

**Name:** Tapiwanashe

**Surname:** Hadzizi

**Contact details:** +27810008471

**Email address:** [hadzmantapiwanashe@gmail.com](mailto:hadzmantapiwanashe@gmail.com)

**Organization/Affiliation:** University of Zimbabwe

**Theme**

**TRACK 2: WORK, EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AND LABOUR LAW IN AFRICA**

**Paper Title**

**RESPONSES AND EXPERIENCES OF MALE YOUTH TO UNEMPLOYMENT  
DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC, A CASE OF HARARE, ZIMBAMBWE**

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## **Abstract**

*The paper extrapolates the concept of youth unemployment in Zimbabwe and Africa at large during this time of COVID19 pandemic. This research explored how young men in Harare are responding to the problem of being out of work either due to effects COVID 19 pandemic or those who haven't had the opportunity to find work, retrenched or resigned. Among the working-age population, unemployment is one of the most devastating and depressing experience and for the case in point, the problem is on young men. It is important to highlight that; the inquiry process was done in a struggling economy which has failed to provide adequate jobs for its citizens. Given such a scenario where the role of the government in terms of providing welfare and basic services to its citizens has been very minimal, the informal sector has been very active in the country. The paper also did evaluate the experiences of the unemployed young men in relation to the satisfaction of demands and domains of life such as financial situation, housing situation, and their use of public space, progress over time, their activities and health.*

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## **Introduction**

African countries have been subjected to a number of problems which needs their attention, without exception youth unemployment is also among them especially in this COVID 19 pandemic era. This research explored and elaborated the responses and experiences of young men in relation to unemployment in these unprecedented times where COVID 19 has led to massive retrenchments in companies, lockdown regulations restriction of mobility & informal trading activities. To put it in context, over the next three decades' African countries will be faced with an extraordinary population challenge. Most countries will double their population by 2050. The continent's demography is expected to more than double to 2,6 billion by 2050 and account for 57% of the world's growth in people. According to the Economist, Africans will make up a bigger and bigger share of the world's young people by 2100, they will account for 48% of those aged 14 and under. Therefore, this piece articulated the state of youth unemployment during this COVID 19 pandemic in Harare, Zimbabwe mainly focusing on young males aged between 14-35 years who are out of work voluntary or involuntary, formal or informal due to the devastating effects of COVID 19.

**Key words:** youth unemployment, COVID19, population dividend.

## **Background of the study**

While the predicament of the pandemic varies across nations, most governments in Africa, Zimbabwe inclusive and globally have implemented measures/strategies such lockdowns, social distancing, testing and tracking and quarantine measures in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. In developing nations where the levels of unemployment are high, larger proportion of work is found in the informal sector and the impacts of COVID 19 is very worrying. According to The Lancet, (2020), In India the majority of the work takes place the informal where a dangerous COVID 19 variant was observed. Due to the nature of Informal work and the COVID19 regulations in place most people are at home in compliance which plays families at risk of hunger, poverty and starvation since the majority are informal actors and they are out of work. In addition, evidence from ILO indicates that there is high unemployment in developing nations than developed nations. A good example is the case of South Africa (the most COVID 19 hit country on the African Continent). According to Graham et al., (2020) unemployment among the youth is very high, a staggering figure of more than 50% are out of work.

The capacity of governments in developing nations in mitigating the devastating effects of COVID 19 on youth unemployment momentarily it's unclear, even though the current evidence suggests that extreme poverty rate among the poor families is going to increase if the government fails to intervene (Bassier et al., 2020). In Zambia, Lusaka Hansen (2005) noted that most young people experience urban life in a twofold process, on one hand in the form of exclusion and the other as inclusion. The focal point of great importance here is an exploration of how young poor men feel alienated and excluded from the labour market. The effects of globalisation, structural adjustment programmes and neo-liberal policies have reduced Zambia's wage employed population. This has negatively affected young men as they grieve over stretched aspirations and desires, restrained roles and the general hostile urban socio-economic environment. Regionally also in Ethiopia, Mains (2007) observes that in the urban areas the rate of the unemployed youths especially those between 18 and 30(age) is estimated to be more than 50% were the jobless young men have become victims of boredom and discouragement due to the unavailability of work. More so in Botswana, Durham (2000) also spends much of her time in studying the experiences of youths as shifters in the society.

The state of youth unemployment in Zimbabwe is one of the pressing issues which the government is facing at the moment. Kanyenze (2010) argues that, Zimbabwe has been struggling to cope up with high levels of youth unemployment for a prolonged period and the burden is continuing to worsen. In the past ten years the country has been encountering bad economic conditions up to date and the unemployment level is estimated to be over 80%. As Coltart (2008) regarded the Zimbabwean economy to be declining at an uncontrollable levels and now it is even worse due to the effects of COVID 19. Since the pandemic is disruptive, as it puts governments in precarious in balancing public health and economic concerns of its citizens at the present moment. It is in this circumstances that the underscores the responses and experiences of male youth to unemployment during this pandemic in Harare, Zimbabwe.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The livelihood development approach**

Human beings adopt a range of strategies and activities in order to make a living. These activities together comprise their livelihood. The resource poor in particular seldom have only one way of making a living. They adopt a range of strategies depending on their assets, skills, social standing,

time of the year and access to social services. The Sustainable Livelihood framework was initially developed by Scoones (1998) to facilitate a better understanding of how to provide sustainable livelihoods. This theory facilitates a holistic understanding of the context livelihood and provides a basis for promoting secure and sustainable livelihood options. It determines a bundle of livelihood assets that an individual, family or village has and how these assets combine to produce secured livelihoods. The sustainable livelihood theory explores how existing assets can be transformed, with the support of existing structures and processes, to assist individuals to produce secured livelihood outcomes. The theory uses various elements of political economy to present the challenges and opportunities for promoting secure livelihoods for individual households and communities. For the case in point the approach was used in logically to analyze the experiences and responses of young man to unemployment during this COVID 19 period. The young people exhibited creativity, resilience, and adaptations measures such as use of social networks.

### **Research Methodology**

According to Titchen and Hobson (2005) phenomenology is the study of lived, human phenomena within everyday social contexts in which the phenomena occur from the perspectives of those who experience them. For the purpose of understanding the experiences and responses of male youth to unemployment during this time of COVID 19 crisis a qualitative approach was used with more usage of contemporary methodologies which were in line with COVID 19 restrictions. Contemporary methodologies which were employed include, digital ethnography-online interviews on platforms such as zoom and skype (Burns, 2010), Microsoft forms and email-administered questionnaires, mobile methods, social networks and Non-probability sampling technique was used, purposive sampling. A final sample of 50 participants was used. The researcher thematically analysed that data, (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Ethical considerations were taken seriously as the researcher observed privacy and confidentiality of the respondents.

### **Findings**

Data analysis produced four main research themes which are, masculinity, social standing and COVID 19, Youth delinquency and unemployment, social media usage and entrepreneurship. These themes are reflective of the responses and experiences of male youth to unemployment in Zimbabwe during COVID 19 crises.

## **Masculinity, social standing and COVID 19**

Research has revealed that there is a negative correlation between youth unemployment and masculinity. For the majority of young men, they argued that work is part of defining maleness in society. Being out of work, this has negatively affected the "maleness" of the majority of young men, thus Silberchmidt (2001) argues that men have responded poorly to the problems of poverty. She went on to say that failing to find a job some men left their families and they turned to alcohol because of the failure to meet the societal roles of providing the basic amenities and to look after their families. COVID 19 pandemic has worsened the situation since lockdown regulations were put in place. People cannot move out of their homes unless they're part of the essential service. The pandemic has also led to massive company closures and retrenchment, hence disaster for the young males especially those who are married. The majority of the youth operates in the informal sector and because of the public health measures people's livelihoods are under threat. The social standing for the unemployed young men is under threat considering the society is patriarchal, as they found themselves at the lower strata of the society. According to (OECD, 2019) the disruptive effects of the pandemic further worsens the pre-existing vulnerability of the youth in labour markets as they are more likely to work temporary jobs or part-time, hence loss of income for them is imminent. Due to COVID 19 induced financial challenges, job losses, losses and inability to take responsibility, it has pushed them to the periphery of social hierarchy. It has created frustration and boredom for them.

## **Youth delinquency and unemployment**

The large bulk of unemployed youth which made up the African society they have the capability of formulating sub-cultures on the periphery of the society. COVID 19 pandemic in a way has acted as a catalyst in speeding up this process in Zimbabwe. These sub-cultures promote socially condemned behaviour. Evidence reviewed that some segment of the young people was now using drugs such as *mutoriro* (burning substance), *marijuana* and excessive drinking of alcohol. In support the (Guardian, 16 March 2021) noted that in Mbare (the oldest suburb in Harare) due lockdown rules the majority of youths ventured in illicit and dangerous drugs such as crystal meth as people try to cope with social pressure aggravated from job losses and low incomes. Delinquency clearly supports the unavailability of "cultural capital" in society. According to Bourdieu (1997) cultural capital alludes to knowledge concerning cultural beliefs and acceptable

behaviour which encourages accomplishment and success in life. Research findings have shown some discontinuities on this notion, since many of the unemployed young men who engage in these delinquency related activities have made little progress in life. Basing on this line of reasoning, stigmatisation of delinquent unemployed young men, it concurs with the argument proffered by the labelling theory, which labels them as deviants. Socially unaccepted behaviour have compelled to label these youths as the 'lost generation' without purpose and for Link and Phelan (2001) deviant labels, criminal labels in particular are associated with stigma which means the mainstream culture has attached negative stereotypes.

### **Social media Usage**

The majority of unemployed young men have adopted modern lifestyles of their own in the society which made them to be regarded as a *generation of confusion*. Being out of work during this time of COVID 19 pandemic has been an issue of concern among many youths. Pre-existing evidence prior to the pandemic era divulged that, for some youths there was no work out there in the cooperate world or either they were tired of looking for work which cannot be found or it is just a matter of personal (voluntary) to choose not go to work or to find one. This have compelled some critics to argue that, youths of today are just a bunch of people who are lazy and unwilling to accomplish their social obligation in the society. The majority of the youths during this lockdown period spends much of their time on social media it could either be WhatsApp, twitter or Facebook. Klouwenberg and Butter (2011), they argued that the eruption of modern ways of communication for example the internet and mobile phones, through globalization it has been much been nearer to youths. More so the same youths who are clamouring for good life and employment opportunities, even if they have reached the age of voting some of them they don't partake in the voting process in order to transform their lives, but rather the opt to spend much of their time on social media. For livelihood approach theorist this is when they advocated for social participation in society in order to counter the effects of unemployment encountered by young men such as social circulation, dissatisfaction, constrained autonomy and boredom.

### **Entrepreneurship and youths**

The notion of self-employment, it was revealed as one of the key features which young men are using as part of their respond to unemployment during this lockdown period of the pandemic.

Basing on the ideas advanced by the livelihood approach theorist which emphasise that, the society is endowed with various institutions and resources which are there for the common good of the whole society. Some young men have embarked on carrying out online part-times jobs, buying and selling in a bid to counter the effects of COVID 19 induced unemployment. In support Langevang (2006), he argued that across Africa the overall decline in employment opportunities mainly in the formal sector, it has propelled some young people to engage in entrepreneurship activities as strategies for survival. On the same note Cole (2004), notes that lack of securing government work and the reduction in the value of education has propelled many youths to formulate opportunities in the informal sector. Comprehending the discourse of entrepreneurial culture which supports the idea of small businesses in terms of development in a country it is quite debatable regarding it as the panacea to the problem of youth unemployment, since young men have cited a number of challenges which they face as entrepreneurs. These include lack of capital, shrinking markets for their outputs and lack of adequate government support, hence youth unemployment remains high.

## **Conclusion**

Youths in Zimbabwe has been confronted with a plethora of challenges. The outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic has worsened the situation of unemployment especially on young male youth. A combination of a disruptive pandemic and a history of young people of unemployment associated with limited career development opportunities, low incomes and scarce chances of securing better jobs. The economic and social effects posed by the pandemic have negatively affected their lives leading in some instances abuse of drugs, masculinity insecurities and addiction of social media usage. Whilst on the other hand, some have ventured into entrepreneurship as a response to unemployment.

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