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Graduate unemployment: employment seeking experiences and perceptions of unemployed young graduates in townships of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Abstract

The rate of youth unemployment in South Africa is among the world's highest, which has rapidly become a significant social issue affecting individuals and society at large. It is particularly worrying because historically disadvantaged communities are disproportionately affected compared to other population groups. This study's aim is to contribute to existing literature on youth unemployment, focusing primarily on unemployed youth graduates. The primary objective is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of unemployed Black graduates residing in townships to explore their transition from university to the labor market despite having qualifications.

Many young graduates believe that obtaining a tertiary qualification would guarantee job opportunities, but various challenges prevent some from joining the labor force. Although there is considerable literature on graduate unemployment, studies have largely overlooked the personal experiences and perceptions of graduates, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds. In this study, the authors investigated the personal experiences of unemployed graduates to understand how internal and external factors interact with disadvantaged graduates, such as the type of qualification, geographical location, race, socioeconomic status, lack of skills and experience, lack of career guidance, and skill-labor market mismatch.

The study utilized a qualitative method to collect data from fifteen Black unemployed graduates from various townships in Johannesburg. The candidates were actively seeking employment in various disciplines, particularly in the Humanities and Art, and were unemployed graduates aged 20-34. To gain a better understanding of the graduates' labor market experiences, an in-depth interview was conducted with each participant. The study found that despite actively seeking employment, the graduates' acquired qualifications did not match the skills required in the job market. Lack of experience and social networks were the leading reasons for their prolonged unemployment. The study also found that the lack of career guidance and social networks to link graduates to possible employment opportunities were some of the factors that delayed their entry into the labor market.