is a motivation for students across all ages to enter tertiary education in order to improve their access to the labour market. This is likely to lead to success in their career trajectories and sustainable livelihoods (Archer and Chetty, 2013). This is notably relevant in the context of South Africa which has an overarching youth unemployment rate of 74,5 % and a graduate unemployment rate of 34. 5% for those aged 25 to 34 years (Stats SA, 2021). The impetus on higher education contributes to the knowledge-based economy that is driven by pertinent labour market skills, competency as well as flexibility, thus making it easier for graduates to access the labour market (Archer and Chetty, 2013). This impetus on higher education attainment has been exacerbated by the cumulative global preoccupation towards higher education attainment as well as work and labour in the global economy (Archer and Chetty, 2013). Although universities are responsible for the production of employable graduates who contribute significantly to a knowledge-driven economy, challenges in this regard still remain (Archer and Chetty, 2013). To that end, research by Archer and Chetty (2013) concludes that there are existing discrepancies between university produce and employer criteria and this becomes problematic as universities endure the pressure of closing the gap. The gap between university production as well

as the employer criteria augments graduate unemployment on its own as graduates do not match the employer criteria and in turn cannot be employed. This can be extended to the lines of skills mismatch or overall skills deficiency where graduates lack some of the core skills outside of curriculum such as communication skills and computer literacy.

Research conducted by Graham et al (2019) on barriers to the labour market for unemployed graduates in South Africa addresses the causes of graduate unemployment. The study presents data sampled on unemployed graduates pertaining their barriers to the labour market. Graduate unemployment is a global problem that can be linked to the global economic recession of 2008 and access in the higher education sector (Graham et al, 2019). In the prospects of contextualizing graduate unemployment in South Africa, one would have to understand uncategorized unemployment falling under the informal sector (Graham et al, 2019). Additionally, Graham et al (2019) points out that beyond just unemployed graduates, there are other categories experiencing high unemployment rates such as black Africans living in rural areas, women, colored's and those without a post-matric qualification. To that end, the study by Graham et al (2019) revealed that for those living in rural and disadvantaged communities, even though they are well equipped with skills from their post-matric qualifications they still find it hard to secure employment. This is because of the challenges directly linked with rural communities such as corruption or even the socio-economic status. This study believes that the effects of the above challenges hinder progress on women's empowerment because if one has no proximity to resources or prominent economic activities, they cannot access employment. Amidst technological advancements, accessing universities is still a challenge to women living in rural areas because of hindering factors such as no internet cafes of even money to access those establishments if not loadshedding or network issues. This means that in the absence of these challenges, young women living in rural and poverty-stricken areas can go study in cities with adequate resources and get their qualifications. The issue starts when these young women finish their qualifications and head back home to the same communities with no economic activities and opportunities for them. The question as to how women respond to limited employment opportunities, is yet to be discovered thus one of the primary reasons for undertaking this particular study in Bhekuzulu.

A study conducted by Ndebele and Ndlovu (2019) on the employment experiences of graduates in KwaZulu Natal based on the intersection of qualifications and employability in the labour market, seeks to explore the nexus between postgraduate attainment and chances of employability. The study suggests that there has been a noticeable increase in research on higher education and policy discourse regarding access of graduates to the labour market throughout the past decade (Ndebele and Ndlovu, 2019). Like other authors Ndebele and Ndlovu also reveal that the issue of graduate unemployment is not only a national crisis for South Africa but is rather a global crisis. Ndebele and Ndlovu (2019) say that most of the unemployed graduates are those who have previously graduated from disadvantaged universities causing these graduates to lack imperative skills and knowledge, which results in them being unable to integrate into the job market. With the evolution of the labour market certain skills are now being required outside of the initial qualification in order for graduates and the labour force to stay competitive. This includes digital skills as the world is moving towards the fourth industrial revolution which is based on artificial intelligence.

Research by Ndebele and Ndlovu (2019) thus revealed that graduates lack job market information and experience which facilitates employability and ultimately, employment itself. This means that graduates do not have the information they require to infiltrate the labour market. Additionally, graduates do not have experiences and cannot access the labour market, because employers require experience so as to minimize training costs. However, not all graduates have training because only certain degrees offer work integrated learning or what others call educational placement. Furthermore, the study revealed that unemployment and underemployment are as a result of specific personal attributes, skills mismatch and capability within the labour market. This suggests that although graduates have the qualification, there is a mismatch in terms of their personality traits and the occupation thus leading to either unemployment and or underemployment. This study believes that higher education attainment has the potential to empower women through employment. However, there are other factors leading to employment such as level of study, the type of qualification you attain as well as the overall job market demand on skills.

Conclusion

The overall conception drawn from different authors regarding the nexus between the interrelated concepts of higher education attainment, women empowerment, employability and poverty reduction is that attaining education does not guarantee all of the above mentioned in a linear way one would presume. This is because of the different experiences young women face across South Africa. The experiences of women living in rural areas and women living in urban areas are not the same due to women in urban areas having more access to employment because of surrounding economic activities. The case is different for women living in rural areas because there are limited economic activities taking place resulting in minimal employment opportunities. Authors revealed that graduate unemployment is also linked to the different personal skills and attributes that graduates lack. To support this statement, some studies have revealed that the cause of this is that certain institutions do not offer work integrated learning which can equip unemployed graduates for the labour market. Although this is the case, the overall structure of the economy in South Africa has been threatened before and during Covid-19. This means that although unemployed graduates lack certain skills, the overall driver of unemployment in South Africa is its economy.

While authors like Sultana (2010) view higher education as a catalyst to employment, the literature of this study has revealed that there is quite a number of unemployed graduates. It is revealed that this is caused by the weak economy. Additional to graduate unemployment there is also a case of graduate underemployment whereby graduates are serving in low pay jobs such as internships instead of suitable permanent jobs matching their skills and qualifications. It is with this in mind that the researcher explored non-labour related benefits of higher education attainment on women empowerment. This study hoped to answer questions around the impact of higher education attainment on women's empowerment outside of employment opportunities (non-labour related benefits), as well as exploring some of the challenges faced by young women seeking for employment in Bhekuzulu and some of their reasons for returning back to the township after completing their studies. The study sought to understand how women living in these areas cope with limited employment opportunities.

Chapter3
Methodology and Design

This study used the qualitative case study design. The study was structured around the interpretivism paradigm of social research. Interpretivism has a strong connection to qualitative research in pursuing knowledge. This is because this philosophical and research paradigm is concerned with the uniqueness of a particular situation, contributing to the underlying pursuit of contextual depth (Myers, 1997). According Schwardt (2007) a research methodology is defined as a theory of how an inquiry should proceed, including its analysis, assumptions, principles, and procedures. This study seeks to explore the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment in a South African Township, given the limited access to the Labour market. It is to this end that this study made use of the qualitative approach to accumulate in-depth information regarding young women's views, experiences, challenges, and recommendations. According to Johnson & Christensen (2008) a qualitative approach is defined as an approach used to understand and interpret social interactions or specialised findings.

Design

The study design is exploratory. According to Stebbins (2001) exploratory research is defined as a design used in a study in order to examine, analyse or investigate a topic of interest to the researcher. This study employed the exploratory research design. This is because the location Bhekuzulu is an understudied area. In other words, there is a scarcity of studies conducted in Bhekuzulu on the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment.

Study Population and Sample

The study population for this study was young women from Bhekuzulu aged between 18 years and 35 years. Eighteen is the adult age in South Africa and 35 is the 'ceiling' for youth. Bhekuzulu township has a population of 6 619 with 53% of households being female headed. Of the 53% only 6.8% are with higher education and a devastating youth unemployment rate of 45, 1% (Abaqulusi, 2017). It is with this in mind that the study has an interest in the nexus between young women, higher education attainment and prospective access to the labour market.

The study employed purposive sampling. Eitkan et al (2016) define purposive sampling as a deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities that the research participant possesses. A sample of 15 unemployed young women in possession of a post-matric qualification were purposively selected to participate in the study. This is because non-probability, purposive sampling is ideal in selecting “participants with specific experiences and views” (Akpan, 2014). The study then employed the snowball method whereby the researcher asked the initial participants whom she knew from the neighbourhood to suggest potential participants who can be participants in the study.

Data Collection Tools

For the collection of data, this study used online open-ended interviews. Research participants were virtually interviewed individually using semi-structured interview questions via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or WhatsApp voice calls. Eswaramoorthy and Zanrinpoush (2006) define a research interview as a conversation for gathering information from participants. Taking into cognizance that the country was in a pandemic the study chose to use online interviews as a way of obtaining information from participants. Doing any kind of research during the pandemic was certainly not easy as precautions produced so many limitations. Initially, this research project was initially set to be conducted physically using face to face interviews. However, the ethics committee resort to virtual interviews in order to keep safe both the researcher and the participants. Although conducting interviews was a safer option, this did put a strain on the research project. Participants initially became uneasy with online interviews as it felt like a test to them and were unsure if they were responding correctly. This was a bit of a setback as I had to constantly assure them that they were doing great. Additionally, I could not read their body language virtually and this was a shortfall on my discussion as I could not elaborate on their exclamations and non-verbal speech.

Data analysis

To analyse the qualitative data set, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clark (2006), is appropriate for qualitative research because it provides a versatile and effective analysis method that might provide rich and thorough information. Thematic analysis identifies relevant or intriguing patterns in data and uses

these patterns to identify themes to address the research or say anything about a research issue (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The steps of thematic analysis used in this study were familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, writing up.

Step 1: Become familiar with the data - the first step in any qualitative analysis is reading and rereading the transcripts. For this study, I have used an application called Otter to transcribe. I had to read, listened and proof-read my transcript in order to edit because certain words were not picked up correctly. This allowed me to fully understand what the participants were saying and be fully in tune with the data itself.

Step 2: Generate initial codes – The data was organised in a meaningful and systematic way. The concern of the researcher was to address and analyse the data according to the specific research questions of this study using theoretical thematic analysis. The researcher coded each segment of data that revealed relevant insights in line with the research questions. The researcher then assigned descriptive codes using open coding, this means that there were no pre-set codes. Instead, the researcher developed and modified codes throughout the coding process.

Step 3: Search for themes – In this step, the researcher examined the codes and some of them fitted well into a theme. At the end of this step, the codes were organised into broader themes that were in line with the research questions of this study. The themes were descriptive as they described patterns of data associated with the research questions.

Step 4: Review themes – During this step, the researcher reviewed and modified the preliminary themes that had already been identified in step 3. The researcher read the data linked with each theme in order to determine if it really supported the theme.

Step 5: Define themes -This is the final refinement of the themes, and the aim is to identify the essence of what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). The researcher then ensured that themes are coherent and were well comprehended and directly answered the research questions of this study.

Step 6: Writing-up - The researcher then presents written findings in final report/dissertation/thesis. I have then presented my written findings in a research report.

Trustworthiness of the study

The work of Guba (1981, cited in Shenton 2004) proposes that trustworthiness is a key term in ensuring rigour in qualitative studies. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that researchers need to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility refers to whether the study actually investigates what it is meant to investigate (Shenton, 2004). The design of the interview-guide was done with this in mind. In other words, the interview questions were designed in a way that they spoke to the objectives of the study.

Merriam (1985, cited in Shenton, 2004, p. 69) postulates that transferability is concerned "with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations". It is noteworthy that the study does not seek to transfer its findings beyond the geographic area of Bhekuzulu, Vryheid.

In-order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study must be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results (Shenton, 2004). With this in mind, the study was done according to a detailed methodology contained herein in this research report.

In ensuring confirmability "steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). To circumvent this, the data collection and analysis was done strictly according to the detailed methodology contained in this research report.

Limitations and delimitations of the study

According to Simon and Goes (2013) limitations are known as matters and occurrences that arise in a study that are outside of the researcher's control. These are matters that limit the extent to which the study can go which can sometimes affect the end result and

conclusions of the study (Simon and Goes, 2013). According to Simon and Goes (2013) the delimitations of the study are known as characteristics that arise from limitations within the scope of the study.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study are related to the size of the sample of participants. The research sample is admittedly quite small, and the results are not generalisable to the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment given the limited access to the labour market. However, the study did not seek to draw generalisations, but to contribute to the body of knowledge as well as practical and theoretical debates on the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment in the case of limited access to the labour market. Additionally, some of the limitations included participants being anxious during the interview process. Although data was collected online, participants raised a concern that they felt anxious because of not being able to use and give their full body expression due to distance. Load shedding was also an obstacle as a few interview sessions had to be scheduled as connectivity was an issue. This resulted in participants being a bit hesitant as they had to set sessions outside of their comfort time zones such as late at night. This had its additional challenges as some participants live with their families who would be having family time that then creates noise effects and makes it harder for the interview to go smoothly.

Delimitations of the study

This particular study is only limited to Bhekuzulu, Vryheid. The study does not seek to account for the impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment given the limited access to the labour market universally and the study is not statistically representative due to the modest size of the sample. In addition to the other mentioned limitations, in the context of anxious participants, the researcher had to probe more in order to extract as much information as possible. Th researcher also made participants to be less anxious by being more casual and conversational, removing the overly formal interview feel. In the concerns of loadshedding, the researcher asked for the participants to select times that would be best suitable for them as rescheduling had to be done. This

meant working around noise and disturbances as the rescheduled interviews were later in the evening.

Ethical Considerations

According to Strydom (2002, p. 63) ethics is defined as a set of moral principles proposed by an individual or a group and then universally accepted. Not only does performing research necessitate skill and diligence, but it also necessitates honesty and integrity. This is done to respect and defend the human rights of respondents. To that end, an ethical clearance certificate was obtained from the University of Witwatersrand's Humanities faculty in the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. The sampled young women were also be approached and a consent form confirming the informed consent was disseminated to ascertain willingness to participate in the research study.

The purpose of this research was explained in great detail to the research participants. The roles of the participants were also thoroughly explained to the participants through the provision of a participation information sheet (see attachments). The research participants were informed of their right to voluntarily consent, decline or withdraw their participation at any time without a penalty. Written consent was obtained from the research participants before conducting interviews. The researcher sent consent forms to participants and participants sent back the forms with signatures or initials.

Initially, this study was to conduct face to face interviews with the participants. However, due to the pandemic, the study then had to change from face-to-face interviews to online interviews via Zoom, teams and WhatsApp calls. This was done in order to adhere to the special research precautions against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter 4
Findings of the study

This chapter presents the findings of this study. This chapter is setting for the study's main key findings which will be discussed in chapter 5.

The literature review of this study has revealed that the transition of higher education attainment to employment is not linear due to factors such as the pandemic, weakened economy and competition in the labour market to name a few. Respondents in this research confirmed that these challenges are also found for female graduates in Bhekuzulu. This chapter begins by discussing 4.1 the views on higher education attainment by young women in Bhekuzulu. Secondly, this study looks at 4.2 reasons why young women return to Bhekuzulu post higher education schooling. The above are important to lay the foundation and bring about understanding on the question of non-labour market related benefits on higher education attainment.

4.1 Views on higher education attainment and formal employment.

Some participants revealed that employment is now contingent to the labour market and that was a challenge that they had faced as the employee criteria was difficult to meet. Participants critiqued employee criteria for wanting a high experience on graduates as this meant that graduates were further being excluded. For example:

> *"First of all employees are unrealistic when advertising for employment. I mean how will I have 5 years of experience when I have just graduated? For me that on its own is what is causing high unemployment in South Africa, especially in small towns like Bhekuzulu."*
>
> *-Sinenhlanhla Mbatha*

The above quote suggests that there is a gap between employer criteria and graduate attributes. To substantiate this, a study by Graham et al (2019) suggests that graduate unemployment in South Africa is relatively lower than the overall country's unemployment percentage. However, the study points out that there is still a certain group of graduates who struggle to find employment based on what degree they have studied (Graham et al, 2019). This study argues that from the gathered data from participants, some of the common reasons contributing to graduate unemployment is employee criteria. The employee criteria creates a form of exclusion as it requires certain attributes that graduate may not possess immediately after graduating. These are skills that graduates may possess upon having undergone skills training for the required job. However, this study argues that unemployment in South Africa is rather structural as there are not enough businesses who have the capacity to hire

To that end, this study argues that employee criteria should accommodate graduates especially for entry level jobs and provide the desired skills as part of on-the-job training or skills enhancement.

One of the other raised challenges on employment as contingent to the labour market was competition within the labour market. Participants revealed that accessing the labour market is no longer as easy at was before comparing labour market access during Covid-19 to that of times of their parents, they said:

> *“Mxm, there are people who have degrees but are not employed simply because there are no employment opportunities.”*
>
> *-Nontokozo Mthembu*
>
> *“It also depends on what degree you actually study in our case, because at first it was more important to just have a degree and now you just have to further your studies. So just having a degree is no longer as valid as it was at the past. So, the more the further you study, the more you get an opportunity to have work.”*
>
> *-Ayanda Nxele*

The above perceptions suggest that the labour market is evolving and is requiring more than what was essentially required before and during Covid-19. It is with this in mind that this study argues that an undergraduate degree is no longer competitive in the labour market as some of the participants were unemployed even though they had an undergraduate degree. This does not account for graduate unemployment as a whole as there are other factors determining unemployment such as the weak economy. However this study contends that among the respondents there is the perception that a postgraduate degree is now essential as it allows you to be more competitive when seeking for employment in this weak economy gives you a more competitive edge when seeking for employment. The study thus concludes that postgraduate opportunities are essential in order to allow for young women to have a competitive edge in the labour market.

The complex relationship between higher education attainment and employment posed as a challenge to young women living in Bhekuzulu. Some participants revealed that education didn’t guarantee success as they knew people without qualifications who were succeeding in life through entrepreneurship while they were unemployed with their qualifications at hand. This is a challenge because it demotivates younger generations from

believing in education as a key to success. The dichotomy of higher education attainment and women's empowerment through employment is the center of this study. Initially the general assumption between attaining higher education was guaranteed employment, but with the weakening economy and competition in the labour market employment prospects have seized to be that linear. There has also been growth in individual entrepreneurship, this comprises of both those with and without formal education. It is with this that higher education attainment has been a dichotomy because the perceptions of participants maintained that education no longer guarantees success as some people are making it through entrepreneurship without formal education, let alone a post-graduate qualification while others are being successful through higher education attainment.

While certain participants saw employment as being contingent to the labour market, other participants viewed employment as being reliant to networks and connections. Participants saw this as a challenge as it meant they would have to have certain connections in order to attain employment. For example:

> *"WUH. Now it's all about who you know. My dad works at Transnet I have applied several times. But since he does not have connections, I am still not employed. Here you don't even hear that vacancies are available; we just see people wearing uniform because they have connections."*
>
> *-Nontokozo Mthembu*

One of the challenges that young women face when seeking for employment is difficulties penetrating the labour market because of connections and networks. Participants mentioned that they could not be employed because they had no networks and connections. They revealed that nowadays especially in Bhekuzulu, employment is guaranteed if you have networks and connections, however, if you have no networks you will stay unemployed even though you are qualified for the job. While the issue of unemployment in South Africa is structural, it is also worth noting that there are other factors contributing to this structural problem such as corruption and nepotism. Participants may perceive the contributing factors as determining factors because of the depth at which the particular area experiences them. For example, most participants perceive unemployment in Bhekuzulu to be determined by Nepotism through connections and networks. However,

this study argues that Bhekuzulu is a rural and remote community with limited economic activities and employment prospects. Therefore, nepotism cannot be distinguished as determining factor of unemployment but rather a contributing factor, also noting that Bhekuzulu is an intimate community where most people know each other so as a result having connections is relatively easy.

Although the work of Sultana (2010) illustrates the relationship between higher education attainment and employability being a positive one, the literature covered in this study reveals that transitioning from higher education attainment to employment is not linear because of the different dynamics faced by different young women. The respondents themselves saw the relationship between education and employment as complex. The participants had different views on whether education would lead to employment or not, for example:

> *"I can say it's like a two-way street. Just because you are educated or have a degree doesn't mean you will be employed or stand a better chance than a person without a degree. There are people making it without degrees."*
>
> *-Siphesihle Qwabe*

One of the key challenges faced by young women in pursuit of employment in Bhekuzulu is the limited employment opportunities because of the labour market. Participants mentioned that employers had unrealistic criteria, employment now depends what degree you have and that there is competition within the labour market. To that effect, this study argues there is a complex view on higher education attainment and employment prospects. This suggests that while higher education attainment could lead to greater employment prospects, it does not guarantee success as people without qualifications can also succeed through personal attributes such as consistency and passion. This is due to the different dynamics faced by people, such as having a degree but ending up with a low paying job versus not being in possession of any qualification but owning a successful business. The study then concludes that while education is important for employment prospects, it does not ascertain a path to employment nor success as there are multiple factors that determine success outside of higher education. This is mainly

because even though young women of Bhekuzulu have attained higher education, some still continue to face unemployment and underemployment.

Noting that higher education attainment and women's empowerment through employment is dichotomous, this study concludes by echoing that this dichotomy is inevitable. Attaining higher education may yield success through employment opportunities and in turn women's empowerment for some, whereas individual entrepreneurship with or without formal education may yield success for some. To this end, one must note that there are other contributing factors to employment criteria outside of the qualification, just as entrepreneurship has contributing factors to its success outside of formal education. This study sought to reiterate that unemployment in South Africa is structural as the country's economy does not have the capacity to enhance its labour market and create more employment opportunities. Perceptions by participants on nepotism creating unemployment in Bhekuzulu are to be noted, the study however, reviews nepotism as a contributing factor to the bigger problem of unemployment in South Africa and not as the actual root cause.

4.2 Reasons why young women return to Bhekuzulu post-higher education attainment.

An important context of the challenges discussed above is that the respondents were, for the most part, living in Bhekuzulu which is a remote and rural area with limited employment opportunities. This raises the question of why women return to Bhekuzulu after studying. The information from the respondents shows that there are a range of reasons that make women return to Bhekuzulu. The inaccessible labour market as well as personal circumstances including poverty and other challenges often influence the decision to return home. In this way, we can conclude that women return to Bhekuzulu as a result and cause of the general labour market challenges faced by graduates. The challenges that were revealed in this study were mainly poverty, mental health issues as well as family responsibilities.

One of the challenges revealed by participants was poverty as a gatekeeper in the pursuit to employment. This meant that they had to return back to Bhekuzulu upon completion of their studies as they could not afford to remain in cities because of expensive accommodation prices. Other participants revealed that poverty prohibited them from furthering their studies as they could not afford it and did not get funding. This study thus argues that poverty is a gatekeeper to the young women in pursuit of employment in cities as being in a city requires financial support. This means that you cannot look for employment opportunities in a city because you cannot afford to live in the city. This is in accordance with the research by (Wanka 2014), as it states that once a person's status is determined as poor, chances of them being able to further their education are very slim. This study thus concludes that poverty indeed tends be a vicious cycle that prohibits efforts that can change the livelihood of young women in Bhekuzulu and the community in its entirety. This study thus recommends that there should a creation of more internship programs that will incubate graduates while they seek for employment opportunities. Additionally, this study recommends that there should be more postgraduate funding opportunities that will allow students to further their studies in order to remain competitive in the labour market. These recommendations can help break the cycle of poverty as there will be opportunities that create financial freedom.

While other participants said that they had returned back home because of poverty, other participants revealed that they went back home in order to self-reflect and redirect. For example:

> *"It's basically through the fact that it was much easier for me to just come back home and reflect because I am one person who is very emotional. So, after being away from home for such a long time, it was a good thing for me to just come back home and see how the situation is and also teach myself that okay, this is a situation right now. And then what can I actually do to improve whatever situation okay, it was more of a reflection purpose."*
>
> *-Mbalenhle Mthimkhulu*
>
> *"After four years in a different province with a different language, I realized that life has so much to offer so I just decided to come back home. I wanted to go back to the drawing board to see what I can do next, especially since I love challenging myself."*
>
> *-Thembelihle Mchunu*

While poverty was an obstacle, some participants returned back to Bhekuzulu because of mental health issues that they had endured during the period of attaining their higher education. It is with this in mind that this study argues that returning home from university in order to redirect and self-reflect is important for mental health check, productivity and personal growth. This is especially important because of the high rates of mental issues amongst university students. Some participants said that they felt like they had neglected their mental wellbeing because they had so much academic pressure. As a result, they revealed that anything they would start would not yield a positive as they are not in their best form mentally and in turn would not perform at their maximum. To that end, they said that they saw it fit to return home and redesign their path. It is with this in mind that this study concludes that returning back home after tertiary is essential for mental health and self-care in order to increase productivity. This is based on the reasons that some participants revealed that some of their mental health concerns stemmed from not knowing whether they were going to get a job or get an opportunity to further they studies. They

revealed that not knowing what the future held was very stressful to them and forced them to go home while awaiting to see what happens. While returning back home was a sort of remedy to relief themselves from mental health issues and stress, it is worth noting that mental health continued to be a challenge as participants had limited employment opportunities in Bhekuzulu and therefore began to worry about their future. This means that the issue of their mental health problem was to continue as a malicious cycle because returning to Bhekuzulu would only provide temporary relief. After overcoming academic pressure causing depression, one would then be stressed about their future and opportunities. This study concludes that while returning home in the hopes of redirecting may be unsuccessful when residing in a rural and remote area like Bhekuzulu. This is because the limited economic activities and limited employment opportunities would recreate another mental health issue trail as participants are not likely to secure employment in this area. This is unfortunate because the idea of going home regardless of its economic position, should be to bring about refuge and not exacerbate current issues.

For some participants who had returned back to Bhekuzulu, their motives were centered around family responsibilities. This means that they could not stay behind in cities and look for employment because they had responsibilities such as having a child or being a first born with old parents that needed looking after. They said that:

> *“Eish mina the reason I came to Bhekuzulu was because of the challenges with my family. Ever since my mother died nje I have been the one looking after my younger siblings. So nje I had to come back and look after my sister because my brother is troublesome, and you know ke South Africa is not safe for female children.”*
>
> *-Slindile Mhlongo*
>
> *“Firstly, I am the first grandchild, my grandparents’ kids all passed away. This means that I am solely responsible for taking care of them as they often get sick. That was the reasons that made me take a decision as to like no man, I need to go back home so that when I get such calls about them being sick, I'll be closer to home than when I'm in free states. So that was quite a challenge to me.”*

-Zodwa Sithole

With the above, this study argues that females have more family responsibility than males as females are seen to be more nurturing. This is in line with some of the cultural beliefs that iterate that a women's role is in the kitchen and making a house a home. Some of the participants said that in their households, women have minimal empowerment as their roles are not the same as those of men. They said that women are not allowed to participate in certain decision making because of their gender. They mentioned that they could not stay in cities and look for employment because they either had children or were firstborn children with old parents that needed looking after. Beyond this, participants revealed that as females they had more responsibilities than males. It is a displeasure to note such for women living in Bhekuzulu noting that it is a female headed community. That on its own suggests that women are already caring a burden of bringing supposed change in socio-upward mobility through employment, whereas the dynamics are limiting from achieving such. Bhekuzulu in its form is a traditional community with set traditions that limit women's empowerment and this study acclaims that in this community, women's empowerment will continue to be limited because of the challenges faced by women in the hopes of uplifting their livelihoods. This study recommends that young people are treated equally despite their gender and that responsibilities are shared equally between males and females. This would result in a fair chance in opportunities without any exclusion.

Bhekuzulu is a rural and remote area with limited economic activities and very limited employment opportunities. Participants said they returned back to Bhekuzulu because of poverty, mental health issues and family responsibilities. Although this study found challenges that resulted in some of the participants returning back to Bhekuzulu, some of the participants revealed that they returned back to cities because Bhekuzulu had limited access to employment opportunities. It is with this in mind that the main research question of this study seeks to explore the impact of higher education attainment on women's empowerment outside of employment opportunities. It is of great concern that young women still returned back to Bhekuzulu after completing their studies. However, the main theme revealed in this study was that the non-labour related benefits on higher education

attainment on women’s empowerment is Independence and self-growth which is still essential for women’s empowerment.

Chapter 5

Main findings of the study.

Chapter 4 presents findings of this study, it is a setting of chapter 5 which discusses the main findings of this study. It is of no doubt that Covid-19 had a negative effect on the economy which affected the labour market and the overall unemployment rate. South Africa would not be spared of this as it already has a structural unemployment problem due to limited capable businesses which can create employment opportunities. This then leaves the government as the largest employer, which is problematic because the government institution is relatively dysfunctional due to political instability and corruption. Noting South Africa's structural unemployment problem and the continuous high youth unemployment rate, this study sought to explore the nexus between higher education attainment on women's empowerment living in Bhekuzulu in the absence of employment prospects. With high youth unemployment rates why did young women living in a rural remote area continue to seek for higher education?

5.1 Non-labour related benefits for higher education attainment on women's empowerment

Research question: What are the effects higher education attainment on women's empowerment in Bhekuzulu given the weak labour market and limited employment opportunities?

Theme 1: Higher education as a promoter of Independence and Individualism.

The criteria for this study included women with a post-matric qualification. All research participants had their undergraduate degrees and some participants had already been registered and studying towards their post-graduate degrees. Pursuing post-graduate studies indicated that higher education had a particular impact on women's empowerment. For example:

> *"Well, firstly, I'll begin with this point, that it's making us more of like being independent. Because if I have to take it back, woman did not really study back then. Because they suppose just to be the way it's supposed to be like, stay at home moms, whereas men had to go and study and do all the things that needed finances. So the impact that that is having on Bhekuzulu woman, is that it's teaching us that If you are a woman or young girl, you can now go to any institution and study for whatever that you might want to study. Like, it's no longer restricted."*
>
> *-Sinenhlanhla Mbatha*

The participants refer to the impact of higher education attainment in their lives as bringing about independence as they spoke about no longer being restricted or gatekept simply because they are women. This study defines women independence as the ability of women to be free from the control or governance of another person. Women independence is considered as a positive indicator and a measure of women's empowerment. This is because when women are empowered through higher education attainment, they are at liberty to do what they wish for their lives with limited restrictions because of the knowledge, skills and capabilities possessed. Although their impact on higher education attainment was not in employment opportunities which is what would be

most ideal, it is a positive indicator for women living in Bhekuzulu to be independent because the development and growth of Bhekuzulu as it is a female headed community.

This study argues that the concept of women being independent promotes individualism for women, as it looks at individualism as the tradition of being independent and self-trusting. In the predicament of Covid-19 and weakening economy, the participants still had positive outcomes of higher education attainment such as promotion of independence.

> *"Yoh Andiswa, apart from getting a job? Okay for me nje having a degree has impacted me in the sense that I am more independent now. I can make my own decisions and I trust in myself more as an individual because I think I know what is best for me more than anyone else."*
>
> *-Zodwa Sithole*

The above information suggests that the journey of going into a higher institution and getting a qualification has far more rewards that just getting a job. It has to do with one's self -confidence, understanding and a changed mindset. It is with the presented data that this study concludes that the main non-labour related benefit to higher education attainment for women in Bhekuzulu the promotion of independence which in turn stimulates individualism. Participants further mentioned that when they are empowered and independent, they serve as an inspiration to other members of the community. This allows for a cycle of empowerment as members of the community also pursue the same trajectories for their future endeavors. As mentioned earlier, the results in continuous empowerment show as Bhekuzulu is having more young women pursing their higher education. The presented data revealed the complexity of independence and individualism. While one young woman would feel empowered in the sense that allowed them to be independent, participants echoed that they also served as an inspiration to younger women in the community. This shows that the growth of one individual may directly or indirectly influence others as well. This is extremely true in a society that believes in that being a good example to others brings about desired change. One of the other participants mentioned that while they could not think of any non-labour related benefits of attaining higher education at the time, they felt grateful as they managed to

inspire their younger siblings to start focusing on their schoolwork. This study thus concludes that despite young women in Bhekuzulu not being in employment, attaining higher education is still a positive indicator as it yields positive outcomes such as one feeling independent and having a changed mindset. It is notable that the outcome of independence and individualism is complex as it yields to other positive outcomes, directly and indirectly.

Theme 2: Higher education attainment as a gateway to self and personal development.

While one of the key benefits to higher education attainment is employment opportunities, participants revealed that a non-labour related benefit to higher education is self-reliance and self-development. For example:

> *"Education has so many benefits outside of employment. For instance, I now have knowledge that empowers me as a young woman and allows me to make better informed decisions about myself."*
>
> *-Samkelo Zwane*

> *"It has empowered me in the sense that I can now communicate better and see a lot of opportunities which can develop me as an individual and allow me to actually rely more on myself and not depend on other people."*
>
> *-Andile Phakathi*

The above information suggested a sort of trend as initially, participants felt that attaining higher education empowered them in the sense of allowing them to be independent. With independence they learn to become self-reliant using the skills and knowledge they had attained through high education such as better communication and decision making. This study defines self-reliance as the ability of relying on owns efforts and abilities outside of external interferences. While one may argue that independence and self-reliance are similar, this study argues that self-reliance is rather a produce of independence. To differentiate this, independence looks at the freedom to do whatever you want, but does

not mean you have the resources to do it. Whereas self-reliance means you don't necessarily need someone's help in order for you to do whatever you want because through some mechanisms you can do whatever you may want. So when a woman is independent, they are more likely to gain more skills that can be used as mechanisms to help them acquire whatever they may want to achieve with little or no limitations at all. This is why this study argues that self-reliance is a produce of women independence because for one to be self-reliance they must be independent first.

In essence, self-reliance and self-development are essential for the perseverance and prosperity of young women living in Bhekuzulu. This claim is supported by data as participants said that they felt empowered and became better versions of themselves during the process of attaining their higher education. This shows that beyond a qualification, the process of attaining a qualification actually does so much for character building which then results to traits inclusive of self-reliance and self-development. This is based on the number of things that individuals go through when they are in the process of attaining their qualifications. In chapter 4, some participants revealed that they return back home because of mental health issues. In the conversation participants mentioned that they acquired mental health issues during their higher education. As a result, some participants mentioned that going through mental health issues enabled them to be self-reliant as they had to rely on themselves and no one else during hard times. For example, one participant said that being in university has forced them to personally develop as they have gone through mental breakdown because of nearly losing funding. She said that she is a strong and empowered women today because of this challenge that forced her to be independent and self-reliant.

Theme 3: Higher education attainment as a promoter of socio-upward and economic mobility.

A study conducted by Torche (2019) focusing on intergenerational educational mobility within developing countries, suggests that education is an important determining factor of the economic well-being. This is because education predicts a further range of non-pecuniary outcomes such as changed mindset, fertility, marriage and so on. These non-pecuniary outcomes play a vital role in the economic standing of a community as they act as a precursor to its development and prosperity. When a community has a distinct number of people with higher education, it can be projected that their economy stands a chance to develop as the knowledge they acquired through higher education can contribute towards significant changes.

The participants thus said:

> *"Yeah, I think that's the safest way to move towards your career because we're lacking a lot of black businesswomen like black owned business in Bhekuzulu. If you educated you can create your own thing. You can even move to a direction where you can fund and support and whatever business idea you have. In that way. You're moving towards a good direction. You can even employ other people in your business."*
>
> *-Nobuhle Xaba*
>
> *"Ehh Mina I think education plays an important role because even your mindset changes. You look at the world in a different view, I have moved from just wanting to be employed to having my own side hustle."*
>
> *-Xolile Zulu*

The above information suggests that attaining higher education for young women living in Bhekuzulu is a promoter of socio-upward and economic mobility. Young women had a changed mindset as they viewed the world differently and were more eager to even open their own businesses instead of waiting for employment. Participants mentioned that with their qualifications they felt empowered and believed that they had the potential to achieve not only their career goals but their personal goals as well. This suggests that higher education attainment for young women living in Bhekuzulu is a holistic benefit as it does not only enhance employability prospects, but it enhances the personal development of

young women. The expected benefit of higher education attainment is employment so as to eliminate poverty through a sustainable income. However, with Covid-19 and South Africa's weakening economy there has been a significant decline with employment opportunities. This brings about the question of the impact of higher education attainment on young women's empowerment during the pandemic and with limited access to the labour market.

The challenges faced by young women in pursuit of employment in Bhekuzulu and reasons why participants returned back to Bhekuzulu led to the main question of this study on the non-labour related benefits of higher education attainment on women. The key findings of this study on the non-labour related benefits of employment were: 1) higher education as a promoter of independence and individualism, 2) higher education attainment as a gateway to self and personal development and lastly 3) higher education as a promoter of socio-upward and economic mobility.

While the main reason behind higher education attainment is the improvement of livelihoods through employment, during this weakened economy and limited employment opportunities. Participants mentioned that in the absence of employment they felt that their benefits on attaining higher education was independence, self-development and socio-upward and economic mobility. They mentioned that they were able to make decisions and could rely on themselves. This study thus recommends that during these trying times of limited employment opportunities, young women continue to pursue higher education as it has non-labour related benefits which are crucial for their personal development, self-esteem and courage. This is because these non-labour related benefits are play an important role in the wellbeing of person and can bring about productivity in the workplace when employment opportunities surface. This study believes that the economy will not always be weak and that high unemployment rates will drop as the pandemic is subsiding and things are getting back to the new normal. Staying afloat now and preparing will ensure a solid transition from higher education to employment for young women in rural townships such as Bhekuzulu.

It is with this in mind that this study concludes that when young women are educated, they have knowledge and are at a better position off making informed decisions. This is

because participants said that upon attaining their qualifications, they were able to start small businesses that allow them to earn an income. This would in turn provide financial freedom and promote independence. Participants revealed that although their main end game was to get employed, attaining higher education allowed them to be open minded and ambitious in the sense that they wanted to start something of their own. They said curriculum which have shaped their thoughts and how to look at life and its challenges. The above on its own shows that nexus between higher education attainment and socio-upward and economic mobility is complex because the outcomes may be different because of direct or indirect influence.

List of Appendices

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Department of Sociology

Title of Project: The impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment in a South African Township: given the limited access to the Labour Market.

Name of Researcher: Ms. Andiswa Khumalo

I am inviting you to take part in the research study. If you agree to participate in the research study, your participation will be entirely voluntary with freedom to withdraw at any time without any consequences. There are no personal benefits to participating in the research. If you agree to participate, I will arrange to interview you at a time and place convenient for you. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete. Noting that we are under a pandemic, the interview will be virtually via zoom, Microsoft teams or WhatsApp call to protect the researcher and the participants.

You may withdraw from the research at any time, and you may refuse to answer questions you are not comfortable with answering. Furthermore, if you agree to participate, I will ask your permission to record the interview and no one other than myself and the supervisor will have access to the recordings.

Personal information will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be available to myself- the researcher and my supervisor. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report. The results of the research may also be used for academic purposes (including books, journal and conference proceedings) and a summary of findings will be made available to the participant on request. All data collected in the course of the study will be securely retained for two (2) years if a publication arises from the study and six (6) years if there is no publication. Thereafter it will be destroyed accordingly.

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM

Department of Sociology

Title of Project: The impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment in a South African Township: given the limited access to the Labour Market.

Name of Researcher: Ms. Andiswa Khumalo

Details of participants:

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

Do you prefer that we anonymize your responses so that no one reading the report could identify you?

YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes or any other information in his / her research report so that it cannot be associated with my original identity?

YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded

YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.

YES NO

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of participant)

…… (Date)

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title of Study: The impact of higher education attainment on women empowerment in a South African Township: given the limited access to the Labour Market.

1. What do you perceive as non-labour related benefits of education attainment on women given the limited access to the Labour market?
2. Can higher education be used to facilitate the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges to young women in Bhekuzulu? Please elaborate.
3. What is your view on higher education as a promoter of upward social and economic mobility of young women? In other words, do you think higher education increases employability of women and their ability to earn livelihoods through entrepreneurship? Please elaborate.
4. In your view, can higher education contribute to positive change among young women in issues social, political, economic and cultural? In other words, does higher education empower women to have greater awareness and decision-making ability in social, political, economic and cultural sphere of their lives? Please elaborate.
5. Does attaining higher education allow women to obtain better jobs?
6. What do you perceive as other benefits of education attainment on women empowerment given the limited access to the Labour market?
7. For women who remain unemployed or in lower quality employment, are there other benefits of higher education?
8. In your view, what are some of the obstacles to young women's access to the Labour market?
9. How best do you think these obstacles to young women's access to the Labour market can be circumvented?

Reference List

Akala, B., & Divala, J. J. (2016). Gender equity tensions in South Africa's post-apartheid higher education: in defence of differentiation. South African Journal of Higher Education, 30(1), 1-16.

Akpan, W. (2014). Sampling in Qualitative and Quantitative Research. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Archer, E., & Chetty, Y. (2013). Graduate employability: conceptualisation and findings from the University of South Africa. Progressio, 35(1), 136-167.

Aref, A. (2013). Perceived Impact of Education on Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas of Iran. *Islamic Azad University, FARS, Iran.*

Barrow JM, Brannan GD, Khandhar PB. Research Ethics. [Updated 2020 Sep 25]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2020 Jan-. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK459281/.

Donaldson, Ronnie, Thobeka Mehlomakhulu, Dan Darkey, Michael Dyssel, and Pakama Siyongwana. "Relocation: To be or not to be a black diamond in a South African township?." Habitat International 39 (2013): 114-118.

Crow, G., Wiles, R., Heath, K. & Charles, V. (2006) Research Ethics and Data Quality: The Implications of Informed Consent, International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 9:2, 83-95, DOI: 10.1080/13645570600595231

Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998. *The Republic of South Africa.*

Easwaramoorthy, M and Zarinpoush, F. (2006). Interviewing for Research.

Graham, L., Williams, L., & Chisoro, C. (2019). Barriers to the labour market for unemployed graduates in South Africa. Journal of Education and Work, 32(4), 360-376.

Gqola, P.D. (2017). Reflecting Rogue: Inside the Mind of a Feminist. MFS Book: Johannesburg.

Guba, E. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. Education and Communication Technology J. 29: 79-91.

Hassin, F. (2018). Women empowerment Model: *Strategies to overcome Challenges.*

Indoria, D., Ram, M., & Solanki, R.L. (2019). Role of Education in Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurship. International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences, 8, 72-79.

Kapur, R. (2019). Role of Education in Poverty Reduction. *A paper presented at the Youth Colloquium at the University Of Johannesburg, Johannesburg.*

Meth, C. (2011). Employer of Last Resort? South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).

Moyo, C; Franscis, J and Ndlovu, P. (2012). Community-Perceived State of Women Empowerment in Some Rural Areas of Limpopo Provine, South Africa.

Murtaza, F. (2012). Women empowerment through Higher Education in Gilgit Baltistan. *International journal of academic research in Business and Social Sciences.*

Naz, A., Ashraf, F., & Iqbal, S. (2020). The Relationship between Higher Education and Women Empowerment in Pakistan. UMT Education Review, 3(2), 65–84.

Ndlovu, J., & Ndebele, N. C. (2019). Employment experiences of post graduate students in KwaZulu-Natal: An intersection of qualifications and employability in the labour market. South African Journal of Higher Education, 33(2), 92-106.

Rahimian, A; Mirzamani, A and Zehtabi, M. (2010). Impact Model for Women Empowerment. Vol 3 No 1.

Rogan, M and Reynolds, J. (2016) Schooling inequality, higher education and the labour market: Evidence from a graduate tracer study in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, Development Southern Africa, 33:3, 343-360, DOI: 10.1080/0376835X.2016.1153454

Sebola, M. (2015). Achieving gender equity in leadership of South African institutions of higher learning. *Is women empowerment mission impossible in university?*

Sen, A. (1999). "On Ethics and Economics," OUP Catalogue, Oxford University Press, number 9780195627619.

Simon, F. A., Schenk, M., Palm, D., Faltraco, F., & Thome, J. (2021). The collateral damage of the COVID-19 outbreak on mental health and psychiatry. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(9), 4440.

Sharma, S. (2018). Women empowerment and social entrepreneurship. *A life vision.*

Sharma, S. K. (2017). Women empowerment. *Role of Education.*

Shenton, A.K. (2013). Strategies For Ensuring Trustworthiness In Qualitative Research Projects. *Education for Information 22 (2004) 63–75 63 IOS Press.*

Singh, V. (2019). Women empowerment and gender issues. *Sociology and Department of Modern Contemporary History, Johannes Kelper University, Linz, Austria.*

Singh, BP. (2018). Impact of Higher Education on Women Empowerment. Journal of Commerce, Economics & Management Vol. 2, Issue, 03. 8-16p, Dec, 2018

Soharwardi, M. A., Firdous, A., & Gill, A. R. (2021). Are environment, informal sector and poverty interrelated?. *International Journal of Agricultural Extension*, *9*(2), 277-284.

Statistics South Africa. (2021). Youth Unemployment.

Stebbins, R. (2001). Exploratory research in the social sciences: *What is exploration?* University of Calgary

Strydom, R. (1996). *Research at Grassroots for The Social Science And Human Services Professions*. Pretoria: Pretoria University Press.

Sultana, A. M. (2010). Women Education, Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development: *A Theoretical Framework.*

Sundaram, M. (2014). Women empowerment: *Role of Education.*

Torche, F. (2019). Educational mobility in developing countries (No. 2019/88). WIDER Working Paper.

UNESCO. 2013. Education for All global monitoring report. *Teaching and learning for development.*

Van der Waldt, G., Fourie, D., & van Dijk, G., Chitiga-Mabugu, M., & Jordaan. (2019). A competency framework for women empowerment: the case of the local government sector in South Africa. Problems and Perspectives in Management, 17(2), 348-364. doi:10.21511/ppm.17(2).2019.27

Wanka, A. (2014). The Impact of Educational Attainment on Household Poverty in South Africa: *A case study of Limpopo Province. University of the Western Cape.*

Wittmann, V. (2012). Gender and empowerment in South Africa. UCT Press: Cape Town.

World Bank. (2020). Gross Domestic Product in South Africa.