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'Unions are for older people' : a case study of young people in the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU).

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Abstract

Evidence from literature on youth and trade unions suggests mixed perception of the youth towards trade unions. On one hand, the youth is said to perceive unions positively, thus see unions as relevant in improving their employment conditions. On the other hand, the youth is said to have negative perception towards trade unions. Consequently, it has been argued that there is apathy among young workers in terms of identification with unions. This study thus aimed at contributing to this discourse by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of young people (between the ages of 18 to 35 years) towards trade unionism. Qualitative technique was used to collect data through in-depth interviews and Focused Group Discussions with 28 young workers working at where the South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) organises**.** The findings of this study indicate that the issue of young workers' apathy towards trade unionism is complex. Majority of the participants had positive perceptions toward the union and saw the union as useful in addressing their workplace issues. Hence, the generally held view that the youth predominantly have negative perceptions toward trade unions is exaggerated. This is because young workers are also mindful of workplace protection and believe that trade unions can offer them protection**.** This notwithstanding, the findings also shows some frustration and apathy among young workers, generated by ignorance of unionism due to lack of information and unfavourable working hours.