



Exploring the psychological impacts of unemployment amongst youth in Johannesburg



Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree **Master of Philosophy in Arts** at The
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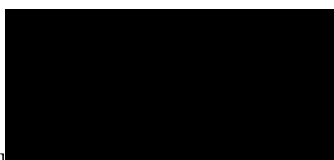
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22/10/2025

DECLARATION

I, JoElla Tsholofelo Itlhobogeng, declare that this study titled “Exploring the psychological impacts of unemployment amongst youth in Johannesburg” submitted for the Master of Philosophy and Arts to the Independent Institute of Education (IIE MSA). This dissertation is my own work and has not been previously submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution. And work that is not my own will have been in-text referenced and presented in the reference list. All work that is not my own is referenced to in the dissertation. Where assistance was given is noted within the study.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Youth unemployment is a great threat to South Africa; it is especially harmful at the individual level. Youth unemployment is an economical issue, but it also causes negative psychological impacts. This is a decades long problem that disproportionately affects individuals aged 18 to 34. The lived psychological experiences of unemployed youth in the South African urban contexts remain underexplored.

Aim: The study aimed to capture the realities of youth unemployment in Johannesburg, the city of gold. This research explored the psychological impacts of unemployment on youth and emphasised the psychological risks that future youth may need to prepare for.

Methods: Qualitative research methods were employed, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. Data was collected through Focus Group (FG) discussion with unemployed youth aged 18 to 34 years old, using purposive sampling. The method of analysis was Thematic content analysis (TCA). The psychological theoretical backing was the Diathesis-Stress theory, utilized by the researcher to explain the interaction between individual vulnerabilities and environmental stressors.

Results: Thematic findings revealed consistent reports of emotional distress, including sadness, anger, stress, low self-esteem, and discontent. Participants expressed feelings of being perceived as inadequate and stunted. Stress was found to be the cause of most, if not all, psychological distress.

Conclusion: Youth unemployment in Johannesburg has significant psychological consequences that extend beyond the economic hardship it causes. The study highlights the need for mental health interventions, social support structures, youth-centred employment initiatives, government accountability and responsibility. Lastly, it provides a warning for future youth on what may be their circumstances if youth unemployment persists at high rates.

Key words: youth unemployment, psychological impacts, unemployment, youth, Johannesburg

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

List of Abbreviations	
FG	Focus group
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
TCA	Thematic Content Analysis
UYU	Urban youth unemployment
SWTS	School to work transitions
BBBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
SI	Symbolic interactionalism
UIF	Unemployment insurance fund
OFLS	Out of labour force and out of school
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
GDP	Gross domestic profit
CLAW	Community lead Animal welfare
FAMSA	Families South Africa

Chapter 1: Introduction

The current youth unemployment rate in South Africa was 46.6% in 2024 and 46.1% in the second quarter of 2025, according to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2025b, p. 9). Youth are defined as individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 who are in a transitional phase according to Bonnie et al. (2015). During this time, they are expected to become financially independent, form stable relationships, and take on adult responsibilities within their communities (Bonnie et al., 2015). The youth unemployment statistics reveal a worrying trend of youth who should be in employment but are not. High unemployment rates in South Africa, especially amongst youth, is a continued experience that has lasted for 2 decades with rates above 20% (Naidoo, 2021). This study argues that the persistently high unemployment rates among South African youth over the past two decades require urgent attention, particularly with regard to the psychological consequences. There is a need to explore this to add to research towards outlining ways of coping that can be helpful for the upcoming youth and unemployed youth. Unemployment negatively impacts the psychological well-being of individuals in various ways, not only due to economic stress. This study proposes that the experience of unemployment is a common experience, unfortunately, and seeks to understand how unemployment psychologically impacts youth in Johannesburg, South Africa. By doing so the study seeks to inspire future research towards how to psychologically assist these individuals and further progress towards assisting the unemployed.

In this chapter the topic and motivations for engaging are explained, followed by the research problem and objectives. In addition, the literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, findings and interpretations of those findings and the conclusion and recommendations will take up the chapters thereafter thus giving further insight into the study. Lastly, the ethical consideration and limitations are going to be presented. This study seeks to address the gap in current research by examining the psychological experiences of unemployed youth, which are often overlooked in literature that focuses primarily on economic and policy solutions. This study showcases a more human approach to the state of unemployment by seeking to understand and hear the voices of the unemployed youth by speaking to the youth directly. The reality of unemployment will become more apparent when the experiences and consequences are better emphasized and identified as serious problems while gaining insight from the youth themselves. This study seeks to address the gap in current research by examining the psychological experiences of unemployed youth, which are often overlooked in literature that

focuses primarily on economic and policy solutions. This title was chosen because it expresses that the research will be on youth unemployment and that the internal experiences will be “explored” thus showing the curiosity of the researcher. Instead of investigating the causes of youth unemployment or theoretical solutions this study will explore the psychological weight of youth unemployment.

1.1 Introduction

When one asks a youth in South Africa “How are you doing?” or “How are things?” one can get a different response depending on whether one is asking the one in five youth in South Africa, who are employed or four out of five who are unemployed (Englert et al., 2020). How do we know, though? Considering we have not asked them about their experiences with unemployment in current post-apartheid South Africa? That is what this study sought to discover by addressing the youth directly and by documenting their experience. The definition of unemployment is the condition of not having a job, which is typically discussed as an economic problem (Mago, 2019). South Africa has been having a high unemployment rate for two decades above 20%, even though government output increased by 5% or more a year in the early 2000s (Naidoo, 2021). One could ask, is the issue that young people are not educated enough to be employable? No, the issue of unemployment is not to be blamed on a lack of skills because some of the unemployed youth are those who have graduated from tertiary institutions (Mago, 2019). South Africa currently has an unemployment rate nationally being 32.9% according to Stats SA (2024b). In 2025 the youth unemployment rate is at 46,1% in the second quarter of 2025 according to Stats SA (2025c). Unemployed youth take up more than half of the overall population of unemployed people in South Africa according to Stats SA (2024a, p. 8) and it continues to be the case in 2025.

In 2021, over 150,000 jobs were threatened by looting and unrest in key economic hubs, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (Naidoo, 2021). Those events left lasting impacts on employment prospects in South Africa. Compared to other provinces Gauteng contains 33.8 percent of the official unemployment rate according to Stats SA (2024c) by the end of year 2023. As one can gather there have been issues surrounding unemployment for a very long time across the country and has heavily impacted “the city of gold” Johannesburg, the main city of Gauteng.

In the works of David et al. (2023) they researched qualitatively the history, economic growth and urbanization of Gauteng. The name Gauteng means the “place of gold”. The abundance in gold led to the development of mines (David et al., 2023). Thus, there was major migration of people from rural areas and other provinces who were seeking employment and economic opportunities in Gauteng which resulted in rapid urbanization (David et al., 2023). The province geographically is the smallest province that takes up 2% of the entire nationwide land area (David et al., 2023) and hosts the greatest number of working-age individuals nationwide, between 15 and 65 years old. Gauteng accounts for 11% of the total population (Stats SA, 2024). Though the province is small, many South Africans still migrate and live in the province which goes to show how impactful the past perceptions of the province still hold true to some degree at present. The province is, therefore, perceived to offer better socio-economic opportunities. However, with rapid urbanization came issues such as social exclusion, high poverty levels, unemployment, high levels of crime, pollution, and urban sprawl (Bobbins & Culwick, 2015, as cited by David et al., 2023).

The Gauteng province currently has a notable increase in employment compared to other provinces in South Africa according to Stats SA (2025a, p. 96). However, currently in Gauteng many young people find themselves unemployed, especially those without a higher education past matriculation (Stats SA, 2025a, pp. 96-98). To be a youth in the province of “gold” (David et al., 2023) one would assume that Gauteng’s reputation as a centre of opportunity. Youth unemployment remains alarmingly high in the province, particularly in Johannesburg. There are other consequences of unemployment that do not only affect youth socio-economically.

Though there have been studies dedicated to how to solve the issue of unemployment, Jubane (2021) recommends increased investment in practical skills development, however, this approach overlooks the psychological consequences of unemployment. Jubane (2021) ignores the psychological consequences promoted by unemployment, which influences overall mental well-being and subsequently life satisfaction (American Psychological Association, 2023). It has been evident that unemployment can have adverse effects on the mental well-being of individuals, thus exposing them at greater risk of developing depression related problems, low life satisfaction and general distress than those who are employed or in school (Guhn et al., 2020).

In a study done by Mago (2019) the results showed that South African urban unemployed youth experienced lack of self-esteem, stress and related psychological consequences. In this study, psychological impacts are explored and retrieved from the youth themselves by understanding what their lives look like in Johannesburg while unemployed. Finding the perspectives of those individuals on the current labour force environment. Explore the reasons for their unemployment, feelings about being unemployed, explore/understand their experiences around unemployment.

1.2 Rationale

This study focuses on the psychological impacts of unemployment among youth in Johannesburg, the capital of Gauteng Province. The rationale behind the study is to understand youth unemployment and the impact of this on a youth's psychological well-being. The experience of unemployment is not an uncommon experience, many people have experienced unemployment, as previously mentioned. However, the experience of unemployment during this transitional stage of life has not been addressed in South Africa through the psychological perspective through use of personal accounts. The stage where one is expected to begin meeting the requirements of adulthood expectations and generally entering the workforce fully. Furthermore, relating to the stress and consequences of not meeting such expectations, the stress of unemployment can be a crippling experience (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). Exploring unemployment from the perspective of youth will enhance understanding of its psychological dimensions, develop a greater sympathy towards the demographic and will hopefully lead to greater strides towards reducing the risk of youth unemployment and reducing the negative psychological consequences of it.

There have not been enough studies on the psychological impacts of unemployment on this specific demographic that lives in Johannesburg. There was a study done by De Witte et al. (2012) titled 'The Psychological Consequences of Unemployment in South Africa'. This study discussed the similar psychological consequences mentioned in the present study, however, that study looked at unemployment at the national level (not a specific province or city) and did not focus on a specific demographic. Most studies (in and about South Africa) discuss the matter across the general population of the unemployed, however, this study is relevant because it is specifically addressing psychological impacts of unemployment among youth in

Johannesburg. This study is driven by the curiosity of “what unemployment feels like as a youth?”.

1.3 Research problem statement

The problem that this study seeks to highlight that youth are unemployed, and the psychological consequences of unemployment are not being addressed or fully recognized from a youth perspective. The first problem is that most youth experience negative psychological consequences when faced with unemployment (Guhn et al., 2020), in Johannesburg this could be explored to better understand this demographic intently. A further issue is the lack of in-depth exploration of unemployed youth lived experiences, particularly the psychological toll it takes beyond economic hardship. When discussing the psychological impacts of unemployment. According to the study the socio-economic issues are merely catalysts for negative psychological consequences, an example could be that due to being unemployed a youth may not be able to afford to be amongst friends or keep up relations with others which could result in a feeling of social exclusion, isolation and loneliness. However, this is just a speculative example, through this study the actual experiences of unemployed youth will result in not only knowing their economic challenges but also the underlying psychological challenges as well.

1.4 Research purpose statement

The purpose of the study is to outline the voices of the unemployed youth that show the psychological consequences of unemployment that they experience. This study sees the problem being that the real psychological experiences of youth unemployment are not truly represented in research especially when the likelihood of unemployment amongst South African youth is so high and continued. Through this study South African youth can better understand what possibilities there may be if unemployment persists, the realities can be better communicated, coping strategies can be developed and internal struggles can be better articulated and thus defined. The research purpose was fulfilled by engaging with the youth and discovering that unemployment hinders not only their economic position but also affects their relationships with friends, family and the self.

1.5 Research questions

The study was led by the following research questions:

1. What psychological impacts are experienced by unemployed youth in Johannesburg?
2. Why do the psychological impacts occur for youth?
3. How do the psychological impacts of youth unemployment occur/manifest?
4. What differences in experience of unemployment are there between male and female youth in Johannesburg?

1.6 Research aims and objectives

The aim of the study was to understand the youth in Johannesburg and understand what psychological experiences they have when unemployed. The first objective of the study was to identify the psychological impacts unemployed youth experience when unemployed. The next objective was to gain those personal experiences that may be shared experiences of youth when unemployed and understand why the youth feel the way they feel. The third objective was to find out if youth males and females experience different psychological impacts from unemployment to the same degrees or differ in significance. This objective sought the personal accounts of the youth who experience the differences or similarities themselves in the South African context. This study investigates these dimensions by capturing the personal accounts of unemployed youth in Johannesburg.

1.7 Definition of key concepts

Unemployment

Unemployment is described as being a state of not having a job/employment which is mostly described as an economic issue (Mago, 2019).

Youth

Youth are people between the ages of 18 to 34 years old who are in a period of transition where young people are expected to become financially responsible, form stable romantic relationships, become parents and enter into roles in which they are expected to be productive

and engaging members in their communities and families (Bonnie et al., 2015). The African Youth Charter (African Union, 2006) defines the youth as people between 15 and 35 years old. Biologically this is also seen as a transition into maturation when adulthood is becoming more imminent, and this stage is treated as the transition period between adulthood and childhood.

During this stage youth seek to create lives in which these expectations are met not only for others but for themselves as well. In South Africa the demographic known as youth are individuals between the ages of 15 to 34 years old who make up a third of the South African population (The Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024). People under 18 years of age are not able to give consent to participate in the study without parental consent. Therefore, in this study only youth between age 18 to 34 will be allowed to participate because they can consent to participate. When referring to youth the definition of youth according to the South African parliament will be used to define this age demographic chosen, however, people under-18-year-olds will not be included in the “youth” discussed in this study. In this study, the definition of youth that is leaned on is people between the 18 and 35 years old.

Psychological consequences/impact

Consequence refers to a result of a particular action or situation. Psychological refers to something relating to the human mind. Psychological consequences are then the impacts of an occurrence on the mental state of individuals or groups (Cambridge English dictionary, 2024).

1.8 Layout of study

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter explains the background of the study, the purpose of the study and the relevance of the study and further information on other aspects of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review consists of a critical discussion of previous literature that covers the topic of unemployment and the psychology behind being unemployed. Throughout this chapter the literature will be compared and contrasted in regards to how different authors discuss unemployment and use that to further discuss the psychological aspects. The past literature will

explore the current state of youth unemployment, the social and transitional aspects of youth, the problems of youth unemployment and psychological impacts. Previous literature is critically reviewed to showcase the state of the psychological experience of unemployment and assist in the present study to build upon that past literature to further expand on previous findings using a different approach.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is the Diathesis-stress model; this will be used in the study to provide psychologically based theory that will support the study and its goals. The model is described in relation to the psychological aspects of unemployment. The theory will also be utilized when discussing the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter will explain thoroughly how the research has been conducted. This chapter will include the research approach, paradigm, population and sampling approach, data collection and analysis method, research trustworthiness and all ethical considerations regarding the study. Moreover, the procedure of the study will be detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings and Interpretation of Findings

Through concise explanation the interpretations of the data and detailed research findings will be found in this chapter. These findings will be used to form relevant conclusions of what main findings and themes are found from the research. This is done with the trustworthiness of good research acts kept in constant consideration when evaluating research findings from the raw textual the data.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter will present the overall conclusion of the research study and the relevant recommendations for future research. This summary will include the main findings of the research, the relevance of the study and the possible contribution to the greater body of knowledge on the research topic. The limitations found through good research will be discussed in correspondence with the main findings so as to clearly present how the research succeeded in its aims and its shortcomings as well.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the background in how the study was formulated and provided information regarding the research topic. The rationale. The research problem statement. The research purpose statement. The research questions, aims and objectives were presented and provided the understanding behind the research study. The key terms that were used throughout the research study were presented: youth, unemployment and psychological consequences/impact. These terms were defined in relation to how these terms will be used in the study. Lastly, the conclusion presents and summarises the full first chapter of the study. the previous literature regarding the study's topic will give greater insight into what is being studied in the present study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores existing research on youth unemployment and its psychological consequences, with a focus on both global and South African contexts. Firstly, the youth unemployment in South Africa will be discussed. Secondly, the literature on youth unemployment amongst other African countries will be discussed in relation to South Africa. Thirdly, youth unemployment is examined through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism and Youth Transition Theory. The importance of the transition from adolescence to adulthood will be explained and the lack of employment as a youth during this transitional phase will be made clear through the lenses of symbolic interactionism. Fourthly, the general difference between youth unemployment and other forms of unemployment or socio-economic strife will be discussed to show the uniqueness of unemployment as a youth. Thereafter, the literature from various parts of the modern world will be discussed regarding the findings made globally about youth unemployment, its impacts on well-being, behaviours found to be significant in unemployed youth and resilience discussed as well. Sixthly, the previous literature on psychological consequences of unemployment will be explored. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of findings and identification of key gaps in the literature.

2.2 Youth unemployment in South Africa

Unemployment is traditionally described as a state of not having paid employment, typically framed as an economic issue. However, it also has significant psychological implications, especially for youth which tends to be ignored in conversation regarding youth unemployment (Mago, 2019). Approximately one in five South Africans between 18 and 25 years is in paid employment (Englert et al., 2020). This is a very high number of young people not working which means there are many at risk of the mental health problems associated with unemployment and prolonged unemployment. Mago (2019) explains that prolonged urban youth unemployment may lead some individuals to engage in criminal activities as a means of survival. The literature suggests that the social issues that arise are a direct reaction to the high unemployment rates, which is pushing the youth towards behaviours that may not have arisen if employment was more accessible. It is explained by Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) that youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment due to there being a rise in demand for highly skilled employees/labour which is intended to drive technological development, however, results in a drop in the employment of unskilled labour.

The issue is not a lack of skills either because so many of the unemployed youth are those who have graduated from tertiary institutions (Mago, 2019) which puts youth in a very psychologically frustrating position. However, the unemployment rate of youth has been much less amongst youth who have had tertiary education such as a diploma, certificate, degree and such. Those who only acquired matriculation, no tertiary education and no labour market-related qualifications are the youth who suffer most from unemployment (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). This supports Mago's (2019) argument that inadequate education systems contribute to youth unemployment by failing to produce work-ready graduates. Matriculation is the lowest level of education for hiring, those who end their studies at a matric level have an even harder time finding employment due to the highly competitive job market according to Stats SA (2025a, p. 8).

To further understand the current youth unemployment, it was found in year-end of 2023 that of the 27% of working age individuals in the labour force, only five percent of them between ages of 15 to 34 are employed (Stats SA, 2024). According to Stats SA (2025c) 61% of youth between 15-24 are unemployed. Moreover, the lack of employment contributes to economic disadvantage among youth, reinforcing social inequality and a sense of marginalisation. Youth unemployment is also related to socio-economic issues such as social conflict, crime, poverty, civil unrest and other problems (Mago, 2019). Furthermore, a lack of self-esteem among youth, family instability and the emergence of gangsterism (Mago, 2019). Youth unemployment may exacerbate social unrest, as evidenced by incidents of rioting and protest during periods of economic strain. Youth are not only internally frustrated but have taken to rioting, protesting, looting and crime. A study was done to find out if crime/murder in KwaZulu-Natal was positively associated with unemployment (Mazorodze, 2020). The research proved that youth unemployment and crime are positively associated, and the researcher stated that job creation for young people could alleviate or at least reduce the number of murders in KwaZulu-Natal (Mazorodze, 2020). This is a display of what can arise when youth are in a position where access to jobs creates youth who lean towards criminality.

A contributing factor to South African youth violence is low socio-economic conditions (Adams et al., 2022). Most youth live and work in the Gauteng, the province of gold (David et al., 2023). Most youth also live in the province Kwazulu-Natal. These two provinces are where most youth reside because of the economic opportunity both are perceived to provide. In regard to the study, most working youth are in the Gauteng province (Stats SA, 2024) which makes

Gauteng a place of interest for the study, specifically Johannesburg. Mago (2019) argues that urban youth unemployment (UYU) is responsible for the socio-economic and political problems in South African society, this suggests that UYU is a much bigger problem that affects multiple sectors of the society simultaneously. The problem of unemployment needs to be solved by the government (improving education systems, creation of jobs in various fields and with various levels of skill requirements) and employers (who need to be implored to hire more youth) is what Mago (2019) suggested.

The literature shows that some young people in South Africa when placed in a position where they are not able to support themselves become deviant and express behaviours that do not support homeostasis of society. The psychological consequences can be related back to stress as being a psychological consequence experienced by youth who are in poverty and experiencing strenuous inequalities. That stress over time, an undesirable stressor, can lead to depressive symptoms and depression to be triggered in youth (Ingram & Luxton, 2005).

2.3 African youth unemployment

A study was done by Makanyanga et al. (2019) in Zimbabwe where the researchers selected 112 graduates who participated in the study which aimed to examine the relationship between optimism and general health by looking at the demographic characteristics and influences. The study addresses the hardship of being an unemployed postgraduate (Makanyanga et al., 2019). The study recognises how unemployment at the beginning of a career can lead to loss of confidence and skills (Makanyanga et al., 2019). Similarly to South Africa, graduates in a country experiencing economic strife (Zimbabwe) results in declined health outcomes for those graduates. The study states that unemployment for these postgraduates can lead to reduced income which impacts their deteriorating health (Makanyanga et al., 2019). The study as well discusses how youth unemployment, especially for those who have graduated from tertiary institutions, leads to emotional “scarring” in later life such as reduced income which thus deteriorates general health further (Makanyanga et al., 2019). Optimism was found to moderate the effects of unemployment, although prolonged joblessness following graduation led to a decline in optimism over time (Makanyanga et al., 2019). This study showed that high unemployment affects even graduates who meet employment requirements more than those without degrees but even so, they are negatively affected by youth unemployment and further discusses the importance of mental health being a priority especially during economic distress (Makanyanga et al., 2019). This study used self-administered questionnaires, which limited the

depth of insight into the lived psychological experiences of participants. General health and optimism seem constrictive in encapsulating the psychological experiences of unemployed youth. For this reason, is why the present study opted for a qualitative approach over a quantitative one so as to better capture the nuanced and emotional realities of youth unemployment

In a study done in Southern Ethiopia researched the prevalence and factors associated with depression amongst unemployed youth was done (Ayano et al., 2020). This study showed how depression is a high risk for unemployed youth and urges for measures to be taken to detect, prevent and improve access to care for unemployed youth (Ayano et al., 2020). Youth unemployment has been steadily increasing in Ethiopia with an above 20% youth unemployment rate (Ayano et al., 2020). Unemployed youth who were graduates were included in the study. In the present study both graduates and those without degrees will be included. The reasoning of Ayano et al. (2020) to exclude non-graduates is understandable as the likelihood of employment is highly reduced due to not being employment ready thus the focus was put on the youth who are employable but still suffer the psychological consequences of unemployment. This will not be done in the present study because the researcher believes that even without a degree youth still require employment and the lack thereof can be investigated as most people do not gain degrees for various reasons. The study by Ayano et al. (2020) found that depression was 30.9% present amongst those unemployed youth. The study found that men were more impacted by depression than women and this is found to be true in most developing countries such as Southern Ethiopia, Zimbabwe (previously discussed), South Africa and other African nations (Ayano et al., 2020). Though the study found various factors that correlate to the increased depression amongst youth it did not encapsulate the experience of youth unemployment on a human level. What is meant by a “human level” is that the studies discussed so far did explain the feeling of those youth in a way that the masses can more accurately understand the despair unemployed youth are feeling, why they feel that way and express how they feel in their own words. The researcher of the present study seeks to more accurately showcase the psychological impacts of unemployment through the perspective of the youth from a South African context. The researcher wants youth to be able to express all feelings they experience instead of fitting their emotions into the words of the researcher or within the parameters of exploration that the researchers “felt” discussed unemployment enough.

In a study by Moroe et al. (2025) a qualitative approach of an interview was used to determine the psychological effects of unemployment and how other people (society, family, friends, etc) contribute to the psychological well-being of unemployed youth. The study found that unemployment leads to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, loneliness, low esteem and can lead to youth finding ways to cope with those psychological consequences by participating in risky sexual behaviour and substance use. (Moroe et al., 2025) The study encourages both the private or public sector of South Africa to combat youth unemployment by use of psychological interventions, teaching entrepreneurial skills, more job creation and internships/mentorships for graduates to avoid these consequences of unemployment both long term and short-term unemployment (Moroe et al., 2025). It was found that “other people” supporting the unemployed youth was critical towards future employability and economic survival while unemployed. This support was also seen as crucial in the study by Moroe et al. (2025).

Looking back at South Africa the experience of unemployment amongst speech therapists and audiologists were explored by Bacela and Kheswa (2023). This is a specialized field that meets healthcare demands in South Africa, however, graduates in this field find themselves unemployed within the first-year post community service, it was found that by the second-year unemployment amongst these graduates increased from 16% to 19%. The chances of employment decrease (Bacela & Kheswa, 2023). This study sought the lived experience of these graduates. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the study which revealed that there were macroeconomic factors that affected these challenges as unemployed professionals. Participants of the study discussed how the government bodies, universities and professional bodies could have a more positive impact in this issue of unemployment and how their lack of assistance negatively affects their career progress (Bacela & Kheswa, 2023).

2.4 Symbolic interactionalism and youth transitions

Symbolic interactionalism (SI) is described as a micro-level sociological perspective that looks at the ways people create and maintain themselves in society through interactions with other members of society, meaningful interactions (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Symbolic interactionalism develops the various perspectives interacting. SI is about the meaning behind social acts taken in an environment which affect the self-perception, societal perception and environmental perspectives (Husin et al., 2021). Symbolic Interactionism emphasises the meanings individuals assign to their social interactions, which in turn shape their perceptions of self and environment, all people exist in it (Husin et al., 2021).

The transition from being under care to becoming independent is a process that takes time where many changes are experienced by youth (Chacaltana et al., 2020). The transition from school to work is the transition that the present study is most interested in due to the topic of unemployment. Various transitions take place between the age of 15 and 29 according to Chacaltana et al. (2020), transitions such as reproductive transitions (independence, coupling and parenthood), basic to higher education transitions and the transition from school to work. The study was done in low to middle income countries, for the purpose of the study, similar to South Africa thus generalizations regarding youth transitions are transferrable to the present study (Chacaltana et al., 2020). Looking at the school to work transitions (SWTS) it is found that there is much struggle due to most people not taking on further studies for various reasons such as leaving school early or lack of interest in schooling. Like South Africa there are greater shares of paid employment for those who finish tertiary education and those who get standard education (Matric/secondary education) tend to remain in informal employment and low-skill jobs which do not provide high-paying income opportunities (Chacaltana et al., 2020). Graduates, therefore, have an easier time in society finding employment and gaining high paying employment in their lifespan. The study states that individuals who finish tertiary education may enter the work force at a later age, due to an extended period of study to achieve higher education in order to secure higher-paying employment (Chacaltana et al., 2020).

Combining insights from Symbolic Interactionism and School-to-Work Transition theory reveals that both personal and structural factors shape youth transitions to the labour force. In the case of South Africa, the transition of youth towards employment is hindered by the aspects of SI. The environment of the country contributes to how these youth transition towards adulthood and independence. The previous study states that in lower income nations the high skill jobs are lacking recruits that meet education criteria to work the job due to most youth not finishing tertiary education (Chacaltana et al., 2020). Thus, resulting in most youth only being suited for lower paying jobs while higher-paying jobs lack recruits thus resulting in higher supply than demand in informal/low-skill labour markets and less supply to the demand of high-income labour markets. The study encourages that policies are to be made to aid youth transitions (Chacaltana et al., 2020). The study suggests that transitions should be supported through these transitions being integrated, this should be done to attain a greater impact on youth since in the past these transitions would be dealt with separately which may have limited the overall transition of these youth (Chacaltana et al., 2020). The study mentions that work-

based training such as mentorships should be encouraged in government and universities (Chacaltana et al., 2020).

From the above literature it is suggested that finding employment is the beginning of successful transitions and that employment type has great impact on the life trajectory of youth. In the present study the researcher aims to put focus on the SWTS as this transition will assist in other transitions simultaneously, namely finding a mate becomes more plausible with employment and transitioning to parenthood become easier due to childcare being covered by an income. In the present study the researcher recognises through the literature the true importance of employment and the necessity of employment towards growth for youth. The period of “youth” is suggested to be a time of great changes from dependency (adolescence) to independence (adulthood) with the overall aim of youth gaining lifelong employability (Chacaltana et al., 2020). Furthermore, the issues pertaining to youth unemployment and the importance of SWTS will be better addressed when discussing why youth unemployment specifically is such a crucial issue not only for the individual but for the society at large.

2.5 What makes youth unemployment problematic?

Cloete (2015) states that unemployment puts individuals at risk of decreased life satisfaction, depression, low self-esteem, and poor general well-being, especially over extended periods. Other psychological effects include anxiety, apathy, suicide, fatalism and physical health strain such as heart diseases (Cloete, 2015). These are similar to the symptoms experienced by those who experience poverty, however, poor people experience nihilism which makes them feel hopeless. Cloete (2015) emphasises that employment provides individuals with purpose, financial security, and a sense of self-worth, elements that many unemployed youth may lack or missing out on.

Youth are not the only demographic affected by unemployment, however, research indicates that there is a difference between older and younger unemployment (Cloete, 2015). Older people most probably have worked before and therefore, benefit from unemployment insurance and Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). The young people cannot benefit from it since most have always been unemployed and now require support from family, friends and community for a longer period especially after tertiary study that support may not be there (Cloete, 2015). Cloete (2015) argues that the absence of institutional support may lead some young people to engage in anti-social behaviour, including criminal activity, as a coping mechanism. It is

suggested that this happens due to the psychological issues formed through unemployment which may lead to crime and the use of recreational substances. Cloete (2015) suggests that these courses of action are a way for young people to create a transition into full adulthood and are trying to give their lives meaning which is what they seek. Furthermore, the lack of employment creates young people who are socio-economically disadvantaged and that creates a sense of inequality as youth are being discarded not only South Africa but across the world.

2.6 Global youth unemployment impacts

Akter et al. (2020) stated that unemployment showed that feelings of financial stress, financial hardship and financial well-being were strong predictors of depression, anxiety and stress among Bangladeshi youth graduates. This study showed how unemployment can lead to financial stressors that are associated with depression, anxiety and stress (Akter et al., 2020). Underemployment, even when compensated, does not fully mitigate the psychological consequences of joblessness, as it often fails to provide financial stability or professional fulfilment. However, it was suggested through findings that it does not produce the same positive psychological associations full employment provides. It is suggested that full employment produces the most positive mental health outcomes which demonstrates how essential employment is not only economically but also psychologically. Bangladesh also operates in a collectivist society, thus the data found from there can be transferable to the South African context.

In a study by Medina-Lara and Morrish (2021) loneliness was discussed in relation to employment status. It was found that those who are unemployed are more likely to experience loneliness. In the study those who identify as being lonely were mostly those who are unemployed than those employed (Medina-Lara & Morrish, 2021). The youngest demographic was included in having a greater effect of unemployment leading to loneliness, however, the study discussed this connection to employment status throughout life from the youngest individuals being 19 and the oldest being 75 years of age (Medina-Lara & Morrish, 2021). The study found that the most affected demographics of loneliness paired with unemployment were the youngest demographic (19 – 34 years old) and the oldest demographic (60 – 75 years old) (Medina-Lara & Morrish, 2021). This qualitative study looked across various articles with a clear relationship between loneliness and unemployment which extends across the life-course of work life. Through that investigation it was found that the youngest demographic was included in having a greater effect of unemployment leading to loneliness (Medina-Lara &

Morrish, 2021). These findings suggest that unemployment is a catalyst to those feelings of loneliness, this was interpreted with the notion that even more emotions are caused by unemployment such as anxiety, depression, sadness, low self-esteem etc. just as loneliness was instigated by unemployment.

A Canadian study by Guhn et al. (2020) sought to examine the relationship between self-reports in relation to five categories of labour market and educational attachment (Guhn et al., 2020). The study found that unemployment was associated with greater risks of poorer mental health compared to employed non-students for all outcomes, the outcomes of the study showed that unemployed youth experienced more than twice as much depression, distress and lower life satisfaction than employed non-students (Guhn et al., 2020). Both OFLS (Out of labour force and out of school) youth and unemployed youth in the sample had a higher prevalence of depression, higher mean distress and lower mean life satisfaction, compared to youth who were employed or students. OLFS youth are different from the unemployed youth because the unemployed youth are actively seeking to be employed, whereas OLFS youth choose to be inactive in school and the labour force, however, both groups showed similar results (Guhn et al., 2020). This study showed that even if youth are looking for work or not, there are consequences to mental well-being which do not promote health. The study did not discuss the more social aspects of the feelings of distress, depression and low-life satisfaction appearing which is what the present study hopes to gain through discussing similar psychological consequences with unemployed youth instead of using a self-report method. Self-reported data may limit the accuracy of findings due to potential biases in participant responses, such as social desirability or lack of self-awareness. That is why the present study asked the youth questions and got answers in real time in an environment where participants felt emotionally safe enough to express their true feelings as a group.

A similar study was done by Bonell et al. (2021) that sought to investigate how the sexual, physical and mental health of youth who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) compared to youth who work or study. The study found that NEET youth were in poorer general and mental health (Bonell et al., 2021). The study found precarious behaviours congregated in NEET men but not in NEET women (Bonell et al., 2021). All NEET experienced poorer mental and general health outcomes (Bonell et al., 2021). Risky behaviours amongst men and poor health outcomes clustered amongst women were found in those who were NEET (Bonell et al., 2021). The study did not differentiate NEET who were not employed

as either seeking employment actively or not, however, the previous study by Bonell et al. (2021) does give insight into why the OLFS and unemployed individuals would still have similar health outcomes even when they are not differentiated in another study. Once again those who are not employed in the youth demographic have poorer mental health than those who are working, in training or are studying.

In the United States there was a study done during Covid-19 by Clomax et al. (2021), the study was about evaluating whether unemployment and underemployment are linked with mental distress. Furthermore, the study searched for whether employment insecurity and its mental health consequences are disproportionately concentrated among specific demographics during the pandemic. In their findings they found that underemployed people, due to the pandemic, and unemployed people have increased odds of having depression and anxiety (Clomax et al., 2021). There were no significant differences between the two, however, the underemployed having similar mental health impacts as those who were unemployed during the pandemic. The finding reinforces the findings of Akter et al. (2020) regarding how underemployed individuals and unemployed individuals have similar mental health problems though having different experiences with employment.

Bryan et al. (2023) provided a comprehensive meta-analysis of 29 studies, confirming a consistent association between unemployment and diminished well-being across multiple national contexts. The study was based on 46 samples from 29 studies published between the years 1990 - 2020. In agreement with previous literature, this study showed that unemployed people experience lower well-being than those who are employed. The study also determined that the longer the unemployment period is then the greater the impact (Bryan et al., 2023). The meta-analysis pointed to there being a potential causal relationship between unemployment and well-being. The link is suggested to be found in the wider micro and macro social/environmental factors when discussing well-being of the unemployed (Bryan et al., 2023). This study suggests that there are other factors that contribute to the link between unemployment and poor mental health.

The previously mentioned studies by Clomax et al. (2021) and Bonell et al. (2021) have suggested that a lack of purpose may be affecting both men and women who are unemployed or not employed. This lack of purpose could be a factor in the resulting poor mental health in youth, though a feeling of lacking purpose could occur whether one is employed or not. However, lack of purpose is suggested to occur when youth are not in employment, training or

schooling (Bonell et al., 2021). Additionally, the literature by Guhn et al. (2020) and Bonell et al. (2021) states that youth when placed in a position where they are not able to support themselves become deviant and express behaviours that do not support their physical or mental health. The psychological consequences can be related back to stress as being a psychological consequence experienced by youth who are unemployed and experiencing strenuous circumstances (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). That type of major stress over time can lead to depressive symptoms and depression to be triggered in youth (Ingram & Luxton, 2005).

2.7 Unemployment's psychological consequences

Employment not only provides for economic gain but also elevates a person's social standing and sense of dignity (Sage, 2017, as cited by Mayekiso & Obioha, 2022). Unemployment in relation to mental well-being and other indicators of psychological wellness, most studies lean towards the rationale that unemployment does contribute to negative psychological experiences. Unfortunately, the nuanced psychological experience of youth unemployment in South Africa remains underrepresented in existing literature. However, there has been enough evidence shown that unemployment produces negative psychological impacts.

In a study done by Bryan et al. (2023) they explored longitudinal evidence on the relationship between unemployment and well-being. Their findings are restricted to being done on a sample of the economies in Europe, the UK, the US and Australia (Bryan et al., 2023). The study found that men were more negatively affected by unemployment than women, largely due to societal expectations linked to the male breadwinner role. Men's identity being stressed on their work centrally (Bryan et al., 2023). Countries where men are characterized by conservative gender roles, mostly the men suffered more from unemployment (Bryan et al., 2023). To coincide with that they also found that in these countries where the gender inequality index was low the men actually had more psychological damage caused by unemployment (Bryan et al., 2023).

Bryan et al. (2023) found that it does not matter how long an individual experiences unemployment, they still experience the negative impacts to their well-being. It could be suggested that there may be different levels of severity of negative impacts, but regardless of length of unemployment the negative impacts are experienced, nonetheless. Bryan et al. (2023) made it clear that those who are unemployed for a longer period experienced more damage than those who experienced it for a shorter period. The longer these individuals are left unemployed then the longer they experience harm to their well-being, poorer mental well-being

over time. Negative impacts become exacerbated and a large drop in life-satisfaction is experienced (Bryan et al., 2023).

Mukuku and Phiri (2020) investigated whether unemployment may be aggravating the suicide rates rising in South Africa. They mention that after the global financial crisis between 2007-2008 the suicides rose, South African male youth were the ones to take their lives more so than female youth (Mukuku & Phiri, 2020). They also found that in urban areas men who failed to become employed, while subjected to conservative gender roles such as being viewed as a breadwinner, were most likely to take their own lives (Mukuku & Phiri, 2020). Females with low education were the most vulnerable in the study (Mukuku & Phiri, 2020). There were other factors contributing to suicide rates in South Africa that the Mukuku and Phiri (2020) considered in their study. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was used as a standard of measure of standard of living; GDP was considered a contributing factor towards suicide rates in the study. A lower GDP per capita rates were considered a greater contributing factor of suicide rates (Mukuku & Phiri, 2020). Inflation and divorce were also considered in the study as additional contributing factors to suicide rate (Mukuku & Phiri, 2020). The study came to find that unemployment was insignificant as a factor on the suicide rates, they state that GDP, divorce and inflation were the most significant contributing factors (Mukuku & Phiri, 2020). However, the study does not take a nuanced view of the factors and how those different factors interact with one another. GDP being very low and inflation being high have great consequences for the South African workforce and work opportunities (Mukuku & Phiri, 2020).

Given the current inflation and economic pressures, it is likely that many individuals are underemployed, a condition that continues to contribute to psychological distress. People generally experiencing a poor living standard in South Africa. Unemployment affects both the individual and the economy within South Africa. Therefore, though on paper unemployment is not as significant, the current study counters that it is more significant when the more experienced-based descriptions of unemployment are expressed by those living it. A more nuanced take on unemployment and well-being is found in a study done by Mayekiso and Obioha (2022) where they did a survey-based data study of anti-social behaviour related encounters of unemployment in Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The study revealed dishonesty as the most prevalent anti-social behaviour among the participants, most of the unemployed people used dishonest means to achieve social and economic goals (Mayekiso & Obioha, 2022). Participants showed that most resorted to alcohol

for comfort due to not being able to cope with their well-being when unemployed. Majority of participants did not resort to criminality to achieve socio-economic relief, however, 30.6% stated they did sometimes. Unfortunately, 7.6% stated they always do, that brought to light the reality of the levels of desperation unemployed people achieve to meet economic and social goals (Mayekiso & Obioha, 2022). Majority of participants stated that they do not get support from others, 84.7% of respondents stated that. Community perceptions of the majority of respondents were of being perceived as lazy which created a further challenge while experiencing unemployment and while being unsupported (Mayekiso & Obioha, 2022). Furthermore, to discuss how unemployment can lead to continued unemployment (Bryan et al., 2023) they found that most participants struggle to have money to apply for jobs.

The study suggests that those who are unemployed are experiencing very poor living standards, though in the minority of responses participants experienced lack of maintained shelter, hunger before bed, inability to purchase clothing and lack of money (Mayekiso & Obioha, 2022). Majority of participants expressed a sense of hope for future employment, however, were experiencing bitterness, disappointment, frustration, inequality and helplessness in regard to unemployment (Mayekiso & Obioha, 2022). This suggested that there is a high level of resilience for so many to still feel positive about future employment ‘sometimes’, however, only 3% of participants felt positive always (Mayekiso & Obioha, 2022). These results suggested also that the certainty for employment is weak but not dead, considering the rates of unemployment in the country as a whole, this could be a shared sentiment amongst youth in Johannesburg as well.

2.8 South Africa’s systems of unemployment

In South Africa there have been various forms of correction of the past actions taken and their consequences. Apartheid ended in 1994 and as time continues to pass the corrections continued to be made, however, the past may not be blamed for the current day strife experienced by youth. Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) was introduced to redress historical inequalities by encouraging inclusive hiring practices. However, the policy’s current effectiveness in improving youth employment outcomes remains a topic of debate. BBBEE’s purpose was to reduce racial/sex biases and inspire fairness (DTIC, 2025), however, whether it is still necessary is arguable due to the fact that the population dominant race is still Black people. While racial dynamics remain a topic in South Africa’s labour market, this study

primarily focuses on the economic and psychological dimensions of youth unemployment in Johannesburg and contributing government infrastructure.

2.9 Conclusion

Through examining the previous literature there were mostly similarities found in regards to how most of the found literature discuss youth unemployment psychologically and infrastructurally. The literature provided more insight into the various ways in which youth are mentally affected by unemployment and how their mental state is compromised due to unemployment. Though most of the literature reinforced each other's findings, they were reinforced due to the different literature filling in the gaps of one another, thus expanding the total and holistic understanding of how unemployment brings various types of mental strains and in different ways similar to how unemployment affects individuals differently. Some may experience loneliness or alienation due to a lack of support and others may not feel lonely because of unemployment but may feel depression or sadness due to the emotional stress of unemployment.

The past literature also contextualized the reality of youth unemployment from different perspectives; socially, developmentally, globally, continentally and in the South African context. The previous literature indicates that male and females experience youth unemployment differently due to males having a greater social pressure to be breadwinners or providers in society even in different cultural settings. The literature supported that youth unemployment can lead to behaviours such as criminal behaviour, substance use/abuse and psychological stress that can have physical manifestations, poor physical health. The state's economic reasons for unemployment are briefly discussed, however, the present study would rather discuss the macro-economic reasons as a source of frustration that contributes to the mental stress that affects the unemployed because the state of a nation is not something youth are unaware of and can be a contributor of their deeper feelings on unemployment. The past literature reinforces the psychological effect unemployment has on youth that the present study seeks to understand on a more conversational level. The stress diathesis theory will give further insight into how these psychological impacts occur and why they do.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the psychological theory underpinning the study and explains how it supports the exploration of youth unemployment's psychological impacts. The Diathesis-Stress Model is explained in this chapter. This study applies the Diathesis-Stress Model to explore how socio-economic stressors associated with unemployment contribute to negative psychological outcomes among youth, thus affecting their life satisfaction. Youth could have predispositions to mental illness and stress which could trigger mental illness or progress it as well, however, it is important to note that not all people have the same thresholds for stress. The threshold discussed in relation to the threshold model of the Diathesis-Stress Model states that major stressors and minor stressors could affect people differently which is subjective to personal experiences. In this study the predispositions that is environmental is unemployment (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). According to the stress model, being unemployed is a persistent stressor that has a detrimental effect on one's health. Economic factors such as quality of life, job status and financial status will be discussed in relation to stress and the vulnerability to psychological distress amongst unemployed youth.

3.2 Diathesis-Stress Model

The Diathesis-Stress Model serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. Initially developed in the context of schizophrenia research, the model has broader applicability in understanding how predisposition vulnerabilities interact with external stressors to produce psychological distress (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). Meehl, Bleuler, and Rosenthal in the 1960s developed the terminology "diathesis-stress interaction" (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). Diathesis, or vulnerability, is discussed psychologically as a predisposition factor or factors that could make one susceptible to developing psychological disorders or mental illness, including genetic, past life events and biological factors (Sussman, 2023). Stress is defined as exposure to significant life events or chronic environmental pressures that may trigger the onset of mental illness. Examples include trauma, daily life stressors, and unmanaged pre-existing conditions.

Though there is subjectivity to what stressors could lead to mental/mood disorders and predispositions to those mental/mood disorders vary from individual to individual. There is still a way to categorize stressors from major stressors to minor stressors, temporal factors (time-related) and qualitative characteristics (desirable or undesirable stressors) that can be used to better understand this model in relation to the study (Monroe & Simons, 1991). In this

study the Diathesis-Stress Model will be used to discuss how the socio-economic stress of unemployment could have psychological effects that could result in negative psychological consequences amongst youth, thus affecting their life satisfaction. Youth could have predispositions to mental illness and stress which could trigger mental illness or progress it as well, however, it is important to note that not all people have the same thresholds for stress. The threshold discussed in relation to the threshold model of the Diathesis-Stress Model states that major stressors and minor stressors could affect people differently which is subjective to personal experiences. In this study, unemployment is treated as a chronic environmental stressor. The diathesis refers to underlying vulnerabilities that may predispose individuals to mental health challenges under such stress (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). According to the stress model, being unemployed is a persistent stressor that has a detrimental effect on one's health. Economic factors such as quality of life, job status and financial status will be discussed in relation to stress and the vulnerability to psychological distress amongst unemployed youth.

According to the Diathesis-Stress Model, diatheses interact with stress to bring about mental illness. The model is involved in the debate of “Nature vs Nurture” in psychopathology by providing an account of how both can be present in giving rise to a disorder (Sussman, 2023). The model has found success in the study of schizophrenia, a disorder with both hereditary and environmental factors present (Ferryhough & Jones, 2006). In Hymel and Swearer’s (2015) study, how the Diathesis-Stress Model was used to understand the psychology of bullying for both the victim and the bully. The Diathesis-Stress Model was used and bullying was classified as a stressful life event accompanied by other social stressors. They found that stressful life events can be ignited by biological vulnerabilities and can activate cognitive vulnerabilities, leading to more significant negative outcomes for the individual (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). The vulnerabilities were brought forward by the life stressor of bullying. This study shows how stress can psychologically impact people negatively by making them more vulnerable to other negative feelings and thoughts. The Diathesis-Stress Model was used to understand the complexity of stress and how that stress affected both the bully (risk factors) and victim (protective factors) engagement and interventions (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Helps et al. (2023) aimed to test a Diathesis-Stress Model whereby self-criticism interacts with monthly perceived stress to predict same-month or next-month internalizing problems, including depression, anxiety, non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), and suicidal ideation, in students transitioning to university. The results were consistent with the Diathesis-Stress Model; self-criticism strengthened the associations between stress and same-month depression and anxiety.

Helps et al. (2023) concluded that students who experienced self-criticism were more vulnerable to internalizing problems while transitioning to university, experiencing more stress than the norm. Stress was found to allow for more negative outcomes to surface; rises in depression and anxiety were more immediate (Helps et al., 2023).

The Model was used by Alexander et al. (2024) to analyse Grey Matter Volume changes in response to stress, a control group of healthy people and another group of people with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) were used in the study. It was found that Major Depressive Disorder patients with higher levels of childhood maltreatment and at least one depressive episode during the 2-year interval, compared to those without an episode and Healthy Controls, showed Grey Matter Volume increases in these areas with increasing stressful life events (Alexander et al., 2024). This finding suggested that the MDD patients experienced significant structural remodelling in these areas of the brain after exposure to stressful life events, whereas the other groups indicated potential neurobiological adaptive mechanisms in response to the stress (Alexander et al., 2024). This study biologically displayed how stress can affect parts of the brain and how past experiences create vulnerabilities to negative psychological impacts. When life stressors were introduced those with greater vulnerabilities were made more vulnerable because of the current stress, other groups did have a response to the stress but rather adapted to it (Alexander et al., 2024). This displays how stress affects people differently and how it can contribute to negative psychological experiences. Stress is more impactful than discussed in other psychological papers.

Moreover, depression was also found to be present when diatheses are present in combination with impactful life events. In the study it was supported that the Diathesis-Stress Model can explain the occurrence of depression (Bywaters et al., 2020). This model is appropriate for a qualitative study aiming to interpret how external stressors, such as prolonged unemployment, lead to adverse psychological outcomes. This model can be used to describe and explore the psychological impacts the study seeks. Existing literature supports the use of the Diathesis-Stress Model to explain the emergence of psychological symptoms in response to unemployment-related stress. The studies discussed embraced a mixed methods approach to their respective studies, therefore, the theoretical framework can be used to explain the possible psychological impacts found from the experience of unemployment.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter explained how the Diathesis-Stress Model suggests that youth unemployment is a major stressor to the youth and can potentially be predisposing them to other negative psychological impacts. The theory posits that stress may lead these youth to feel depressed, lonely, experience low self-esteem and could predispose them further to more serious mental conditions that individuals may already have an innate predisposition to. This theory assumes that stress is the catalyst of negative psychological impacts on the individual and emphasises that the type of stress experienced is relevant to the degree to which individuals are psychologically affected. This theoretical framework supports a deeper understanding of not only the psychological symptoms experienced by unemployed youth but also the underlying mechanisms contributing to these outcomes. Why they feel how they feel? What is the source of those mental strains? A more important question is, how will this study be executed? In the following chapter such clarity will be provided.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology, detailing the study's design, sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures. The chapter will present how the research uses the Qualitative approach methods. The interpretivism paradigm will be discussed and the choice of this paradigm will be explained. The population and sampling methods are shown and an explanation on why the chosen ones are applicable to the study. Therefore, the eight participants for each focus group will be discussed in how they meet criteria to be considered for the study and the purposive sampling method used to choose the chosen inclusion criteria. The chapter describes the data collection method and data analysis method. What and how the focus groups were conducted is described in this chapter and the thematic content analysis method used to report the data collected from the focus groups. How the focus groups came to be will also be described in this chapter thus giving more insight in the data collection strategy. The trustworthiness and ethical considerations are provided in this chapter clearly.

4.2 Research approach and design

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research approach to investigate the psychological impacts of youth unemployment. Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, the social psychologist and market researcher, is considered the 'father of qualitative research' (American Sociological Association, n.d.). Qualitative research is used to explore and give deeper insights into the occurring phenomena, not focusing on statistical and numerical aspects in quantitative research (Nassaji, 2020). This approach seeks to explore and understand phenomena instead of manipulating and explaining variables. It has an emphasis on the process and patterns developed from data rather than focusing on the product or outcome of the study (Nassaji, 2020).

Qualitative research seeks to generate generalizations, hypotheses, investigate and understand data (Brannan et al., 2017). The qualitative method focuses on humanistic, descriptive, and qualitative characteristics of phenomena (Bhangu et al., 2023). Qualitative research was selected for its ability to capture complex social phenomena through subjective interpretation and thematic analysis. The qualitative approach is practical when the researcher seeks to uncover the “who, what or where” of events or experiences especially when describing phenomena under investigation (Turale, 2020). Through qualitative research methods non

quantifiable phenomena can be understood (Bhangu et al., 2023). Approaching research open-endedly assists qualitative researchers and was essential in the analysis of the data of the present study. Qualitative techniques allow for subjects to be understood through objective analysis from multiple vantage points, the approach is cautious of predetermined notions of the researcher that could affect the object integrity of the study (Bhangu et al., 2023). Qualitative research techniques make it possible to move from the individual as a unit of analysis to the larger societal and structural forces at work (Bhang et al., 2023). A limitation of qualitative research is that since it is not numerically based which makes pinning down phenomena very difficult because qualitative research looks at relationships and experiences that can make the research more subjective by nature even when objectivity is still required (Bhangu et al., 2023).

4.3 Research paradigm

A paradigm is made up of several components including ontology, epistemology and axiology (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Each of the components of a paradigm will briefly be defined and explained in relation to the chosen paradigm. This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises understanding human experiences through subjective meanings and social contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Interpretivism the epistemology is the study of how a researcher attempts to gain knowledge in order to arrive at reality or truth (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The ontology states interpretivism adopts a relativism-based ontology, according to which reality is formed in a subjective manner. The axiology states that the research will be categorized as subjective because the researcher cannot be objective or separated. (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

In qualitative research, interpretivism is used to investigate phenomena while presuming that reality is subjective (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). People are ruled by personal opposing and underlying structures, such as social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender; these differences in structures create different experiences of reality (AbuBakar et al., 2015). People are seen as social beings who create meaning and make sense of their worlds through the lens of their experience of reality. Thus, reality can only be grasped imperfectly, however, subjectivism is still required even if reality and the interpretations of reality are inherently subjective (AbuBakar et al., 2015).

Interpretivism allows the researcher to acknowledge subjectivity while striving for analytical rigour in interpreting participants' experiences. By doing so it allows the researcher more

freedom to interpret data at a “human level”. The paradigm fits the study because of the realism-based ontology which allows for a more realistic analysis to be done. The paradigm also assists with the Thematic content analysis to follow which requires the researcher to engage with the data personally. The subjectivity of the paradigm may be seen as a limitation to good research acts, however, for this study this level of subjectivity is required to effectively analyse the data.

4.4 Population and sampling

The population for this study included unemployed youth in Johannesburg between the ages of 18 and 34, consistent with the national definition of youth in South Africa. A minimum education level of matriculation or diploma from high school is required. This population was chosen because from it a sample can be found that will represent the general population of unemployed youth in Johannesburg to be used to make generalizations of the population. Purposive non-probability sampling was employed to recruit participants who met the study’s specific inclusion criteria, participant selection will not be random (Bywaters et al., 2020). It is a sampling method where participants are selected based on attributes that are necessary for the sample. Put differently, purposive sampling involves "on purpose" participant selection (Bywaters et al., 2020). Purposive sampling is used to select participants who are most likely to produce useful information for the study and in this study, it is used because a specific group of people hold the ideas and views necessary to achieve the goals of the study (Bywaters et al., 2020). A demographic questionnaire was used to verify participant eligibility based on the study’s inclusion criteria. In qualitative research, usually small and purposefully selected sample may be used when the aim is to increase the depth of understanding (Bywaters et al., 2020). The researcher aimed for a demographically representative sample to be used in the study.

4.5 Data collection methods

Data was be collected by conducting a focus group that consisted of unemployed youth in Johannesburg. Due to the dynamic nature of focus group discussions, it was necessary to establish clear ground rules and use a structured interview guide (Cortini et al., 2019). The study was conducted by use of a focus group interview schedule and a demographic questionnaire for data collection to later be analysed thematically. Focus groups are defined as conversational gatherings intended to identify and probe into the opinions and viewpoints of a

designated group of people concerning a particular subject and field of interest (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Morgan, 1996; Kritzinger, 1995, as cited Crump et al., 2007). The focus group questions guide were used as a tool to gain information from participants. A secondary tool was questions relating to the demographic which was given to participants as well prior to the focus group via email correspondence to both send out and receive answers to the demographic questions.

The participants were thanked once the point of saturation had been met or when the discussion reaches its natural end after the last question is discussed. The participants were thanked for their participation, time and effort they lend to the research. Afterwards the participants will be asked if they have any thoughts about the session, the focus group experience and asked how they felt by the end of the session. This was a brief debriefing or open discussion by participants prior to leaving the session and being thanked. Afterwards, the participants and the session were dismissed. Participants were also informed that if they have any questions for the researcher were free to do so.

The focus group environment was designed to be open, respectful, and non-threatening to encourage honest participation. The data collected is the results of the discussions and interactions between the participants (Crump et al., 2007). A focus group is usually made up of 8 - 12 participants, however, Prince and Davies (2001, as cited by Yayeh, 2021) explain that small-sized groups between 4 and 6 participants are productive because a small-size group allows every participant to actively partake in the discussion thus inspiring different ideas to be created on the topic during the discussion (Yayeh, 2021). It was found that larger groups tend to produce more ideas compared to a group of 4 participants (Fern, 1982 as cited by Cortini et al., 2019). The moderator's efficiency is not affected by the number of participants (Fern, 1982 as cited by Cortini et al., 2019). Fern (1982) suggests numerically it is better to have smaller focus groups and also prefers individual interviews over focus groups. However, qualitatively a focus group is used to observe and point out group interactions rather than evaluate the number of ideas generated. In the present study there will be use of one large focus group consisting of 8 – 12 participants.

In the present study the researcher over recruited subjects by 20% of the desired number of participants which is a normal practice with focus groups (Morgan, 1993; Greenbaum, 1998 as cited by Cortini et al., 2019). By over-recruiting, in the case of participants withdrawal or cancellation the focus group can still be within the numerical size of the participants in a full

focus group. Therefore, the researcher will recruit 14 participants so that in the case of participants not attending the session there would still be a good number of participants (between 8 – 12 participants) for the focus group. It is advised to consider the sensitivity of the study's themes, social classes of participants and researcher too when planning a focus group (Farquhar, 1999 as cited by Cortini et al., 2019). The experience of unemployment is not uncommon in South Africa especially amongst the group demographic with 4 out of five youth being unemployed currently (Englert et al., 2020), therefore, having it be so common it may not be too sensitive for participants to discuss as a group.

A study by Husain (2023) found that participants wanted their identity to be protected due to the perception participants had of unemployment, it being a delicate and intimate issue (Zuma, 2019 as cited by Husain, 2023), therefore, in this study confidentiality will be ensured due to the sensitivity of the topic to protect participants. The issue of differing social classes will be alleviated by having at least 12 participants so that the differences in social class can be outweighed (Davis, 1982 as cited by Cortini et al., 2019), therefore, a larger group would be better in such cases. This will also allow for the focus group to consist of participants of differing backgrounds and experiences with unemployment. However, a large group can still be considered large when ranging from 8 or more participants, therefore, in this study the focus group will remain of 8 – 12 participants.

The line of questioning, 14 questions, were structured in line with the research questions in order for them to be answered for the purpose of the study. The location of the session was more formal so as to inspire a more regular turn taking format of discussion since the location's structural characteristics will communicate something to participants which could set the tone for discussion prior to the session (Cortini et al., 2019). The session took place at a neutral and safe environment close enough for participants to travel to in the selected area in Gauteng.

Data from the focus groups were collected and analysed thematically to identify psychological impacts associated with youth unemployment. Unemployment is a subjective and social experience and by use of a focus group unemployment can be interpreted through the demographic's lens. The focus groups are audio recorded from the beginning of the session until the end of the session. The audio recording is then transcribed and be the collected data for later thematic analysis. Focus group discussions are used in qualitative research and the questions asked need to be well thought out and guided by the "who, what, where and why" of an event or experience (Turale, 2020). The focus group discussion is a suitable tool to collect

data for this qualitative study and then can be analysed simultaneously to correct errors or omissions (Turale, 2020).

4.5.1 The Application of the Data Collection Method

The study was posted online, the contact details of the researcher were present on the posts. Voluntary participation is the only participation that was accepted for participants to take part in the study. When volunteers contacted the researcher, they were sent a demographics question sheet and participation consent form (Annexure P) which included all information about the study and their role in it. 8 participants were chosen for each focus group, through active communication from the researcher a time and place were discussed between the researcher and participants on where and when the participants would be able and available to participate in the study. Participants were sent the information regarding the venue and time once decided. Demographic questionnaires were distributed to participants prior to the focus group sessions to ensure they met the study's inclusion criteria. The first focus group was held at Community lead Animal welfare (CLAW) and included the volunteers of the organization where the gatekeeper's letter (Annexure H) was signed by the manager and where participants were most able to travel to for the focus groups. The second group, the same conversations and discussions with participants were done regarding time and place and it was decided to have the focus group at Jackal creek Golf estate as it was a manageable distance for participants to travel to and participants agreed to meet at the suggested booked venue.

Prior to holding the focus group the researcher, with guidance from supervisors, was taught how to conduct a focus group. This acted as a refresher and assisted me in so far as attending to the dynamics in Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The researcher received guidance on moderating focus groups, including strategies for encouraging participation and ensuring a respectful environment. Data was gained through audio recordings from the focus groups, as well as from observation. Each focus group lasted between 1 – 2 hours. Participants received a R100 reimbursement to cover travel expenses. After the focus group concluded the participants were to be thanked again for their voluntary participation. All recordings and transcripts were saved onto the researcher's password protected personal laptop and phone. Audio recordings were transcribed so that the data is textual for analysis purposes. Lastly the researcher used Thematic content analysis (TCA) to analyse the data was used for the final report of the present study.

4.5.2 Focus group

Focus groups were selected to facilitate dynamic discussions that reveal participants' perspectives on youth unemployment (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Morgan, 1996; Kitzinger, 1995, as cited by Crump et al., 2007). Focus groups provide an opportunity to unitize qualitative techniques because focus groups allow for discussion which can assist in the exploration of the subject (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Morgan, 1996; Kitzinger, 1995, as cited by Crump et al., 2007). The qualitative approach positions focus groups as a valuable method for capturing rich, context-specific insights. Focus groups are used in the qualitative approach because it allows for the researcher to increase the sample size. It is used as an exploratory tool whose results are required to be verified by qualitative study (Freitas et al., 1998).

The focus group is a qualitative research tool used to search for answers to “how an experiences, ideas, or events are viewed by people?” (Freitas et al., 1998). By using a focus group, the researcher can have a wider range of input from people in different socio-economic groups, schooling and experiences. A focus group was used because the researcher aimed to truly understand the psychological position youth find themselves in South Africa and to understand the youth the first step would be towards listening to their feelings towards unemployment as youth. That perspective can be gained more honestly, in relation to actual youth experiences, through a focus group where those youth can further discuss their feelings amongst those with similar experiences. By doing so the root feelings that those youth experience can be deduced and there can be a clearer understanding of the psychological challenges of being an unemployed youth in South Africa.

4.6 Data analysis methods

Thematic content analysis is used in this explorative present research using data collected through recordings. Those recordings are to be transcribed verbatim. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data (Anderson, 2007). A process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. The qualitative data in this study are to be transcribed audio recordings of two focus groups. Thematic content analysis is limited to textual data, the textual data of the transcribed focus groups. Thematic content analysis identifies common themes in the text of data to be analysed (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). This form of analysis was applied in the qualitative research because of its flexibility.

Thematic content analysis is not limited to any particular epistemology, paradigms or theoretical perspectives which allows the interpretivism paradigm to be used as well due to the analysis method being flexible to many forms of research and not limited (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). This analysis method was chosen because the data requires interpretation, and this method allows for that, however, must maintain a level of objectivity with a minimum amount of researcher subjectivity. The themes and patterns in the data will be named which would directly reflect the data provided, these themes and patterns will require interpretation by researcher in order to name the patterns and themes in the data (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). There are six steps to achieve thematic content analysis namely: (Step 1) familiarity with the data, (step 2) creating initial codes, (step 3) find themes, (step 4) review themes, (step 5) define themes and (step 6) write-up (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017).

Step 1 required the researcher to become very familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts, this is where the researcher can make initial impressions of the data and make notes, but the aim is to become very familiar with the transcripts collected.

Step 2 required the researcher to generate initial codes meaning the researcher must organise the data in a meaningful and systematic way (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). This is taking the large quantity of data and organizing it into smaller chunks where meaning can be derived from data. With the thematic method the data was analysed and coded in a way that is relevant to the research.

Step 3 is when the themes and patterns of data are searched for by the researcher. The themes are patterns that contain something significant or interesting relating to the data and research questions. A theme would be anything that is significant to the data (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). In the beginnings of the thematic analysis the researcher would notice overlap in the data at the second step especially with a small sample size for research and these would be viewed as preliminary themes which are yet to be defined properly.

Step 4 is when the preliminary views identified were reviewed, developed and modified. This is where the researcher compares the themes to the data and sees if the themes are really supported by the data (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). Each theme must be distinct from each other and coherent. This is where the researcher reviews whether the themes really work, make sense, and see if the themes work across all collected texts. The themes are reviewed as to whether they are coherent, comprehensive, and significant to data and research questions.

Step 5 is when the themes are defined and at the final stage of refinement (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). The researcher asks themselves what are the themes conveying? Do the themes relate to each other? What is the theme? How do the themes relate to the topic?

Step 6 is done at the end of the research where the analysis of data is reported on after data has been analysed.

In this study the thematic content analysis method allows for data to go through a process where the themes and patterns are identified, interpreted and reviewed by the researcher. This analysis method works well for this explorative form of research. This method is relevant to the current study because the study requires interpretation as it is secondary research, and it gives the researcher more freedom to derive meaning from large amounts of data into a structural format without forfeiting a level of objectivity. The strength of this method is that it is flexible and reachable format of analysis and allows for the researcher to take large data and structure it in an organized manner (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

The researcher will follow the steps in the sequence of the thematic content analysis process, read the data and then read it over again five times to truly get a sense of the data. The weakness of the method is that its flexibility can lead to inconsistencies and that can lead to deficiency of comprehensibility while creating patterns derived out of data. This method is best for the study because this form of study on youth in relation to unemployment and its psychological impacts is not as vastly researched as other topics on youth. Thematic analysis was used in a qualitative study by Husain (2023) and themes were derived from the interviews done and resulted in psychological issues becoming a theme in the findings where it was found that participants experienced suicidal ideation, stress, insomnia and feeling drained.

Though the study did not only focus on psychological factors, but this is also a good example of a similar outcome being found in that study which assists in justifying the use of thematic content analysis as well from transcriptions of dialogue (Husain, 2023). The study also showed how effective thematic analysis can be, the data was excellently discussed by use of themes thus making the findings coherent and clear. Therefore, this analysis method is best for a study which has not been fully explored in South African academic literature. It is important for the transferability of the results to be maintained, therefore, the researcher must select participants according to a detailed criterion, also provided by the researcher.

4.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is achieved through showing credibility, transparency, dependability and conformability (Stahl & King, 2020). Each of these factors of trustworthiness will be described and how each factor will be achieved will be briefly discussed. The stability of data throughout time and under various circumstances is referred to as **Dependability** (Elo et al., 2014). **Conformability** refers to how the data truthfully represents the information that is provided by participants, it also refers to the interpretations of the data not being fabricated (Elo et al., 2014). The researcher kept all interpretations as objective as possible to still interpret the original data. **Transferability** refers to the potential for extrapolation, qualitative inquiry seeks to expand understanding by findings being able to be transferred from one context to another (Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher was required to give heavily detailed descriptions including relevant information about the field work location (Stahl & King, 2020). **Credibility** deals with the focus of the research, it refers to the extent of confidence in the data conveying the intended subject of research (Polit & Beck, 2012). From the stance of creating credibility, participants were well described (Stahl & King, 2020) as to how they fit into the purpose of the research.

Researcher reflexivity was considered throughout analysis. Researcher prejudice and assumptions are always present in research, it is unrealistic to discard that (Stahl & King, 2020). Qualitative research requires the values and enthusiasm of the researcher for proper engagement in the study, however, it is important that the researcher monitors their personal passions influencing the study and still adhere to the principles of good research acts (Stahl & King, 2020). By being so immersed in the research and still maintaining the principles of good research fosters a greater degree of confidence in the trustworthiness of the study, provided researchers to be self-reflective throughout the research project (Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher kept the principles of good research to guide their analysis and all other parts of the study, balancing objectivity and subjectivity to produce the best Interpretations of the data.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics deals with the moral issues related to conducting research and what the researcher ought to do (Bellaleme et al., 2023). The participants were the number one priority of the researcher, the study itself comes second to that (Bellaleme et al., 2023). The well-being of the participants was of most importance, this means that if a choice must be made between harming the study

or the participants, the study will be sacrificed in favour of participants. The researcher aimed to meet all and referred to ethical guidelines to ensure good research practices/principles were adhered to (Bellalem et al., 2023). Below guidelines are discussed pertaining to this qualitative study. The researcher made sure to gain informed consent from all participants and gained access to other participants by use of a gatekeeper letter that gave permission for the researcher to recruit participants from an organization. The participants were made fully informed before voluntarily participating. Voluntary informed consent was given to the researcher by every participant that participated in the study before data collection (Bellalem et al., 2023).

The focus groups were recorded by the researcher through the researcher's phone which was password protected. Both the audio and transcriptions were password protected. Confidentiality of participant information was made guaranteed. The identity of the participants was not shared, or included in the study, except the researcher and the researchers' supervisors who have access to the study data through the researcher (Bellalem et al., 2023). Research participants were given clear and complete information about the aim and objectives of the study, procedures, potential outcomes and the nature of their involvement and any associated risks of partaking in the study (Bellalem et al., 2023). Participants were made aware that they could exit and quit the study at any point. All participants were willing participants who chose to participate. No incentives/compensation (monetary or otherwise) were given to participants. However, the travel costs were provided to them by the researcher before the focus group sessions began. The amount total of R100 for travel costs.

Participants were informed that if they were triggered "The Family Life Centre" also known as Family South Africa (FAMSA), which is a registered non-profit organisation that offers free counselling services (including individual counselling), their contact details were provided to the participants. Participants are being kept aware of the progress of the research. All will receive a copy of the transcript to prevent misinterpretations and fabrications of findings. A summary of the collected data that will be analysed will also be provided to participants which is viewed as a good research practice (Bellalem et al., 2023). Feedback from participants at any stage of the study will be received so that any adjustments will be made if necessary. Transparency is the guiding principle throughout the research process.

The potential for researcher bias is a limitation, like researcher bias, the subjective nature of the research may result in more subjectivity than desired which may limit the study due to human error, preconceptions and personal life experiences of researcher. The researcher

avoided this happening by continuously seeking guidance from supervisors who assisted in maintaining the good research acts, such as being more objective where subjectivity may have interfered the study. Lastly, the researcher was limited to only asking questions related to the feelings of participants about their unemployment rather than exploring other factors of unemployment. The study only required the researcher to investigate the psychological impacts of unemployment on an internal level.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter of research methodology gave a detailed understanding of how the research was conducted. The chapter will present how the research uses the Qualitative approach methods because this approach allows for data to be interpreted in the research process. The approach allowed for data to be collected in a format that allows for the participants to share their feelings and thoughts regarding their experience of unemployment emotionally. The interpretivism paradigm was discussed in this chapter, this paradigm was chosen because of its perspective that the researcher would require room to subjective interpretation to a small degree due to the nature of the research data collection method. Interpretivism perfectly suits this study because of its realistic take on researcher involvement in analysis of data as well. The population and sampling methods were; the population was the demographic of unemployed youth in Johannesburg South Africa. The sample consisted of 8 participants because it was a conducive amount of people to conduct a fruitful focus group. The sample was chosen through purposive sampling due to the research topic being youth unemployment, therefore, the unemployed youth were purposefully chosen to meet specific criteria to be considered for the study. Participants were required to meet the age limits of 18 – 35 years old, speak English, have matriculated or acquired a high school diploma. The chapter describes the data collection method and data analysis method.

The data was collected by holding two focus groups and the data was analysed through thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis was used because it allows for textual data to be interpreted to draw conclusions, themes and findings for the research that will be reported in this study. Focus groups was the method chosen to collect data because it allowed for the participants to not only speak candidly about their feelings regarding their personal unemployment but also it allowed participants to interact with each other in discussion thus generating more data. It was very important to the researcher that the participants spoke without holding back on admitting the more sensitive parts of being an unemployed youth and as a

group the participants encouraged each other a lot. The researcher wanted participants to be relaxed and being in a space with people who share similar feelings to them made them more comfortable and less judged to express themselves candidly. Further in the chapter the trustworthiness and ethical considerations were provided that described how participants were informed and protected throughout the study. The findings will be presented in the following chapter where the theory, paradigm previously mentioned and the Diathesis-Stress Model will be applied.

Chapter 5: Findings and interpretations of findings

5.1 Introduction

The interpretations of the data and detailed research findings will be provided in this chapter. These findings will be used to form relevant conclusions based on the findings and themes from the data. The participants demographic information will be briefly discussed. Data presentation and analysis will provide information on the thematic content analysis method step by step. From that point of the chapter each step will be described and analysis presented from step one to step six of the Thematic content analysis method. After the last step of the thematic content analysis method the discussion and reporting of findings will be presented, the five main themes will be explained in relation to the data found. Lastly a conclusion of the chapter will be drawn.

5.2 Participant demographic information

Below are the demographic information from both focus groups. This has been presented to allow for more context as to the different ages and education levels among participants. This is necessary to display that all participants met the inclusion criteria and were, thus able to participate.

FOCUS GROUP 1

Respondent A	
Age	28 - 34
Gender	Male
Education level	Bachelor's degree

Respondent B	
Age	18 - 23
Gender	Male
Education level	Bachelor's degree

Respondent C	
Age	24-28
Gender	Female
Education level	High school/matriculation

Respondent D	
Age	24 - 28
Gender	Male

Education level	High school/matriculation
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Respondent E	
Age	28 - 34
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Respondent F	
Age	28 - 34
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Respondent G	
Age	18 - 23
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Respondent H	
Age	18 - 23
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Respondent I	
Age	18 - 23
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

FOCUS GROUP 2

Speaker A	
Age	28 - 34
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Speaker B	
Age	24 - 28
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Speaker C	
Age	24 - 28
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Speaker D	
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Age	28 - 34
Gender	Female
Education level	Master's degree

Speaker E	
Age	24 - 28
Gender	Male
Education level	High school/matriculation

Speaker F	
Age	18 - 23
Gender	Female
Education level	High school/matriculation

Speaker G	
Age	18 - 23
Gender	Female
Education level	High school/matriculation

5.3 Data presentation and analysis

Thematic content analysis is used to analyse the collected transcripts from the two focus groups. This analysis method is used to analyse textual data and is considered a qualitative analysis method. Thematic content analysis identifies common themes in the text of data for analysed (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). The analysis method was used to generate themes and patterns from the data that are named which are required to showcase interpretation done by researcher (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). There are six steps used to achieve thematic content analysis in the study namely: (Step 1) familiarity with the data, (step 2) creating initial codes, (step 3) find themes, (step 4) review themes, (step 5) define themes and (step 6) write-up (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017).

5.4 Familiarisation with the data

In this first step the researcher reviewed the focus group transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data, as part of the thematic analysis process.

5.5 Initial codes

During the process of creating initial codes the researcher noted down the main themes and patterns that were found after the researcher familiarized themselves with the data (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). The initial themes and patterns are seen as the "initial themes", the

commonly brought up points made by participants (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). Initial codes were developed using an inductive approach to capture recurring psychological themes and emotional responses across participants.

Table 1: Initial codes

Psychological impact: negative feeling towards the self. Depression, discontent in life currently, sadness, discontent, suicidal feelings, extreme financial and emotional stress
Perceived as: lazy, unproductive by family
Negative self-perception
Peer pressure
The stress is a continued battle
Fear
Fears of substance abuse
Scared of failing in life
Being compared and seen as lesser than their employed counterparts.
Government failings
Government corruption and everyday people
Lack of faith/trust in government
Lack of government intervention
Poor education system
Poor education systems leave them unprepared for the job market
Foreigners
Aging out of youth
Long term unemployment
Having children as youth adds to the negative psychological impacts
Crime
Men and women experience unemployment differently
Men are burdened
Both men and women experience the stresses of unemployment similarly though
Men and women fair differently in forming romantic relationships when unemployed
Environment differences
Overpopulation

5.6 Finding themes

Step 3 of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) is when the themes and patterns of data were searched for by the researcher. The themes are patterns that contain some significance or interest relating to data and research questions. A theme would be that which is significant to the data (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). In the beginnings of the thematic analysis the researcher would notice overlap in the data at the second step especially with a small sample size for research and these would be viewed as initial themes that the researcher defines at a later step.

The most common themes or commonly/significant points and which research question the themes related to from the discussions from both focus groups are as follows;

Table 2: Themes and patterns

COMMON/SIGNIFICANT THEMES AND PATTERNS
RESEARCH QUESTION 1 Psychological issues caused by unemployment Stress caused by youth unemployment Perceived as not good enough Comparison to employed peers Substance use to avoid the negative feelings caused by unemployment Non conducive environment
RESEARCH QUESTION 2 Lack of government intervention/being failed by government causing unemployment. Government lacks in job creation Poor education is causing unemployment Corruption adds to the issue of unemployment Foreigners taking jobs Age concerns
RESEARCH QUESTION 3 Government failing youth and not creating a good education system Government failings regarding illegal foreigners Government lacking job creation Negative perception from others and themselves Crime manifests from youth unemployment
RESEARCH QUESTION 4 Men and women experience youth unemployment differently

Women are more supported when unemployed

Men feel a greater burden for being unemployed

Men and women both suffer the mental strain of unemployment

5.7 Themes and data

Step 4 is when the preliminary views identified were reviewed, developed and modified. This is where the researcher compared the themes to the data and sees if the themes are really supported by the data (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). This is where the researcher reviews whether the themes make sense and see if the themes work across all collected texts. The themes are reviewed as to whether they are coherent, comprehensive, and significant to data and address the research questions. The themes found through this process, the relevant themes were as follows: “Psychological issues”, “Stress”, “Perceived as not good enough”, “Comparison to employed peers”, “Substance use”, “Lack of government intervention and failing youth”, “Poor education”, “Corruption”, “Foreigners taking jobs”, “Age concerns”, “Crime” and “Men and women experience unemployment differently”. This section presents 12 individual themes. Below are examples from a few key themes.

5.7.1 THEME 1: Psychological issues

“Psychological issues” was found as a theme because it was found in both focus groups that negative feelings such as depression, guilt, shame, suicide, sadness, fears, frustration, physical heart ache, hope for employment, traumatized and anger were found to be commonly discussed in the focus groups. There was great emphasis in the study to discuss the “feelings” of the youth and the most common/most agreed upon sentiments of group participants regarding the youth' feelings while unemployed, which addressed the first research question. Participants consistently described feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and demotivation. One participant in Focus group 2 stated, “you know, just waking up every day and not really doing anything It really isn't”, being “hell”. The presentation of the information from the themes and focus group below demonstrate the above. The next section after the presentation of this information, further discussion on the theme is made. This structure is followed in the presentation of all the themes.

Table 3.1: focus group 1 data “psychological issues” theme

• Sandness

Pg1 "Respondent C: I'm sad" Pg2 "It gives people like a depressions and also we don't we don't know what to do actually because you don't have a choice."
Depression Pg2 "Respondent A: what I feel about unemployment is that it cause a lot of pain. Yeah so, whenever you have pain uh it gives you all those thoughts, the bad thoughts, yeah. You become another person because now you can't. You can't. You can't afford to buy certain things. Yeah, so I think unemployment makes me feel eish sad hey."
False hope while job seeking Pg2 "Respondent C: trying to apply online but then we don't get, we don't even get the response so it gives you a depression while you're at home"
Fear of A.I. taking jobs away even more Pg13 "Respondent A: You know, my personal fear is this. What do you call this? The AI Moderator: AI?" Respondent A: Yeah, now the problem is that our youth, yoh – Respondent D: It does everything for us"
Fear of technology being advanced and leaving job applicants behind with lack of A.I skills Pg13 "Respondent A: yeah you're going to lose. Yeah, we're going to. We're going to suffer. And now the problem is that. They are giving a free a free what you call this a free study for you to learn those things" Pg13 "Respondent A: and some of our youth are not informed about that. And now when that thing's going to be introduced, fully, we're going to suffer. The people who going to to to get jobs are those ones who got the certificate for that particular technology, that is coming. Yeah."
Discontent Pg15 "Respondent D: I feel content, well partially. Partially..." Pg15 "Respondent D: Because of... I feel great about myself, but not great still because...I'm not where I wanna be this very moment. I think yea I'm not fully but a part of me. Yeah" Pg17 "Respondent F: I'm not happy, ma'am eish. Because now I'm close to Like 5 years old. So heish always I'm stressful... so yeah"
Hope Pg 7 "Respondent D: For me personally id say. OK. Let me let me put it this way. People in Joburg they don't wanna work, OK? They don't wanna try finding something that they could use to sustain themselves because cause there's a lot of money in Joburg, I'm not gonna lie there's a lot of money and there are a lot of opportunities, some of them OK, may most of them we need qualifications and all that, but you can do something on your own to sustain yourself. There are hope. There are a lot of things, but in some provinces it's hard. It's really hard. Respondent H: Right. Moderator: We feel like we're kind of better off being in Gauteng and being in Joburg. Respondent D: I think it's much people are much better off being in a in a much p-productive province here, I'd say." Pg 31 "Respondent E: Yes. So that they can be, they can be aware of this situation when they are getting here, when they will be depressed and and end up committing suicide because of their not ready about this situation. Moderator: mmmhmm hey helang! No it was too much (referring to barking) *Group chuckles* Moderator: Sho! Ah no that was too much, right? haaa

Continued laughter

Moderator: But I like what she said. Yeah, not just kind of whether you're schooling now or not. You don't know where it's going to be like.

Respondent E: Yes, just keep on pushing. Don't think you're better than others. Don't think that you are special. Don't...Just keep on working on yourself and yeah."

- Desire for a paying job/ a job is a job as long as it pays/ there are dreamers, defeated and nonchalant

Pg24 "Respondent E: uhhh...For now I don't have any specific job that I need (murmured agreement from other members of group) I need job that I can give me money.

All respondent agree and echo respondent E's statement

Respondent C: mhm

Respondent E: Maybe I can just try the other ones. The other one maybe if I can't, I can't get that enough money for myself, for, for, for my, for my needs. But for now, any job that can come across.

Moderator: Mmm, do you all feel the same?

***Most respondents nodded yes and said yes (voices overlapping) ***

Pg25 "Respondent G: I'm feeling like. I want to do an architect."

Pg25 "Respondent A: If you don't get that job, go and do something, maybe uh buy something and sell that, maybe bring you money and maybe who knows, somebody would say I know I'm taking this breath I'm taking to wherever we pay you such Yeah Yeah, I'm that person. So jobs are tired of knocking, right?"

- Trauma
- Though traumatic they keep trying

Pg24 "Moderator: OK okay. So it's kind of painful. Men and women, and like everyone, really, all of us unemployed youth do we feel that this is traumatic? Do you guys feel like being unemployed? That kind of - we did talk about, like, it depends, you know, how long? So, like 2 months mxm are you are you traumatized? You know but I can imagine over time in years does it feel like trauma like?

Respondent F: yeah

Moderator: Just you just wanna... I'm done with this.

Respondent A: End up being a daily thing

Other members murmur agreement

Respondent D: its rather its rather. It's better failing than t.. than not trying at all. Fine fine If you do it the next time at least you doing with experience. You know what to do, to be done, you go somewhere you improve."

Pg 24 "Respondent E: Trauma, more especially when you're reaching the 35. 35 years - Like now I need to work by myself now there is no any other company that can just hire me, so that's where the trauma starts.

Moderator: So it also just kind of gets worse, as we age, it's -

Respondents simultaneously: Yeah

Moderator: it just gets more and more painful. We have more responsibilities. We have goals.

Respondent A: 100%

Moderator: And just get through this and you said that you have to like take care of yourself and start your own.

Respondent E: Yes. Yeah. That's why you're supposed to be like uhh brilliant the individual. It's not easy If you didn't like practice while in, in, in any ages need to be brilliant.

Moderator: Because we we have no choice but to be

Respondent E: we have no choice."

Table 3.2: focus group 2 data “psychological issues” theme

Feeling bad about being unemployed Pg3 <i>“Speaker G: No. Most of us feel bad neh. But What you can say, some of us believe in ourselves. You know you will be like I always tell myself. Sometimes I like ohh someday or become something because like, I keep focus on myself. I want to try more. Even even though I fail sometimes. But I always pull through you understand, yeah.</i> <i>Moderator: You guys feel like similar sentiment? *question is posed to group*</i> <i>Speaker E: Like even though looking at your background where you're from, you want to change the circumstances. But when it comes to like when you can't get a job, you being unemployed, they think it's on, makes you angrier like every time when you look at your background like you want to become something, you even lose hope on your goals and dreams</i> <i>*All members: Yeah.*</i>
Low self-esteem Pg3 <i>“Speaker E: Like even though looking at your background where you're from, you want to change the circumstances. But when it comes to like when you can't get a job, you being unemployed, they think it's on, makes you angrier like every time when you look at your background like you want to become something, you even lose hope on your goals and dreams</i> <i>*All members: Yeah.*</i> <i>Speaker B: You you're gonna lose a low self- you're gonna have a low self-esteem, yeah.”</i>
Discontent with life Pg25 <i>“Moderator: I think I I know the answer, but I need to ask do you guys feel content with the life right now?</i> <i>All speakers: No</i> <i>Moderator: No, not at all.</i> <i>Speaker F: far from it</i> <i>Moderator: Far...</i> <i>Speaker B: Very far.</i> <i>Moderator: I can see it on your face *referring to speaker C* ayyy man!</i> <i>*Other speakers laugh briefly*</i> <i>Speaker C: This session is making it too too too...</i> <i>*Laughter continues*</i> <i>Speaker B: his facial expressions talk a lot.</i> <i>Moderator: Its deep, I know, I know. It's it- It, it, It hits right here *points at own chest*</i> <i>Speaker C: it hits like straight.</i> <i>*Murmured agreement from other speakers*</i>
Feeling guilty to ask for money from others/family / any money received is for needs not fun Pg3 <i>“Speaker F: I think also ohh sorry to cut you off (moderator: please please) because I mean we all know that as a person there's certain things that you at least want to afford for yourself, with your own money. Umm you might have family members that do come through for you, but you know they can only do much you. Know there's things that, let's say you want to go out with your friends. You know, it's not really. It wouldn't really make much sense to your mother to give you money for you to go out and party with your friends. It's money that has to come from your own pockets. They can give you money to, you know, buy toiletry or whatever because it's, it's needs-</i> <i>Speaker G: Yeah.”</i>

Feeling angry at yourself Pg5 <i>"Speaker A: It's really hard because you know, yeah, it's rough rough, the life that we're facing like you, someone can see you maybe walking on the street like saying, ah, no, this guy. Yeah, I think, yeah. But no, once he or she like, go deeply like talking to him and then make him or like understand, like where you from? like your background and everything like you, it's very hard. Yeah. So this question of yours? Like I think, yeah, at some point you get angry.</i> <i>*Other speakers: Yeah, yeah.*</i> <i>Moderator: Angry at the world and yourself?</i> <i>Speaker B: And yourself."</i>
Feeling like life would be different if raised by a family (both parents present) in a better environment Pg5 <i>"Speaker A: Yeah. End up like maybe blaming the parents if maybe, you know what, they were still together, maybe my life wouldn't be the same, you understand? "</i>
A hellish feeling: Life feels monotonous and unproductive Pg20-21 <i>"Speaker F: I do, I think just being unproductive in a way because... you know, just waking up every day and not really doing anything It really isn't...</i> <i>Moderator: It gets boring.</i> <i>Speake B: its traumatizing."</i> <i>*Other speakers nod and humm in agreement*</i> <i>Speaker F: Yeah, it's very boring. Waking up and doing the same thing every day.</i> <i>Speaker E: everyday...</i> <i>Speaker F: Waking up and doing the same thing everyday its just, It's just, it's yoh that is hell. Umm yeah, I think that's just...</i>
Feeling traumatized Pg30 <i>"Moderator: OK I think once again I might know the answer to this, but do you feel personally that unemployment, the actual experience of unemployment, is traumatic?</i> <i>*Multiple speakers: Yes, yes a lot.*</i> <i>Moderator: Alright. Do you feel like it might be a time thing? Doesn't matter how long you're unemployed that it or not at all, unemployment as it is is just...</i> <i>Speaker B: As it is, it's either you unemployed one month, two months</i> <i>Speakers G: 10 years.</i> <i>Speaker B: unemployment it's unemployment, yeah"</i>
Hope Pg5 <i>"Speaker A: And just for us, you know, like knowing your background, where you're from, you know it's very, very hard cause even though if you wanna lose hope and then this thing like of not working like you know I can say it's very hard, it's very hard. It's very hard, like seriously, cause at some point we from different backgrounds, right? Like at some point as I as as * Speaker A's name*-</i> <i>Moderator: Hmm.</i> <i>Speaker A: I have to make certain that you know, and even though I want to give up, but then I can't just because of maybe I've got kids. I have to look for my mom, you know, like all that responsibility you know, it's on me. So not working like it's some at some point they like they - Yeah, it's painful you know, like when I'm sitting alone like, you know, trying to balance the equation but you see that yeah no it's hard.</i> <i>Speaker C: Hard."</i>
Still hopeful for future employment, future entrepreneurship and hopes to change youth unemployment by decreasing it

Pg31 *"Speaker A: You understand? Yeah so so I need to to renew them off which it it needs it needs me money like to to, to, to to renew them and stuff you understand? But then what I dream of like I I don't see myself like in future like working for someone you know. I I want to see people working for me."*

Pg31 *"Speaker E: I dream of having my own company."*

Pg31-32 *"Speaker C: I've no... I'm on on on my side like I'm... actually like I'm... i me i can see like myself, i can see myself working for umm one of our government institutions."*

Moderator: Ohh yeah, under government, OK.

Speaker C: Yeah, because I'm, there is some. But you know here in South Africa but... Like I I just wanna put some little impact into our country you understand, you understand. But I know like to change that something nyana (small/little) you understand. But i know like umm, like. I know this standard of ma kwanazi you know like ummm he's trying the guys trying to to, to, to, to to, to expose one of those biggest people there, wa bona (translation: we see/you see)."

Pg32 *"Speaker F: my dream job. I think I would really love to work with the United Nations. I love what they do you know, just making global impact. Yeah, that's, I think that's what I really want."*

Pg34 *"Speaker C: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's what I wanna do to to depreciate the the unemployment."*

Psychological issues: negative feelings towards the self, indicated by the data on the theme above, show that the unemployed youth go through a lot of stress as they make sense of their situation. Depression, discontent in life currently, sadness, discontent, suicidal feelings, extreme financial/emotional stress and feeling disheartened was demonstrated in the engagement. Unemployment is a traumatic experience; this was candidly expressed in the discussion. Feelings: feeling bad, depression being unemployed (feelings of detachment), anger, angry at yourself, low self-esteem, frustration of not being employed, feeling guilty for not being employed, feeling behind their peers and losing hope for personal hopes and dreams. Still hopeful for employment in future. Feeling discontent with life currently. Feeling like things would have been better in a better environment/better community.

All participants expressed feeling traumatized by unemployment, some stated that they feel they got even more traumatized as they spent more time unemployed. Thorough all this heart ache of being an unemployed youth there was also hope observed and discussed by participants through encouraging each other to seek new ways to find/create employment for themselves and hope of other participants to achieve their career dreams. These youth have not given up and still hope to find a job, any job, but with the constant state of youth unemployment possibly stifles this hope for the future that remains.

5.7.2 THEME 2: Stress

“Stress” was a common theme between the two focus groups. Different forms of stress were discussed between members, but the most common were financial stress, familial stress, emotionally crippling stress, stress of unemployment and constantly being in a state of stress. The data indicated that stress as a theme was a central and was frequently identified by participants as a precursor to psychological distress. These findings support the assumptions of the Diathesis-Stress Model, which posits stress as a trigger for underlying vulnerabilities. It was discussed in focus group one that there is a positivity to the stress because it motivates the individual to find a job, however, it was described as turning into a negative stress when the goal of employment is not achieved. In focus group two, a similar sentiment was made of the job seeking to be part of the stress as well.

Coping mechanisms/ways to cope with stress were shared across both focus groups. Activities such as sports, exercise, keeping “busy” in some capacity, chores, religious prayer, job seeking, substance use and entertainment were brought up. Both groups expressed that their forms of coping with unemployment were more so ways to also distract the mind from the stressors affecting them daily. However, stress is only eased temporarily, as expressed in the discussion. In focus group two it was expressed that the stress of unemployment can change you, becoming distant and detached from others. These are symptoms of depression. Stress was persistently brought forward from the groups and this was observed as being the core cause of most of the negative feelings and negative psychological impacts presented, this is because the “stress” of unemployment were what catalyzed the psychological impacts discussed in the groups. The stress of unemployment seemed to have been the most prominent feeling amongst participants and seemed to be the most uncomfortable feeling most participants had.

Table 3.3: focus group 1 data “stress” theme

Experiencing a positive stress in hopes of employment and experiencing negative stress
Pg8 “Respondent E: Start from positive by by, by by looking to to to get like to get you what what you want, what you dream about? And then once you don't get it changed to become negative because you don't have money at home, you don't have anything to buy. Actually, even cosmetics, it's hard to balance and it it it it becomes negative. In you because now you don't have money. Now you can say that you want to achieve that thing, but then now how can you live now? Then it's too much.” Pg8 “Respondent E: Basically, it's positive, positive stress cause all of all of us want to achieve, so we are, I can say to positive stress.”
Stressed financially

• Emotional stress • Suicidal from stress Pg9 <i>“Respondent A: I feel like it’s a emotional stress because... Others, they don't get job, then they feel like they are useless while they are living and like they get depressed and they and then they end up committing suicide.”</i> Pg30 <i>“Respondent E: Yes. So that they can be, they can be aware of this situation when they are getting here, when they will be depressed and and end up committing suicide because of their not ready about this situation.”</i> Pg 17 <i>“Respondent F: I'm not happy, ma'am eish. Because now I'm close to Like 5 years old. So heish always I'm stressful... so yeah</i> <i>Moderator: How do you deal with that stress? That's a long time. It's painful.</i> <i>Respondent F: Yes, ma'am. I'm trying to push. So so that I can get what I want.”</i>
• Recreational activities like exercise, gyming, volunteering, music, reading, writing, soccer, meditation to relieve stress Pg9 <i>“Respondent A: Or physical gyming, volunteering.</i> <i>Respondent B, G, H: Yeah.</i> <i>Respondent G: volunteering</i> <i>Respondent D: Yeah.</i> <i>Respondent A: I listen to a lot of music</i> <i>Respondent E: playing soccer</i> <i>Moderator: Sports.</i> <i>Respondent D: actually meditate”</i> Pg10 <i>“Respondent A: like anything to keep you busy”</i> Pg10 <i>“Respondent C: in your house umm you wash your clothes – ironing the stress.”</i>
• Copping manages stress but temporarily Pg10 <i>“Respondent D: it helps temporarily”</i>
• Keeping busy helps cope • House labour to keep busy and manage stress
• Familial stress (children related)

Table 3.4: focus group 2 data “stress” theme

• Stress of affordability of needs • Financial stress Pg19 <i>“Speaker A: But ehh you'll have that stress. You know what? Even if I get money like to to buy all those stuffs you understand</i> <i>Speaker C: financials...”</i> Pg23 <i>“Speaker E: Not having to meet your needs.”</i>
• Familial stress Pg19 <i>“Speaker E: you have to take care of your siblings. There are a lot of things...</i> <i>Speaker A: You understand? So it's very, very at some point like giving us like a huge headache.”</i>
• Mental stress/depression/stressed • Stress of lack of sleep • Becoming distant (detached?) Pg19 <i>“Speaker B: This thing of of, of, of unemployment is depression is depressing us like a lot, A lot. A lot. Ummm Because like when we are unemployment . Even the mindset, the</i>

mindset, the way you are thinking sometimes like eish its getting like little distant nyana (translation: little bit)"

- Feeling bored
- Always in a state of stress

Pg21 *"Speaker F: Yeah, it's very boring. Waking up and doing the same thing every day.*

Speaker E: everyday...

Speaker F: Waking up and doing the same thing everyday its just, It's just, it's yoh that is hell. Umm yeah, I think that's just...

Moderator: The main stressor

Speaker C: And knowing very, very well you are not financially stable, is very confusing. The way you wake up you don't, you know very well you don't have money to buy bread and stuff.

Speaker E: You're always stressed.

Speaker C: Heish yoh! Where I'm, where am I going to go from now? Then I wake up.

****Other speakers nod and murmur agreement****

Speaker G: stressing a lot, stressing a lot.

Speaker B: You know...Not to be able to afford to buy yourself a 5 rand airime eyyy

Other speakers: humm and murmur

Speaker B: Imagine five rand."

- Stressed to apply for jobs

Pg21 *"Speaker C: And that 5 rand airtime and that time, just to ask for another for another airtime or money from someone, you understand.*

Speaker A: you have to hence like when i did touch on... like nowadays like we use phone to apply you understand that some point like you'll find out, you know what eish? I don't even have data.

****Other members of group "mmhmmm" in unison****

Speaker A: That will stress you because we have to apply, we have to check the e-mail the the e-mail like, because you've been like applying online, you understand, maybe something can pop up if you don't have that 5 rand to buy data. You know it's also stressing as well, you understand like it's giving you like that thing of you know what? eish yeah... its rough, its hard you know, yeah."

- Financial stress/affordability

Pg19 *"Speaker A: Firstly, I can say you know what, there are some other things. That as a as a person, you will need to to do for yourself. Like personal stuff, you understand?*

Moderator: mmhm

Speaker A: Yeah, like buying yourself.

Speaker E: Cosmetics...

Speaker B: Choice cosmetics

Speaker A: things like that you understand?

Moderator: Mmhmm

Speaker A: But ehh you'll have that stress. You know what? Even if I get money like to to buy all those stuffs you understand

Speaker C: financials...

Speaker E: you have to take care of your siblings. There are a lot of things...

Speaker A: You understand? So it's very, very at some point like giving us like a huge headache."

- Applying for jobs help ease stress
- Being outdoors relieves stress

- Socializing relieves stress
- Religious prayer relieves stress
- Talking to people helps relieve stress
- Exercise helps relieve stress
- Sports helps relieve stress

Pg22 *“Speaker E: being outdoors”*

Pg22 *“Speaker F: OK. I think for me, I think the gents know I'm from a Christian background. So praying is the number one thing you do. Or even if it's not really praying, cause sometimes you just don't even have the words to like tell God. Listening to gospel music or just like talking to God in your heart that gives me-”*

Page 22 total

5.7.3 THEME 3: “Perceived as not good enough”

The theme “perceived as not good enough” addresses the significant feeling brought up by the youth when discussing their thoughts and feelings regarding being currently unemployed. Inadequacy would be the word that describes those feelings as presented through discussion. During the focus groups it was observed that participants do not feel good enough from both the societal perspective (not meeting their adult goals due to lack of employment) and themselves. Youth described a sense of perceived inadequacy, noting that they felt judged by potential employers and family members. As one participant shared, “according to my opinion, I feel like people think you didn't learn at school. Maybe you fail your metric” Participants discussed being perceived as lazy, unproductive, feeling pressured to do better and feeling misunderstood which was indicated in the data thus providing the above theme. There is also a feeling of not being able to do what other young people their age are able to do while they are unemployed. How the participants see themselves and how they see others perceive them was found to be very useful in understanding how the youth may, implicitly, feel about themselves.

The thoughts regarding their perception gave insight into how there is a shame in being unemployed for however long, a lack of confidence in themselves and feeling less than because of unemployment. Unemployment has placed them into a situation where they crave employment not only for the socio-economic benefits but also to change how they are perceived by others and themselves. Unemployment was observed to have a stigma attached to it that only discredits individuals' abilities, intelligence, and drive, as expressed through discussion. There seems to be a misconception that unemployed youth are “lazy” when in reality these youth that participated craved employment as it would change their lives economically and socially. These unemployed youth experience so many mental and emotional

difficulties because of unemployment, why would they want to continue being unemployed. Rather, the researcher proposes that instead of looking at the unemployed youth “lazy”, they should rather ask “why are they still unemployed though they continue to apply for jobs?”. Laziness is perceived as a choice, but are these youth unemployed by choice or seen as lazy because they haven't acquired work yet? This leads to the more macro-economic influences that can better answer that question; such themes will be discussed further in this chapter.

Table 3.5: focus group 1 data “perceived as not good enough” theme

• Seen as unproductive/not serious Pg 3 “Respondent E: They feel like you're you're not serious. Like you don't want to just, like, do something about your life. You see.” Pg 3 “Respondent E: They feel they feel they feel like you don't want to like something like improve something in your life”
• People assume you're lazy Pg 3 “Respondent E: According to my opinion, I feel like people think you didn't learn at school. Maybe you fail your metric. You can't continue to go to university to study. Yeah” Pg 3 “Respondent E: Yeah, some of them, they they just think that you're not serious about yourself, yeah”
• Perceived as lazy Pg4 “Those people, when they know that you went to school. They just think that, oh, this one, he doesn't want to work. He doesn't want to to think he doesn't want to to to. To achieve this goal, goal or whatever. So it depends who's thinking about you, so supposed to by by your own self.”
• Pressure to be as successful/influenced to desire luxury Pg12 “Respondent A: Now it's it's becoming a peer pressure thing because now you see somebody driving a Lamborghini you also want that one, that's the problem.” Pg12 “Respondent A: So you don't know how that person struggled to get that Lamborghini, wena you just want it at 350 and 70, so you become influenced by rich people.”
• Not meeting these expectations is where the problems start Pg32 “Respondent F: And if you are a person you should teach yourself that you are, you are too young to be rushing things and you are too old to be wasting time” Pg31 “Respondent: Expecting that I'm going to get the job and buy that car like my my teacher, like my principal and have the big house or what. Once you don't get them that's what the problem that starts.” Pg31 “Respondent E: because high expectations are the ones that are killing us.”
• Feeling like you can't do what your peers do • Feeling limited Pg4 “Speaker F: it's important things. So you can't really, you know, just do what other people are doing. Do what your peers are doing. When you get money, you know it has to go to the important things first. You don't really have much umm ability to just, you know, live life and just enjoy yourself. It's always the first priorities. Every time you get maybe any sort of income.” Pg4 “Speaker F: It's always needs!

Speaker B: You're being limited to the other things. If, yeah, if you're broke unemployed, you're being limited. You can't go beyond."

Table 3.6: focus group 2 data "perceived as not good enough" theme

• Lack of understanding from family Pg6 <i>"Speaker D: For me, when I used to live at home, it was weird. They'd be like we understand you're looking for a job It's OK. But the treatment would be different between my cousin and I, who was working. I'd be expected to do the chores and cook and be the run around girl. Go fetch your brother. Go do this. Go do that. Make me tea while everyone else maybe has the capacity to do those things, but they just don't want to, It's like do something you can't just sit down there."</i>
• Lacking job experience at young age of youth after matric and up. • Employers have high expectations making getting a job harder for youth/ridiculous expectations Pg2 <i>"Speaker D: For me, I think it's also like the issue with experience. We apply for jobs. They'll say you must have five years experience like I just arrived –</i> <i>*Respondents and moderator chuckle*</i> <i>Speaker D: - where am I getting five years of experience.</i> <i>Speaker B: and maybe you just graduated</i> <i>Speaker D: Like, yeah, like, I was a student, so.</i> <i>Speaker C: And when you when you go out for that experience that that five years you were trying to get experience?"</i>
• Blaming themselves for being unemployed because while unemployed they seek pleasure, fun times and distractions (substance use) Pg8 <i>"Umm us as youth, OK, sometimes, yes, we have to blame our government system. Also, I think we have to blame us, us ourselves, because where I'm coming from, let me say like, let me take it put it ummm I'm where? where? where I'm from. Our environment, our environment and most of us on when is, when, when, when it's starting like on this Thursday, the mindset of our youth, it changed same time it changed same time."</i> Pg10 <i>"Speaker A: There are those who are lazy, they are those are who want to change their life like #1 you understand.</i> <i>*Other speakers: Yeah.*</i> <i>Speaker C: Yeah the other thing, our youth, they don't take life seriously nowadays.</i> <i>*Other speakers murmur in agreement**</i>

5.7.4 THEME 4: "Comparison to employed peers"

This theme "comparison to employed peers" addresses the feelings of peer pressure as well, as the feelings of being "less than" the unemployed youth employed counterparts. Participants expressed how they feel a pressure to succeed as their employed age mates have done, this was expressed in the data and became a theme in analysis. Their age mates were discussed as moving forward in life, meeting goals, starting families and having careers. These youth discussed how in their families there is a pressure to be employed because there are other youth who have done so and have met adulthood milestones through it. Comparison to employed youth in subtlety expressed in their families through how their employed (youth) relatives are

treated compared to how they, as unemployed youth, are treated. There is a difference in treatment between the two that was expressed by some participants in focus group 2. There is a deep desire to achieve employment because it allows for these youth to also meet adulthood milestones like buying a car and living independently from familial financial support.

Table 3.7: focus group 1 data “comparison to employed peers” theme

• Peer pressure from comparison to other youth who are employed
Pg11 “Respondent A: Now it's it's becoming a peer pressure thing because now you see somebody driving a Lamborghini you also want that one, that's the problem.”

Table 3.8: focus group 2 data “comparison to employed peers” theme

• Treated better when employed vs unemployed Pg7 “Speaker C: I'm on my side ummm, on mine on mine neh I think it's a little different because I'm I'm I'm I can see on on on my family. Especially my family umm they are not umm treating me the way I was working before, hence now I'm in- I'm unemployment. Like I can see that there's a- errm a little bits of different change. Moderator: Its different now. Speaker C: It's different now. Ummm I think like they are prioritizing the ones who are working like you understand that they're giving them that, that special treat hence umm umm my colleague here (referring to speaker D) said is actually like he he took all those words understand but yeah.”
• Feeling like a failure • Pressure to achieve • Peer pressure Pg23 “Speaker D: For me, I it's it's a personal thing, for me, because I compare myself a lot to people my age, my friends, whatever. So its a comparison thing that oh, this one bought a car, this one bought a house, this one is getting married. What about me? So I lack validation and I feel like a failure. So the difficult part for me is accepting that I'm on the right track. Things will eventually get there. It's like OK, but like, even me, I want to have a car.” Pg23-24 “Speaker D: Not making it in life. Moderator: Not making it. *Speakers: YEAH!* Speaker B: Age the age is going Moderator: Ah you're getting older. Speaker B: I'm you're getting older. My ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma peers my my prayers are like they're achieving something while I'm still in one place you understand, that things affect him a lot like.” Pg24 “Speaker B: Like yes, you understand, you see yourself stuck in one place. Other speakers: Stuck” Pg24 “Speaker A: Yeah, yeah. At some point, we do understand that, you know what? Everyone is running his or her race right? Yeah. But it's also, like affecting us. Like, hence as you said that you know what? Yeah, other people are achieving this one or two and then those people are at my age group and then you on the other side like you. You feel that gap, you know that you know what, I also maybe need to push, but we have to understand it at the end of the day that you know what everything like has its occasion.

Other speakers: yeah.

5.7.5 THEME 5: “Substance use”

The theme “**substance use**” is significant to the data because it was discussed as being a coping mechanism, a distraction from stress, a fear and a form of escapism. Substance use was discussed as being both a distraction from stress but also a distraction from meeting the goal of unemployment. A subset of participants reported using substances, including alcohol and cannabis, as coping mechanisms for the stress of unemployment. This mirrors findings by Moroe et al. (2025), who noted a similar pattern among urban youth. The participants discussed how it can be a good form of escapism, however, they stated that it can be abused which can lead to even more stress and further unemployment. Such as missing an interview on Monday because you over drank alcohol and were hung over during the previous weekend. Substance use was discussed as being something to enjoy but also something to take heed of while using. It was observed by the researcher that substance use was common because it allows these youth to temporarily escape their troubles which also “refreshed” them to later deal with their stresses and continue to pursue employment.

Substance use was observed to be a way to more effectively relieve stress, due to the chemical changes that occur from drinking smoking that can be addictive if abused. It was also observed that there is a fear of using substances to “forget” because of the fear of becoming addicted to them and also distracting themselves too much from their stressors which can also be addictive. The participants candidly discussed this. Substance use as a coping mechanism is different from other recreational activities due to the possible negative outcomes of using substances while in a negative headspace. Their recognition of their own vulnerability to substance use was observed by the researcher; the participants seemed very aware of the risks of substance use, especially while they are not working.

Table 3.9: focus group 1 data “substance use” theme

• Fear of submitting to smoking and drinking to destress but lack motivation Pg13 <i>“Respondent G: I can see some others like...They smoke, they drink, you see. Like they don't want to do their things, but they have to like to distress themselves from the unemployed. Something like that, yeah.”</i>
• Feeling the need for escapism from reality of unemployment PG14 <i>“Respondent E: We will try to escape reality actually. Respondent D: yeah for most</i>

Respondent A: Just to escape reality. Just that. That's why they will use that. Because nowadays we're living in scary -
****Agreeing murmuring****

Table 3.10: focus group 2 data “substance use” theme

• Substance intake, smoking and drinking to keep busy and distracted Pg6 <i>“Speaker G: So that is why some of us, like, make, then end up choosing wrong decisions like drinking alcohol, smoking drugs, you understand? Yeah.</i> <i>Speaker C: Just to keep their self-busy.</i> <i>*Other group members nod and murmur agreement sounds*</i>
• Distractions (substance) holding back youth from employment but also helps cope with unemployment Pg19 <i>“Speaker B: That's why we that's why on weekends you get us drinking, isn't like you are you you are, you are You are celebrating that. No, we just like we just want wanna run little bits to that reality you understand. Just try to refresh your mind because like it's a lot. Our mums start looking at us...-</i> <i>Speaker C: Sometimes, sometimes it helps you know, sometimes it helps.</i> <i>Moderator: Oh.</i> <i>Speaker G: Yeah. Sometimes when you like. You had a lot, yeah, you wake up, like, sick and stuff, but sometimes when you have, like, a few drinks, go to sleep. Yeah.</i> <i>Speaker B: Feel refreshed”</i>
• Distraction helps them forget their circumstances (substance use) Pg20 <i>“Speaker A: You know, just to cool up, you know, I know alcohol doesn't you know what, change, It doesn't change the fact I mean like the the situation that we're facing, but at some point like your mind said, like the state of of mind yeah.</i> <i>Other speakers: Yeah.</i> <i>Speaker C: Because that's how we socialize at some point.</i> <i>*Hummed agreement from other speakers*</i> <i>Speaker C: Some of us keep ourselves locked in our houses. But how we socialize its like weekends.</i> <i>*Other speakers hum in agreement*</i> <i>Speaker C: It's Friday you know by the corner you buy 4 or cold drink, you chat, that's how we socialize.</i> <i>Speaker B: mostly that is how we got some jobs. “</i>
• Youth prioritizing fun entertainment • Distractions (substance) holding back youth from employment but also helps cope with unemployment Pg8 <i>“Speaker E: Lose control</i> <i>Moderator: Brain switches off Thursday.</i> <i>Speaker G: It's Thursday, then its Friday.</i> <i>Speaker C: Yeah, this weekend, like everything like this, they forget like like even like I'm an unemployed man, you understand?”</i> P8 <i>“Speaker C: Like they're prioritizing more entertainment, more entertainment. Let me say, like on Monday you were supposed to go to interview. You've got Babalas (translation: hangover) or maybe you were supposed to go into some piece job. You've got the babalas. You understand you don't know how to wake up because they they we drink, we drink like we like dead.”</i>

Pg9 *“Speaker B: Yeah we don’t go and look for it we just wanna stay safe haaa I’m unemployment haa no man their taking for us these people they taking job for us, while we’re sitting down, we are not doing anything.”*

5.7.6 THEME 6: “Lack of government intervention and government actively failing youth”

During the focus groups there was a great emphasis on what part the government had to play in their current unemployment. There was blame for the government, lack of trust in government and lack of government intervention towards this major country wide issue. **“Lack of government intervention and government actively failing youth”** is a theme because it addresses a major concern that the youth brought up that is significant also because of the emotional reaction towards their current governing body. All participants expressed that the government is to blame for their unemployment because it is the government's job to make jobs available; this was candidly expressed in both group discussions. It was expressed that there is a lack of jobs and an increase in unemployed youth, especially post-Covid-19. It was expressed that even before Covid, the government lacked urgency to fix youth unemployment. It was discussed that the government is not effectively assisting in job creation but rather giving these youth monthly grants that do not even cover their necessity-related expenses. So not only is the government not creating jobs but also only financially aiding the unemployed at a bare minimum standard that does not promote a livable standard of living. What difference can R350 rands per month do for these youth? The government is discussed as not assisting poorer communities in any capacity, from how these environments look and their lack of access to resources. The government contributing to its poor economy was discussed. The government, through the lenses of these unemployed youth, is unreliable, therefore, they feel they need to look after themselves/ “do your own thing” or “hustle” and not anticipate government assistance. They also had expressed a distrust in there being changes for good from this current government. They do not believe that this government could change for the better, at least not during their time.

It was observed that there was disappointment in the government expressed by the youth; the government is not doing anything. It was observed that there is a frustration towards the “system” of government they are under due to not seeing effective change. As said by a participant, “it’s failing us”, this was a shared sentiment that was expressed in both discussions. These youth feel frustrated and failed by their government. It was expressed that minimum wage jobs (retailer jobs, merchandisers, cashiers etc.) were their only choices left of

unemployment, however, not a plausible option due to the minimum wage income being so low, therefore, would not be worth it, especially after having studied past matriculation. The minimum wage income is not seen as being a sustainable income to meet basic living standards. From what was observed in the focus groups there is a disdain towards the lack of urgency and lack of interest displayed by the governments actions thus far in current day South Africa. It was observed that these youth are pained by their government's actions and lack thereof. The government is seen as a cause of these many problems regarding the state of youth unemployment because simultaneously the government is seen as having the power to create effective positive change, but choose not to?... Why?

The government is seen as being responsible for the macro and micro economic factors that contribute to their unemployment such as poor schooling systems, corruption (financial), a poor economy, illegal foreigners taking the low paying jobs available and overpopulation. In the other themes found the government is seen as a major role player.

Table 3.11: focus group 1 data "lack of government intervention and failing youth" theme

• Lack of trust in gov Pg11 "Moderator: do we think it can change though? do you think it will?" Respondent D: NO, no Respondent A: no not now Respondent E: no Other respondent sign Moderator: So we're just gonna hustle neh? Respondent D: A lot Respondent A: hustle *proceeds to laugh*
• Government is the problem Pg5 "Respondent A: The government is causing us a lot now, yeah, because this thing is a system. The system they've created it." Pg5 "Respondent A: But now the problem. The problem is that this thing is a system you have to go through everything for you to to to be employed. If you don't go under that system, you won't. Yeah, so it's costing us a lot, government eish its killing us shem." Pg11 "Respondent A: We must we must change our government and maybe the system will go out another way."
• Government lacks assistance Pg4 "Respondent D: The government is feeding us with nothing, obviously, but you gotta do your own thing."
• Government lacks focus on job creation Pg 2 "Respondent A: I think it's something it's it's it's, it's a, it's a, it's a government fault actually, because now uhh what they teach us at school is not the thing that's gonna to end up giving you money when you when you grow up. So I think the government that is the one that is causing this lot of pain." Pg 2 "Respondent G: yeah the government is just so messed up"

Pg6 <i>“Respondent D: But I feel like the government is losing us actually is focusing more on...on trying to eradicate poverty or something like that so. Beyond focusing on trying to create more jobs uhh entrepreneurial stuff, things like that.”</i> Pg6 <i>“Respondent D: So the government is focusing more on trying to eliminate poverty, than trying to create jobs, give people experience, there are a lot of things that can be done.”</i>
• Government lacks focus on job creation Pg 2 <i>“Respondent A: I think it's something it's it's it's, it's a, it's a, it's a government fault actually, because now uhh what they teach us at school is not the thing that's gonna to end up giving you money when you when you grow up. So I think the government that is the one that is causing this lot of pain.”</i> Pg 2 <i>“Respondent G: yeah the government is just so messed up”</i> Pg6 <i>“Respondent D: But I feel like the government is losing us actually is focusing more on...on trying to eradicate poverty or something like that so. Beyond focusing on trying to create more jobs uhh entrepreneurial stuff, things like that.”</i> Pg6 <i>“Respondent D: So the government is focusing more on trying to eliminate poverty, than trying to create jobs, give people experience, there are a lot of things that can be done.”</i>
• Poor economy Pg 4 <i>“they just, they know that it's it's it's it's it's poor economy that's why you're not working.”</i>
• Over population/not enough jobs Pg5 <i>“Responded G: Overpopulation that causes unemployment.”</i>
• Bad minimum wage limits people/expensive necessities/ budgeting stress/financial struggle Pg6 <i>“Respondent A: When the money comes, it's just the basic salary it needs the sunlight it needs a bread it needs. Yeah (other respondents agreeing). When you get that money just use it, all of this, you just use. Yeah. So so you don't you don't budget. You don't you don't you don't do you don't. What can I say? You don't prepare for future. Yeah, you just do what what what needs to be done now.”</i>
• Minimum grant money that unemployed people depend on but cannot live off of/sustain/useless Pg6 <i>“Respondent D: Because off, um id saying kindly they giving us thee-seventy (R370) or something like that. Grant money. Its actually useless”</i>
• Covid made it worse with mass job loss/companies closed • Gov failure post covid Pg7 <i>“Respondent E: No, I just said the the guy saying that that those three 70s. Are the ones that they they came with a lot of unemployment because of we started from Corona and then the the the other companies they they closed and actually a lot of companies they they closed and the 100s of million of millions of people they they lost they lost their jobs so that's where. The unemployment. It's started to to gain the the high rate .Yeah. And then after that, they started to give us these three fifties, three seventies. It this shows that they know that what we are, we are unemployed, all of like most of us, majority of us. So that means the economy, the economy came back like came back to, came back to, what can I say? the economy, it's failing like it's it's it's very poor, it's very poor because of that corona. So it's more than before now unemployment.”</i>

Table 3.12: focus group 2 data “lack of government intervention and failing youth” theme

• Lack of resources in communities
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Pg 2 *“Speaker C: And sometimes it can be like lack of resources around the community, like job creations and stuff like you find other places where we live It's like dirty stuff instead of maybe the government creates like opportunities and hire youth to maybe like pick up papers around the community and stuff. But all of those things are lacking and that causes most of you to like lose focus as they lack around the dirty community like everything is happening around them, you can see everyone is not caring so it's like. Most of them lack focus on what they want, you understand?”*

- Environment contributes to that unemployment

Pg11 *“Speaker A: Yeah, I think also the environment has like a lot of impact, especially us you know ”*

- Lack of community intervention

Pg12 *“Speaker F: But also if you have the means to stay in a better place, why would you remain in a place that's just not for a good living standard? I don't blame the people who move honestly,*

Other speakers: Yeah.

Speaker C:I also.

Speaker F: if I also had the means to move out, be paid up I'm going!

Speaker B: yeah...

****Group laughs briefly****

Speaker F: I'm going! So yeah, because that place is is really not a it's not a conducive place.

****Other speakers hum in agreement****

Speaker F: it really isn't we are just there because, I mean, you have no choice.

****Other speakers: Yeah.****

Speaker F: but the minute you are able to get out, you go and you never look back.”

- Government failing youth
- Government failing those from low socioeconomic background, most impacted

Pg7 *“Speaker C: OK. And my point of viewer neh, the first thing in this country, the government is failing us. It's failing us, especially if mmmh, like us we are coming from the, the, the, the, the poor families and the struggling backgrounds.”*

- Overpopulation in jhb, thus lack of jobs

Pg7-8 *“Speaker C:... The government is really, really failing us and and another thing we we've always, my colleagues, they have already touched on those point. We're too overloaded, especially here in Johannesburg.”*

Pg8 *“Speaker C: We, we, we, we had too many we have too population here around Johannesburg.”*

- Lack of jobs

Pg9 *“Speaker F: Uhh but unfortunately sometimes you can do everything, go to school, get the qualification and still not get the job. I have a sister she has, I think, a masters in law. She's been looking for a job for I don't know the past 3-4, but nothing now she ends up working as umm *tongue click* what do they call the people who pack food at stores?*

Speaker B: Packers.”

Pg 9 *“Speaker F: She ends up now having to settle for what she never wanted in her life because there are no jobs and this is someone who had sleepless nights studying.*

Speaker A: Eish you understand

****Other speakers hum deeply but briefly*”***

5.7.7 THEME 7: “Poor education”

The theme “**poor education**” addresses the significant concerns of the youth as they see it as another limiting factor promoting their unemployment and affecting future youth employment. Though not commonly mentioned by participants there was an observation that the education system in South Africa does not promote employability. There was discussion that the schooling systems to do provide learning based on skills that can be used to attain employment at a matriculation level. The schooling system, even when reaching high degrees in tertiary education, does not guarantee good employment after graduation. The youth expressed that when it comes to getting a job after schooling there are no jobs in the tertiary studies fields/specialized fields and there is a lack of practical skills being molded at the matriculate and lower levels. This is also seen as a government failing on the part of the department of education not bettering the schooling system and another failing of government in creating jobs for graduates to attain thus being left with low-income jobs that do not match the amount of time spent in education. Schooling is seen as being heavily theory based which the youth expressed is limiting the potential of youth leaving school and trying to enter the workforce. As mentioned in table 3.6 “employer expectations”, there is a job market where entry level jobs demand experience in positions that these youth were not even qualified yet to fill, it is observed that there is a gap in job opportunities for young professionals to even attain their “first” job. The participants expressed a lack of job readiness amongst youth due to a lack of skills-based support from the schooling system and lack of guidance for schools.

Table 3.13: focus group 1 data “poor education” theme

• Education feels like it won't change circumstances/might still not get a job Pg17 “Respondent G: I need a job ma'am but for now I don't have. I'm not doing eh hh but I'm doing training. Then after maybe uhh... cause this is South Africa cause even if you have diploma exam (barking audio interruption) exam still it's nothing.” Pg17 “Respondent F: Like you, you can you can finish your your studies, but this is South Africa maybe you you will you, you, you you get a job or you not cause.”
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Table 3.14: focus group 2 data “poor education” theme

• Lack of education that leads to future employment or a lesser paying job opportunity Pg14 “Speaker B: Let me go back to that point. The the education system, our, our educational system is too more theory than practical you understand. You can go to China, China they can train umm, they train you like while you're still young like the the the observe you. The other one they observed that no, that boy is good there and there, you understand,

they decided to train you on that younger... and then you go to... You don't need to like you have to have matric, you understand? And something like in the book like like they yeah, our education system like.

****Other speakers hum and mmhmm in agreement and repeat speaker B sentiment simultaneously speaking over each other.****

Speaker B: Yeah, there's something missing there. Yeah, they're supposed to fix it.

****Hummed agreement from other speakers****

Speaker B: Because when you are done, you have to go to university after going to university you have to be in employment.

Moderator: but now you don't have skills.

****Murmured agreement from other speakers****

Speaker F: experience."

- Lack of guidance in schools

Pg11 *"Speaker C: Just, if you can see the drop out at the- at high schools, other youth they used to drop out at schools like in primary. And then other parents, they don't care,*

****Other speakers continue to murmur and hum in agreement to what speaker C is saying****

Speaker C: - whether you're going to school you don't go to school like in Zandspruit.

Speaker A: especially ahhhh

Speaker C: - the other kids, they're at their own, they, they they're at their own.

Speaker F: A lot of them.

Speaker C: Yeah, there is no that ehhe parents ehhehh hand that they're gonna encourage you that you must go to school you have to do all those things you see. That are that, that's what I say that they don't take life seriously.

Speaker E: The fast life."

- Education in SA is not preparing youth to be employed with useful skills (too theory based)

Pg14 *"Speaker B: Let me go back to that point. The the education system, our, our educational system is too more theory than practical you understand. You can go to China, China they can train umm, they train you like while you're still young like the the the observe you. The other one they observed that no, that boy is good there and there, you understand, they decided to train you on that younger... and then you go to... You don't need to like you have to have matric, you understand? And something like in the book like like they yeah, our education system like.*

****Other speakers hum and mmhmm in agreement and repeat speaker B sentiment simultaneously speaking over each other.*"***

5.7.8 THEME 8: "Corruption"

According to participants, "corruption" is an issue directly affecting them. It is indicated by data that corruption directly affects youth. They state that there is government corruption, corruption of leaders and corruption amongst regular citizens. In regard to unemployment, the youth expressed there being nepotism, "connections" and bribery in job acquiring. The government is once again seen as failing the youth because these youth feel slighted by the government having elderly (past retirement age) employed people in positions of power, yet there are young people still unemployed. There was frustration observed by the researcher

through how the youth discussed “corruption” as a problem that seemed to dishearten them in regard to getting employment. This is why “**corruption**” is a theme.

Table 3.15: focus group 1 data “corruption” theme

• Corruption is disheartening Pg18 “Respondent A: yeah connection or lucky Moderator: Exactly. Respondent D: The biggest the biggest problem in our country. Moderator: What's the biggest problem? Respondent D: Corruption. Moderator: corruption mmm. And now, do you feel like it kind of seeps into this issue of unemployment, cause you just mentioned you mentioned connections like you get a job via connections? Respondent H: Everything's a connection Moderator: Everything?”
• Government corruption and everyday people Pg5 “Respondent A: But if you but but if you check the the ones who are on top, the government are working, they are, they are, they are turning 89, they're turning 90, but they're still working. But us can't work! Why!?” Pg5-6 “Respondent E: Why even the leaders. The leaders are the ones who are more hiring us. So if I'm the one who's working there and I'm the leader of like I'm a supervisor or manager, I'll just hire the part of the people that are close to me, families, friends or what. If you are far away from- Respondent G: corruption”

Table 3.16: focus group 2 data “corruption” theme

- Nepotism and connection and corruption to get a job

Pg15 *“Speaker C: Yeah, there are too many people who are, like, corrupt in other communities, you understand where ever else the government is involved, such as SAPS, you understand?”*

Moderator: Hmm.

Speaker C: they’ll be knowing which OK Brian is selling alcohol. He doesn’t have a license. But when they come at night, they don’t care for their young children and staff who are busy growing there. They’ll just come inside, collect and leave and leave bribe and really to make money for himself, not focusing on that they they are they are killing the country, understand they are. That’s....

Moderator: Like the corruption has gotten to the point where it’s the everyday person.

Speaker A: Obvious.

Moderator: mmhmm

Speaker B: government system, those people they are killing us.

Speaker G: Yeah.

****Other speakers nod****

Pg15-16 *“Speaker C: You know hence my brother touched on eh mhm corruption, you understand. Sometimes in order for you to get that job, that maybe you are applying for at some point you you... you have to to give that person a bribe in order for you like to be in there, you understand? And you don’t have money. You understand? We are also looking for a job you don’t have money you understand? So you see the government is also failing as the you see, so it’s very hard. The population is very, very high... It’s very, very high. So you’ll end up like working like a... as a merchandiser *laughs* (other speakers laugh very briefly)”*

5.7.9 THEME 9: “Foreigners taking jobs”

The theme “**foreigners taking jobs**” discusses the commonly brought out issue and frustration of undocumented foreigners contributing to the rise in youth unemployment. This is a theme because of the emotional (anger, frustration and disheartened) reaction, observed by the researcher, that many participants expressed when discussing undocumented foreigners. The participants candidly expressed how undocumented foreigners are another government failing because these foreigners are taking jobs, those available from low paying to high paying jobs, away from South African citizens. There is blatant blame towards the government for not better managing the borders and managing migrants to make sure they are documented. From the data those most affected by this seemed to be those in lower income areas because those are areas undocumented foreigners reside mostly; due to the lack of jobs and high unemployment rate they tend to be in these spaces. Overpopulation was already an issue brought up by participants and with the influx of undocumented foreigners, that population seems to be negatively affecting these youth. Participants stated that employers were more willing to employ undocumented foreigners because: they offer cheap labour thus reducing the costs of

labour spent by these employers/companies. Participants expressed that this allows employers to pay lower wages that South African citizens are not willing to accept, thus making undocumented foreigners more viable for employment. Participants in focus group one agreed that the issue is not the foreigners themselves as they are too trying to make a living, rather it is a failure of government not protecting their citizens.

Table 3.17: focus group 1 data “foreigners taking jobs” theme

• Foreigners taking jobs/ they are cheap (undocumented) labour thus more employable Pg6 “Respondent E: -that, ah that’s where you to see yourself unemployed. So that’s the reason, foreigners are too much and getting the jobs with their deals because if you are qualified for like when electrician like for example your electrician. You know your your your rate that you supposed to rate but then if they are foreigners they just come and negotiate and get that job. So they don’t want to negotiate if you are a South African citizen because they know that you know what you’re supposed to earn. So that’s it, that’s part of unemployment.”

Table 3.18: focus group 2 data “foreigners taking jobs” theme

• Foreigners taking jobs/cheap labour Pg1 “Speaker B: South Africans, they are not being employed because of there’s a bunch of foreigners in our country now. That’s why we lack eh eh eh employment as we as South Africans” Pg2 “Speaker A: To add on that you know mmhmm, I think most companies now emm they’ve got this thing of savings. So they they usually hire people who are actually, I mean like -let me, let me say cheap labour.” Pg8 “Speaker C: Now, most of most of employers that they, they prioritize those foreigners because they are cheap labours. I think that is one of the issues and another thing, another thing that I have to look at”
• Lack of jobs because of foreigners Pg8 “Speaker C:... Most of ummm employee most of employees, they prioritise those foreigners because of what the cheap labours. They know once you once you said OK I’m I’m I’m a South African I’m they they in their mind they said no man this guy is gonna demand this certain of this amount.” Pg17 “Speaker B; another thing... I’m not, I’m not, I’m not emm could you listen to me carefully. * Brief laughter from group* Speaker B: I’m not against against those people but no man these foreigner people, especially the one undocumented one. Moderator: yeah undocumented? Speaker B: Yes, no like no like they like they are they are taking us back like sit like backseat. But it’s too much It’s too much for us guys. Like too much. Too much so much especially here in Johannesburg, this is their home. Like they took everything even the empty cup.” Pg16 “Speaker B: At least man they must have papers to be allowed here, not like, having kids... Moderator: Jumping boarders possibly...?

Speaker A: Yeah. So let me just add on there, you know ehhehh in the. This thing started like, yeah, when the companies getting, like cheap labours and then these people now, ehheh foreigners, they are the bosses like they are the supervisors.

****Immediate agreement “mhm” sounds from group****

Speaker G: Yeah, some of the places

Speaker A: you understand.

Speaker E: They call you from home to come here.

Speaker A: then other other other companies, some, some of them, they they, they, they, they they fraud the the the citizenship of them-

****Mhhh sounds from group members****

Speaker A: -yeah, we understand cause it's also benefit the companies, we understand. You'll you'll get a job, maybe I'm a boiler maker, understand, so I will get a job of of, of, of a of a boiler maker there But my supervisor or my OK or my leader will be foreigner... that person you will get to find out maybe...

Speaker C: He or she is not qualified.

Speaker B: is not allowed!

Speaker A: not even qualified to be here you understand

Speaker G: but he's your supervisor

Speaker A: but he is my supervisor that is earning more than me you understand so eh it's very, very, you know, painful and then... This thing is getting like yeah...

****Male speakers begin to overlap in agreement with the statements of speaker A****

Speaker B: It's affecting us. Like, seriously, it's affecting us this thing. At least the government can do it in the right way. They must be here on the right way. You understand. Not the way like they are, you understand."

Pg 17 "Speaker B: It's affecting us. Like, seriously, it's affecting us this thing. At least the government can do it in the right way. They must be here on the right way. You understand. Not the way like they are, you understand."

5.7.10 THEME 10: “Age concerns”

The theme “**age concerns**” addresses the worry of the youth aging out of being seen as youth. Youth occupy a certain age bracket and thus a certain amount of time to begin meeting adulthood milestones and attaining employment. In focus group one there was emphasis put on the reality that as one gets older the greater the responsibilities they have, having children and providing for them, familial responsibilities and a greater need to become employed at a certain point in time. The participants discussed that when you are younger, there is more hope regarding employment; it is harder when you are older to get employed. The data indicated that age was seen as a limitation in the labour market and in personal life. Age was a briefly discussed topic, however, it was significant in understanding that time is also a factor that contributes to their feelings about being unemployed.

Table 3.19: focus group 1 data “age concerns” theme

Discontent increases the older you get and feeling partially content/being you gives hope like there is still time Pg15 “Moderator: You (respondent E) mentioned age. Do you feel like when you're younger, it's like, no, it's not that bad? Respondent E: That's easy, it was easy if you consider everything. Respondent A: Yes when you're young its up there.”
Not content also because when you have kids its more essential to be employed and plan for yours and their future Pg17 “Respondent E: Still you planned but, but then you need to change your mind. Maybe on certain time, because you will have kids and and the kids, they need your legacy. They need you to plan for them because they're still young. So there are some of the things that you need to change and and focus on them.”
Not content at all and trauma because getting older thus adding more stressed being unemployed for long period of time Pg23 “Respondent E: Trauma, more especially when you're reaching the 35. 35 years - Like now I need to work by myself now there is no any other company that can just hire me, so that's where the trauma starts.”
Aging out of youth position/opportunities Pg6 “Respondent F: age limits”

Table 3.20: focus group 2 data “age concerns” theme

Aging out of youth Pg 24 “Speaker B: Age the age is going Moderator: Ah you're getting older. Speaker B: I'm you're getting older. My ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma.... peers my my prayers are like they're achieving something while I'm still in one place you understand, that things affect him a lot like.”

5.7.11 THEME 11: “Crime”

“Crime” is seen as a more minor theme due to it correlating as being more of a response to youth unemployment and when *respondent D* responded to the question of fears regarding youth unemployment the respondent stated there being a fear of crime increasing. Crime affects everyone and can lead to violent criminal behavior, therefore, the researcher validated this by observing it as a genuine fear that can affect participants when realized.

Table 3.21: focus group 1 data “crime” theme

- Fear of crime (desperation to meet needs) and substance abuse increasing
Pg14 *“Respondent D: I think crime rate will increase.
Moderator: crime?
Respondent D: Crime rate will increase.
Moderator: Why? Why do you think?
Respondent D: Because. If people can't get to sustain themselves. They're finding another way to sustain themselves, which which would lead to crime. Yeah, and substance abuse”*
Pg14 *“Respondent A: - People are dying for no reason. So it's it's it's a lot of things. And now we're facing us now facing. It's coming from all the what you call this, the industry, the news in the magazines. What what what”*

5.7.12 THEME 12: “Men and women experience unemployment differently”

The final theme “**men and women experience unemployment differently**” was found through the responses of participants when discussing if there even are differences in the experience of youth unemployment. Participants expressed that men and women experience unemployment differently. First the differences for men will be addressed then followed by the difference women experience when unemployed.

Participants from both focus groups expressed that unemployment is unemployment, however, men experience more negative effects from it due to the societal responsibilities and cultural identity. Men are seen as being providers and expected to be breadwinners. Men are seen as being the ones to provide for their family's though financial support. Men are expected to provide and be leaders in family and community. Participants agreed that for men unemployment was more painful because they are emasculated by the experience. Unemployment is harder for men because of those societal pressures placed on them that makes their employment much less allowable compared to women being unemployed being more allowable, even in current day. It was found in the data that participants expressed concerns for men regarding finding a mate. Men have a much harder time finding a mate when unemployed. When men are unemployed, they find it difficult to “date” because women were seen as not wanting to date an unemployed man because then he cannot provide for them. Men in the focus group expressed that women will not accept them even if the women themselves are unemployed as well. The men in focus group two expressed that men are very willing to date unemployed women because regardless of the woman employment status the man is still expected to provide. The men in the focus groups expressed emotionally that as a man “you have to work!”. They stated that as a man unemployment is more emotionally crippling compared to women. Both men and women in the groups expressed that unemployment is

negative for both and the hardships were similar, however, the internal experience showcased a greater divide which was indicated in the data, young men and women both struggle but there is a greater burden and disappointment towards young men being unemployed.

The participants expressed that men were more mentally impacted by unemployment and that the men carry a heavier emotional/mental burden when they are not making an income and providing in any capacity to their families, children and potential mates. The researcher observed that there is a greater burden on men when they are unemployed versus women. Participants in focus group one also expressed how women were seen as more employable in certain jobs (receptionists, cashiers) and men were more preferred for other employment such as construction or blue-collar physical labour jobs. However, in an office space it was more mixed. Moreover, men in focus group 2 expressed that as men there are certain jobs that further emasculate them such as being a cashier, that would not be an option plus it is a minimum wage job.

In the focus groups it was agreed amongst participants that women though facing similar stressors from unemployment, they however have it “easier” than men because they are not as burdened societally than men. Participants in focus group one agreed that women in rural areas versus urban areas in the city had differences in their urgency to acquire jobs. Women in urban areas were perceived as being more inclined to work and even be breadwinners in their families, whereas women in more rural areas are less inclined to find work, or “lazy”. Women with children were discussed as having an added pressure to find employment due to having children depend on them to provide. Women were discussed as being more supported when unemployed compared to men. The participants in the focus groups expressed that women, when unemployed, are still provided for financially either by family or by other men. The researcher found that men were not given that similar grace. It was found that there is a significant difference in the experience of unemployment between men and women.

Table 3.22: focus group 1 data “Men and women experience unemployment differently” theme

• Different experience between men and women Pg19 “Moderator: So The, Who says this the same? Right, raise your hand. Same for men and women, anyone. Respondent H: Same? Moderator: everyone says it's not the same. Okay so he said it's because the ladies are able to get some money. Is that the experience for everyone?”
• Women are supported by men in their lives

Pg18 *“Respondent E: Women, they get money from their, it depends if you have a husband or a boyfriend, so you get money. So we don't, me I don't get money from a girl, but I have to give a girl money. Yes.”*

- BBBEE/women are preferred over men

Pg18 *“Respondent F: And if you come to apply for a job, if you are a man and then when it come a woman to apply for a job, they will take a woman first.*

Respondent A: Yes. Cause woman will wake up and make herself beautiful.”

- Males seen as providers, more responsibility on males thus straining them to sustain family, become burdened by unemployment while seeking employment

Pg19 *“Respondent D: I feel like, I was raised, the way I was raised. The thing is, if you were a guy, if you're a male. Male id the provider right so it gets tricky. When you grow up because you gotta sustain yourself, you gotta sustain your family. Becomes hard, becomes a burden to you because you still got a family and a job still trying to figure out how to do things. There's a lot.*

Moderator: Being a man, it's a lot hard.

Respondent D: Yeah, it's hard its hard

Respondent E: It's demanding.

Respondent A: Yeah.

Respondent E: Because you must, you need to be responsible.

Respondent A: Yeah.”

- Women have the advantage to have that pressure relieved by men in their lives

Pg19 *“Respondent E: So being a lady uhhh, it's not easy. I can't say it's easy, it's not easy, but then at least you have an advantage of a man.”*

- Environment differences impact because women in the city are breadwinners, whereas in poorer communities the women are not held to that same financial responsibility and seen as lazy/relaxed

Pg19-20 *“Moderator: Do you think the women are feeling the same pressure to get employed like men now like they're they're like if I have to.*

Respondent F: No.

****Group murmurs disagreement****

Respondent E: It depends now, it depends the environment.

****Group laughs together****

Moderator: so it depends?

Respondent H: It depends. It depends.”

Pg20 *“Respondent E: ... Durbandeep the ladies are relaxed. You can see they're waiting for the guys from from work to get the money,*

Respondent A: But then not all of them.

****Others murmur agreement****

Respondent E: Not all of them but then majority. But there in the cities ladies are working, ladies are working, are the ones who are bread winners the the the... who are responsible actually.”

- Women with children under pressure to be employed to take care of their children and meet their needs and wants/sense of responsibility to provide (single moms)
- Women experience mental strain/physical pain of unemployment

Pg20 <i>“Respondent C: I’m trying every day. If you go to the bed I need that, Grampa, pain block. The boy every day is trying “mama, I need the lama. I need the Poloni”. Yoooh! All of them those things.”</i>
• Women who are unemployed may need to use their sexuality to earn an income of some sort to sustain to provide Pg20-21 <i>“Respondent A: she says uhh the ladies are not the same, because now some of them that they grew up in, in in, in a, in a good place, some of them they grew up in area - Respondent H: In every place. Respondent D: Well. Respondent A: What she's trying to say is that she other girls would have money because now. They go and turn themselves to boys. Some of them do do certain things in order to get those.”</i>
• Desperate women make income through sexual means Pg21 <i>“Respondent A: she says uhh the ladies are not the same, because now some of them that they grew up in, in in, in a, in a good place, some of them they grew up in area - Respondent H: In every place. Respondent D: Well. Respondent A: What she's trying to say is that she other girls would have money because now. They go and turn themselves to boys. Some of them do do certain things in order to get those. Moderator: mmmhm certain things... (respondents murmur agreement)”</i>
• Men think women have more opportunities than them • Specific jobs cater to women and specific jobs cater to men more/mixed • Women better communicators/have it easier. Pg21 <i>“Moderator: All right. So definitely men and women we are we are both struggle but just differently and it seems that – Respondent D: but I feel like women, women have more opportunities than men. Moderator: more opportunities? Is it - Respondent D: They are able to, I could say they always find a way to maneuver how to to find money? Yeah”</i> Pg21 <i>“Respondent E: But the people who have got a lot of opportunity are the guys because there are some of the specific jobs that they need men- *Others agree verbally* Respondent E: - but then on ladies, we are just mixed. We're mixed. So yeah, we'll see ahh the guys see the ladies. But then the people that they've got a lot is guys job wise - Respondent F: yes Respondent E: - yes job wise but then getting money so easily.”</i>
• Men are more required to work thus being harder in general for men Pg23 <i>“Respondent E: you need to work!”</i>

Table 3.23: focus group 2 data “Men and women experience unemployment differently” theme

• Men experience unemployment harder than women Pg5 <i>“Speaker B: I do agree with you, you guys have needs, we... you know what they said? Man is a provider. You you know that you used to grow up like you looking at your dad dad doing everything at the the house is the man of the house is supposed to do everything for you guys. Even though let's say your Mama is is also is working also. Speaker F: Yeah.</i>
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Speaker B: But the major thing is the man. It's your dad who's gonna do the most thing is in the house. That's what I'm trying to say."

- Women have it easier

Pg4 "Speaker B: Especially we as men's. It's hard if you unemployed.

Speaker E: But its difficult on both genders

Speaker B: Yeah, I can tell. But you guys, you as ladies, it's much better than us.

Speaker A: Yeah its much better than us guys

Speaker C: Yeah, because we as men sometimes, even though, like, you're not my girlfriend, maybe let's say you're my sister If I'm working as a man, I can take care of you"

- Men still want to provide for unemployed women
- Men are seen as providers
- Men have a pressure/responsibility to take care of their family members, especially women.
- Men are still held to higher expectation even if mother and father are both employed

Pg26 "Speaker C: Uh... On a fact site like on a reality side, ladies, if we can polish this thing, especially for you ladies, these things should be found for us as men and and and men and women. For for men, It's too too too difficult.

Moderator: mmh

Speaker C: Because umm why, Why, Why I'm saying that I'm not saying that all the ladies, ummm they are like they are living on on that way.

Moderator: Just speak louder for me. The wind is just tearing your voice, yeah.

Speaker C: Eish! ummm I'm I'm saying like is it is difficult for us as men because like most of things as a man and it's up to you as a man you understand. You are the one who have to have a plan or all this stuff. Umm on you ladies at least you've got you've got some boyfriend, you understand. He can meet you halfway you understand? Understand... umm... like us, it's only facing that situation you understand? If you don't have a plan, you you have to make sure that you will end up having that plan you understand ...

****Other members of group hum in agreement quietly****

- Men find it difficult to pursue women when unemployed because they are not financially stable

Pg16 "Speaker C: They be like even like afraid to, get like... be afraid actually to, approach a girl, you know what and you say you know heish –

Speaker G: your not financially stable."

- Women find it hard to date men who are their peers because though they are unemployed they would rather not date an unemployed man

Pg28 "Speaker D: I feel like I agree with what the gents are saying. Unemployment is very emasculating. You cannot feel like a man if you cannot provide because a man is a provider. Personally, me, I cannot date a man that is not employed even though I am unemployed.

Because I will. Look outside that ohh. I'm a beautiful girl. That guy said he can give me this, that, that, that what about the man that's waiting for me at home? Like what are you giving me? The world is very transactional if we are being very honest.

Speaker B: its demanding.

Speaker D: Its demanding. Yes there's a certain lifestyle I want for myself. I can try and get myself there but ultimately I want a man to be able to say baby girl relax.

Speaker A: Go relax. I will do it for you, like...

Speaker C: you like special treatment

Speaker D: Yes, that's what women like. And then it will also be easy for me to wake up and cook for you and clean and cater to you because you're taking care of me."

Men are more willing to date an unemployed woman of their peers Pg26 <i>"Speaker A: I think, you know, us as... I think... For women and men, it's different. Why? Ermm... Because at some point like. As a as a person like, I've got a girlfriend, I've got a girlfriend maybe errrr she is also unemployed, so every cent, maybe that I'm getting neh I will make sure that you know my chick you know must get half of it, you understand? (other speakers hum in agreement*) speaker A: Like the like to at least to maintain those minor things, you understand that you wanna...</i> <i>*Male members hum deeply and repeat "yeah"*</i> <i>Speaker A: -To, to cover, you understand? But, you know, ladies, sometimes you're not fair you know?"</i> Pg27 <i>"Speaker A: Maybe if she's got she she she has something like she would share you understand. But us, as men like we need to make sure that OK, my girlfriend like, it's up to standard every time. Like when she goes out, like, I'll have to make certain that OK, ahh now she's nxaa (translation: fine/well). yeah you understand.</i> <i>Speaker B: Some are demanding some are not</i> <i>Speaker G: So in nowadays, like it's, it's very hard like hehehe...</i> <i>Other speakers: Yeah.</i> <i>Speaker C: Even to date now to approach a girl because I remember the story that you told me that time like that you approach one of the other girl and then she she she she did ask you can you afford can, you afford the weave?</i> <i>*Laughter erupts from all members of group*</i> Pg27 <i>"Speaker C: No, like ummm, I think he was trying to say like in, in, in in some coming time like years, as the the times are changing. ummmm I think some of us men, the men's, they wont date.</i> <i>*Multiple speakers: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.*</i>
Pressure on men to provide in a relationship no matter what Pg29 <i>"Speaker A: Like, us as men like we've got *speaks Zulu and taps shoulders*</i> <i>Moderator: Weight on your shoulder.</i> <i>*Speakers: Yeah, yeah.*</i> Pg29 <i>"Speaker F: If you cant provide who are you in the family?</i> <i>Speaker E: who are you?</i> <i>Speaker B: We are the leaders."</i>
Fear that dating will be harder due to unemployment and lack of financial stability for future generations male unemployment is harder and emasculating Pg29-30 <i>"Speaker F: I think more than anything Christianity validates how you guys feel when you're unemployed because you know the Bible says, you know, the man is the provider they head of the family. So now I feel like if you can't provide for your family. You feel like you know you're failing.</i> <i>*Other speakers: Yeah, yeah.*</i> <i>Speaker C: You're useless.</i> <i>Speaker B: If you can't lead financially, it's like.</i> <i>Speaker F: Yeah."</i>

5.8 Defined themes

Step 5 is where the themes are defined and at the final stage of refinement (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). The researcher asks themselves what the themes are conveying? Do the themes relate to each other? What is the theme? How do the themes relate to the topic? In step 4 of the

analysis process the researcher found 12 themes in the data, namely; “Psychological issues”, “Stress”, “Perceived as not good enough”, “Comparison to employed peers”, “Substance use”, “Lack of government intervention and failing youth”, “Poor education”, “Corruption”, “Foreigners taking jobs”, “Age concerns”, “Crime” and “Men and women experience unemployment differently”. Following transcript analysis, emergent codes were grouped into broader themes through iterative refinement. Final themes were validated through peer review and supervisor input to ensure analytic reliability

This has been narrowed down by combining certain themes then generating sub themes. “Psychological issues” and “Stress” are now combined as being one theme; **Psychological impacts**. Themes “Perceived as not good enough” and “Comparison to employed peers” are now combined and addressed as theme; **Perceptions while unemployed**. The themes “Lack of government intervention and failing youth”, “poor education” and “foreigners taking jobs” are now to be under the overarching theme; **Government failings: lack of government intervention, poor education and illegal foreigners**. The theme “Men and women experience unemployment differently” will continue to be its own theme titled; **Men and women experience unemployment differently**. Lastly, the themes “Substance use”, “Corruption”, “Crime” and “Age concerns” will be combined under the theme; **Latent functions of youth unemployment**.

Table 4: Themes

Themes	
Main themes	Subthemes
1. The Psychological impacts	- Negative psychological impacts - Stress
2. Perceptions while unemployed	N/A
3. Government failings	- Lack of government intervention - Poor education - Illegal foreigners
4. Men and women experience unemployment differently	- Men’s vs women’s feelings - Dating troubles

5. Latent functions of youth unemployment	• Substance use • Corruption • Crime • Age concerns
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5.9 Discussion and Reporting analysis

Step 6 of TCA is done at the end of the research where the analysis of data is reported after data has been analyzed. This will be covered in the discussion section that follows. Thematic interpretation revealed a consistent pattern of psychological strain linked to unemployment, highlighting emotional, social, and cognitive impacts across participant narratives.

5.9.1 The Psychological impacts

The main theme “The Psychological impacts” refers to the negative emotions that unemployed youth experience. The Psychological impacts that were found were negative and caused/catalysed by stress. How these impacts occur and what these impacts are will be discussed further.

5.9.1.1 *Negative psychological impacts*

The participants of both focus groups supported that negative feelings, excluding the one positive feeling of hope for future employment, are the psychological impacts that stem from youth unemployment. The negative psychological impacts were namely; depression, guilt, shame, suicidality, sadness, fears, frustration, physical heart ache, hope for employment, traumatism, anger, discontent, low self-esteem, frustration of not being employed, feeling guilty for not being employed and hope for future employment.

Cloete (2015) discussed that unemployment would result in psychological effects; anxiety, apathy, suicide, fatalism, and physical health strain such as heart diseases. The findings definitely support the literature in that regards, however, the participants did not present feeling of hopelessness. Rather the participants expressed feelings of hope for their personal futures, they are not giving up and are still willing to work towards employment. Cloete (2015) mentioned that work gives people a sense of purpose. Compared to the findings this is to be supported because participants agreed to the boredom that arises from unemployment, that boredom can be observed as feeling a lack of purpose. Akter et al. (2020) stated that unemployment showed that feelings of financial stress, financial hardship and financial

wellbeing were strong predictors of depression, anxiety and stress. That study showed how unemployment can lead to financial stressors which are associated with depression, anxiety and stress (Akter et al., 2020). In the findings, the participants showed similar feelings. The participants emphasized on stress being a huge part of what makes unemployment so difficult. Stress is discussed as being a cause of those feelings arising in Akter et al. (2020) and the findings from participants in the present findings support this claim because the negative feelings they had expressed stemmed from the stress of being unemployed.

In a study by Medina-Lara and Morrish (2021) loneliness was discussed in relation to employment status. The findings from participants show that these unemployed youth do want to socialize, however, due to not being able to afford their needs, these youth cannot afford to socialize. Most of their socializing occurs with alcohol being bought and drank amongst friends, however, not having money to participate they become less social. Medina-Lara and Morrish (2021) made it seem as though feeling loneliness is catalysed by unemployment. The present study would rather state that unemployment contributes to a limited social life but not specifically bringing feelings of loneliness. Loneliness may be a result for some people because of being unemployed, however, this study suggests that loneliness is a less common feeling amongst the unemployed youth, rather a feeling of limitation that makes them feel isolated but not lonely per say. A study showed that unemployed youth experienced more than twice as much depression, distress and lower life satisfaction than their employed non-students (Guhn et al., 2020). This statement was reinforced by the present findings because participants did express discontent with life, depressed and distressed. By expressing discontent the participants are thus feeling a lower life satisfaction due to being unemployed. A similar study found that NEET youth were in poorer general and mental health (Bonell et al., 2021). Due to the findings previously discussed this statement is supported even though physical health was not addressed in this study, however, participants did reveal having headaches and chest pains from their stress and sadness. Those are physical symptoms of stress and sadness, therefore, the statement by Bonell et al. (2021) is supported by this study's findings, though findings about risky behaviour from men can be supported in this study due to the excessive drinking habits that were discussed. The men expressed drinking heavily when possible, to escape their unemployment temporarily. Poor health outcomes appeared for men and women in this study, not just women.

Clomax et al. (2021) found that underemployed, due to the pandemic, and unemployed people have increased odds of having depression and anxiety. The participants in the study did make

note that Covid did create mass job loss in South Africa, so the unemployment rates were affected. The finding of Clomax et al. (2021) that unemployed people have increased odds of having depression and anxiety is supported by the present study because of the responses from participants. The participants discussed how unemployment made them feel and those feelings expressed align with depression and anxiety. Bryan et al. (2023) found that it does not matter how long an individual experiences unemployment, they still experience the negative impacts to their well-being. This finding was supported by the present study because amongst participants were youth who experienced unemployment for different lengths of time and even so they all experienced similar feeling and vulnerabilities to depression.

5.9.1.2 Stress

“Stress” was a common theme between the two focus groups. Different forms of stress were discussed between members but the most common were financial stress, familial stress, emotionally crippling stress, stress of unemployment and constantly being in a state of stress. According to the stress diathesis model stress over time, an undesirable stressor, can lead to depressive symptoms and depression to be triggered in youth (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). Through the finding this theory holds true to the reality of unemployed youth in Johannesburg. Akter et al. (2020) stated that unemployment showed that feelings of financial stress, financial hardship and financial well-being were strong predictors of depression, anxiety and stress. In the present findings the youth expressed being constantly stress and constantly stressing about money, family and more. Their stressors were observed as being the source of most of their negative feelings and alleviating the unemployment was the solution to not being stressed anymore, thus feeling better overall. The literature by Guhn et al. (2020) and Bonell et al. (2021) states that youth when placed in a position where they are not able to support themselves become deviant and express behaviours that do not support their physical or mental health.

The participants did discuss that they felt that others in their positions can find themselves taking to substance use and drinking heavily, however, these behaviours were described as forms of escapism. Trying to escape their stressors and how those stressors make them feel. The psychological impacts can be related back to stress as being a psychological consequence experienced by youth who are unemployed and experiencing strenuous circumstances due to it (Ingram & Luxton, 2005). That type of major stress (unemployment) over time can lead to depressive symptoms and depression to be triggered in youth because by being unemployed they are more vulnerable to those symptoms due to the stressors of unemployment (Ingram &

Luxton, 2005). Constant stress in day-to-day life can then also be categorized as a major stressor according to the Diathesis-Stress Model considering how greatly participants expressed their multiple stressors and how they cope with them. Bryan et al. (2023) made it clear that those who are unemployed for a longer period experienced more damage or severity than those who experienced it for a shorter period. Amongst the participants in focus group one respondent G had said he had been unemployed for 5 years and he had been expressed being extremely saddened by it compared to a participant in focus group two speaker D who had only been unemployed for 10 months who was not as severely affected while still feeling the same feelings and stressors. The severity of psychological impact was different. The findings supports this claim. The findings of this study, however, do differ from most of the literature by concluding that stress is the catalyst of negative impacts when unemployed, rather than unemployment itself being the catalyst alone for those negative impacts discussed.

5.9.2 Perceptions while unemployed

The main theme “perceptions while unemployed” will discuss how the youth perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Moreover, discuss how they are compared ,by other and themselves, to their employed peers. This theme addresses the significant feeling brought up by the youth when discussing their thoughts and feeling regarding being currently unemployed, inadequacy would be the word that describes those feelings. Furthermore, this theme addresses the feelings of peer pressure, as well as the feelings of being “less than” the unemployed youth employed counterparts.

Various transitions take place between the age of 15 and 29 according to Chacaltana et al. (2020), transitions such as reproductive transitions (independence, coupling and parenthood), basic to higher education transitions and the transition from school to work. Looking at both SI (Symbolic interactionalism) and SWTS (school to work transitions) it is determined that when youth are transitioning from school to work, this transition greatly dictates life trajectory. Participants stated feeling “stuck”, like they are not moving forward with life. Or not transitioning into adulthood as expected. They lack a sense of purpose that contributes to that feeling of being stuck because they are not “doing anything”/not being productive. Without work they feel they are not doing enough as young adults compared to what they should be doing during this transitional period. Cloete (2015) also mentioned that work gives people purpose, income to sustain living with a sense of self-worth which is the feeling these youth are missing out on.

Participants discussed being perceived as lazy, unproductive, feeling pressured to do better and feeling misunderstood. Participants expressed they felt perceived this way by family, peers and themselves. The period of “youth” is suggested to be a time of great changes from dependency (adolescence) to independence (adulthood) with the overall aim of youth gaining lifelong employability (Chacaltana et al., 2020). Without employment these youth cannot be fully independent and that is where it is suggested they are perceived negatively because they are not partaking in these transitions due to unemployment. The participants explained how amongst family they may be viewed as being lazy towards gaining employment since they remain unemployed. Rather than the issue being them being unemployed, the findings suggest that the actual perception from others come from not meeting adulthood milestones during this transitional period. The participants discussed how “others” are able to purchase cars, start families and work while they feel left behind in the process of transitioning into adulthood. Seeing their peers “moving forward” affected the participants self-perception as not doing enough and not feeling validated.

Unemployment has placed them into a situation where they crave employment not only for the socio-economic benefits but also to change how they are perceived by others and themselves. Regarding the perception from others unemployment was observed to have a stigma attached to it that only discredits the individuals' abilities, intelligence and drive. The participants expressed how people underestimate them and their abilities because they are still unemployed. In focus group one respondent A discussed how the system and the economic state of the country would need to be considered for others to have a better insight into other reasons why they are unemployed rather than misunderstanding these youth as simply inadequate. This is a point that the study hopes to unfold in the following themes. There seems to be a misconception that unemployed youth are “lazy” when in reality these youth that participated craved employment as it would change their lives economically and socially.

Compared to their employed counterparts, these youth feel even worse about their situation. Participants in focus group two explained how they are compared to their employed family members and subsequently treated for the worse for it. Speaker C explained that when he was previously employed, he was not treated the way he is now that he is unemployed. Speaker D shared the same sentiment that family members would begin to enforce more chores or home tasks to somewhat keep them busy. However, employed members would not be subjected to the same household expectations because they are employed. The participants also compared themselves to their employed peers, discussing how their age mates were moving forward in

life, meeting goals, starting families and having careers while they are not meeting those same goals.

This theme “**comparison to employed peers**” addresses the feelings of peer pressure, as well as the feelings of being “less than” the unemployed youth employed counterparts. Participants expressed how they feel a pressure to succeed as their employed age mates have done. Their age mates were discussed as moving forward in life, meeting goals, starting families, buying cars, building their lives while they are not doing the same. There was pain observed from that point of discussion.

5.9.3 Government failings

This theme addresses the failings of the current ANC government, poor education systems and illegal foreigners. The government is seen as being responsible for the macro and micro economic factors that contribute to their unemployment such as poor schooling systems, corruption (financial), a poor economy, illegal foreigners taking the low paying jobs available and overpopulation. The current government was discussed as not effectively assisting youth, not creating jobs (thus there being a lack of jobs) and not caring to solve problems. There was a perception from participants that the government can assist youth, and South Africa as a whole, however, that power towards good is not exercised. The government was viewed as both the cause of problems and the solution to these problems to follow.

5.9.3.1 Lack of government intervention

There was blame for the government, lack of trust in government and lack of government intervention towards this major country wide issue. All participants expressed that the government is to blame for their unemployment because it is the government’s job to make jobs available. It was expressed that there are a lack of jobs and an increase in unemployed youth, especially post Covid-19. The government is discussed as not assisting poorer communities in any capacity, from how these environments look and their lack of access to resources. The government contributing to its poor economy due to corruption was discussed. The government, through the lenses of these unemployed youth, is unreliable, therefore, they feel they need to look after themselves/ “do your own thing” or “hustle” and not anticipate government assistance.

From what was observed in the focus groups there is a disdain towards the lack of urgency and lack of interest displayed by the governments actions thus far in current day South Africa. It

was observed that these youth are pained by their government's actions and lack thereof. This was significant to the study not only because it was commonly discussed but also because it answers the research question regarding how the psychological impacts occur. The government is a macroeconomic factor as to why these youth are unemployed and feel negative while unemployed and frustration towards the government. The government is failing the youth according to the participants.

5.9.3.2 *Poor education*

The youth expressed that when it comes to getting a job after schooling there are no jobs in the tertiary study fields/specialized fields and there is a lack of practical skills being molded at the matriculates and lower levels. The schooling system, even when reaching high degrees in tertiary education does not guarantee good employment after graduation according to participants. This is also seen as a government failing on the part of the department of education not bettering the schooling system and another failing of government in creating jobs for graduates to attain thus being left with low-income jobs that do not match the amount of time spent in education. The problem of unemployment needs to be solved by the government (improving education systems, creation of jobs in various fields and with various levels of skill requirements) and employers (who need to be implored to hire more youth) is what Mago (2019) suggested.

The present findings indicate that the government infrastructure is a major contributor to the youth unemployment rate, and the findings also indicate how acutely aware the youth are to that conclusion. Participants of the Bacela and Kheswa (2023) study discussed how the government bodies, universities and professional bodies could have a more positive impact on unemployment and how their lack of assistance negatively affects their career progress (Bacela & Kheswa, 2023). The participants in the present study discussed the government failing on the part of the department of education not bettering the schooling system. According to participants the schooling system is heavily theory based which is limiting the potential of youth leaving school trying to enter the workforce.

Chacaltana et al. (2020) mentioned that work-based training such as mentorships should be encouraged in governments and universities (Chacaltana et al., 2020). Though not commonly mentioned by participants there was an observation that the education system in South Africa does not promote employability. This is what these youth feel will better set up future youth for a better employment outcome. As mentioned in table 3.6 “employer expectations”, there is

a job market where entry level jobs demand experience in positions that these youth were not even qualified yet to fill. It is observed that there is a gap in job opportunities for young professionals to even attain their “first” job. The participants expressed a lack of job readiness amongst youth due to a lack of skills-based support from the schooling system and lack of guidance for schools. There is a great desire for change in the schooling system and general government infrastructure for there to be impactful positive change in South Africa and their youth.

5.9.3.3 Illegal foreigners

The participants expressed how undocumented foreigners are another government failing because these foreigners are taking jobs, those available from low paying to high paying jobs, away from South African citizens. There is blame towards the government to better manage the borders and manage migrants to make sure they are documented. From the data those most affected by this were those in lower income areas because those are areas undocumented foreigners reside mostly; due to the lack of jobs and high unemployment rate they tend to be in these spaces. Overpopulation was already an issue brought up by participants and with the influx of undocumented foreigners, that population seems to be negatively affecting these youth. Participants stated that employers were more willing to employ undocumented foreigners because: they offer cheap labour thus reducing the costs of labour spent by these employers/companies. Participants expressed that this allows employers to pay lower wages that South African citizens are not willing to accept, thus making undocumented foreigners more viable for employment. Participants in focus group one agreed that the issue is not the foreigners themselves as they are too trying to make a living, rather it is a failure of government not protecting their citizens.

5.9.4 Men and women experience unemployment differently

This theme addresses how and why men and women experience youth unemployment differently. Participants expressed that men and women experience unemployment differently. First the differences for men will be addressed then followed by the difference women experience when unemployed. Participants from both focus groups expressed that unemployment is unemployment, however, men experience more negative effects from it due to the societal responsibilities and cultural identity.

5.9.4.1 Men's vs women's feelings

Men are seen as being providers and expected to be breadwinners. Men are seen as being the ones to provide for their families through financial support. Men are expected to provide and be leaders in family and community. Participants agreed that for men unemployment was more painful because they are emasculated by the experience. The study by Ayano et al. (2020) found that depression was 30.9% present amongst those unemployed youth. The study found that men were more impacted by depression than women and this is found to be true in most developing countries such as Southern Ethiopia, Zimbabwe (previously discussed), South Africa and other African nations (Ayano et al., 2020). The participants, though it was briefly argued amongst participants, concluded that unemployment is harder for men because of those societal pressures placed on them make their employment much less allowable compared to women being unemployed which is more allowable, even in current day. This perspective also has cultural influences experienced in South Africa regarding gender roles. The men in the focus groups expressed emotionally that as a man “you have to work!”. They stated that, as a man, unemployment is more emotionally crippling compared to women, both men and women in the groups expressed that unemployment is negative for both and the hardships were similar, however, the internal experience showcased a greater divide.

The study by Bonell et al. (2021) found precarious behaviours congregated in NEET men but not in NEET women. This is supported by the data because it was the men who discussed substance use and alcohol use as a form of stress relief compared to the women who did not discuss substance use to a similar degree. The men were more inclined to risky behaviours than the women. The participants expressed that men were more mentally impacted by unemployment and that the men carry a heavier emotional/mental burden when they are not making an income and providing in any capacity to their families, children and potential mates. Bryan et al. (2023) came to find that men tended to be more negatively affected by unemployment than women due to the identity of men being stressed on their work, what they do. This was supported by the finding of the present study as all the participants agreed that men were more burdened by unemployment compared to women and men feel emasculated from it, women are spared that feeling. Countries where men are characterized by conservative gender roles mostly the men suffered more from unemployment (Bryan et al., 2023). South Africa does have a lower equality index thus this statement is consistent with the data of the present study. The researcher observed that there is a greater burden on men when they are unemployed versus women and youth are aware of it.

In the focus groups it was agreed that women though facing similar stressors from unemployment, they, however, have it “easier” than men because they are not as burdened societally than men. Participants in focus group one agreed that women in rural areas versus urban areas in the city had differences in their urgency to acquire jobs. Women in urban areas were perceived as being more inclined to work and even be breadwinners in their families, whereas women in more rural areas are less inclined to find work, or “lazy”. Women with children were discussed as having an added pressure to find employment due to having children depend on them to provide. Women were discussed as being more supported when unemployed compared to men. The participants in the focus groups expressed that women, when unemployed, are still provided for financially either by family or by other men. The researcher found that men were not given that similar grace. Mukuku and Phiri (2020) found that in urban areas men who failed to become employed, while subjected to conservative gender roles such as being viewed as a breadwinner, were most likely to take their own lives. Though none of the participants stated they felt suicidal, suicide was discussed and was presented by men in the group, therefore, it can be considered that suicide is more in mind for men than it is for the women in the focus groups. Suicide due to not being employed was something that participants in focus group one discussed and stated that they even knew of people who had successfully ended their lives.

Participants in focus group one also expressed how women were seen as more employable in certain jobs (receptionists, cashiers) and men were more preferred for other employment such as construction or blue-collar physical labour jobs. When discussing the employability of women or preference to hire women, this is due to the BBBEE policies that do promote fairness by hiring women to go against sexist behaviours that previously limited women in the job market (DTIC, 2025). However, in an office space it was more mixed. Moreover, men in focus group 2 expressed that as men there are certain jobs that further emasculate them such as being a cashier, that would not be an option plus it is a minimum wage job.

5.9.4.1 *Dating troubles*

It was found in the data that participants expressed concerns for men regarding finding a mate. Men have a much harder time finding a mate when unemployed. When men are unemployed they find it difficult to “date” because women were seen as not wanting to date an unemployed man because then he cannot provide for them. Men in the focus group expressed that women will not accept them even if the women themselves are unemployed as well. The participants

in focus group two expressed that men are very willing to date unemployed women because regardless of the woman employment status the man is still expected to provide.

5.9.5 Latent functions of youth unemployment

This theme will address the latent results of youth unemployment that were found to be significant in the data. Substance use, corruption, crime and age concerns will be discussed in this theme. These are things that resulted from youth unemployment discussed in both focus groups.

5.9.5.1 *Substance use*

The participants discussed how it can be a good form of escapism, however, it can be abused which can lead to even more stress and further unemployment. Such as missing an interview on Monday because you over drank alcohol and were hung over during the previous weekend. Substance use was discussed as being something to enjoy but also something to take heed of while using. The study by Moroe et al. (2025) found that youth find was to cope with those psychological consequences by participating in risky sexual behaviour and substance use. The present study findings support this claim as participants emphasized the importance of that form of escapism more so than other recreational activities. This was because most of their socializing includes partaking in drinking alcohol. It “refreshed” them to later deal with their stresses and continue to pursue employment. It was also observed that there is a fear of using substances to “forget” because of the fear of becoming addicted to them and also distracting themselves too much from their stressors which can also be addictive. Substance use as a coping mechanism is different from other recreational activities due to the possible negative outcomes of using substances while in a negative headspace. Their recognition of their own vulnerability to substance use was observed by the researcher, the participants seemed very aware of the risks of substance use, especially when they are not working.

5.9.5.2 *Corruption*

According to participants, “corruption” is an issue directly affecting them. They state that there is government corruption, corruption of leaders and corruption amongst regular citizens. In regard to unemployment the youth discussed there being nepotism, “connections” and bribery in job acquiring. The government is once again seen as failing the youth because these youth feel slighted by the government having elderly (past retirement age) employed people in positions of power yet there are young people still unemployed. There was frustration observed

by the researcher through how the youth discussed “corruption” as a problem that seemed to dishearten them in regards to getting employment. It was expressed that the government and the everyday person participates in corruption.

5.9.5.3 *Crime*

“Crime” is seen as a more minor point due to it correlating as being a response to youth unemployment. *Respondent D* responded to the question of fears regarding youth unemployment, he responded that there is a fear of crime increasing. Young people, by not having that support, may also begin to take part in anti-social behaviour and turn to crime (Cloete, 2015). It is suggested that this happens due to the psychological issues formed through unemployment which may lead to crime and the use of recreational substances. Considering the reaction of other participants to crime being brought up there was compassion in understanding that these people commit these crimes for the same reason they seek jobs, to live a sustainably. Mazorodze (2020) proved that youth unemployment and crime are positively associated, and the researcher stated that job creation for young people could alleviate or at least reduce the number of murders in KwaZulu-Natal (Mazorodze, 2020). Crime affects everyone and can lead to violent criminal behavior, therefore, the researcher validated this by observing it as a genuine fear that can affect participants when realized.

5.9.5.4 *Age concerns*

Youth occupy a certain age bracket and thus a certain amount of time to begin meeting adulthood milestones and attaining employment. In focus group one there was emphasis put on the reality that as one gets older the greater the responsibilities they have, be it having children and providing for them, familial responsibilities and a greater need to become employed at a certain point in time. The participants discussed that when you are younger there is more hope regarding employment, it is harder to be employed when your older to get employed. There was a desire to create a legacy and that time is running out to achieve both adulthood transitional goals, Entrepreneurial goals and personal goals. Age is seen as a limitation as well in the labour market. Age was a briefly discussed topic, however, it was significant in understanding that time is also a factor that contributes to their feelings about being unemployed.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings and reported the findings in an organized and clear manner. Each theme was discussed and critically reviewed for its relevance to the findings and the study. It was found that stress was the catalyst for the negative psychological impacts unemployed youth experience. It was found that youth feel pressure to succeed due to their transitional period of their lives, feel judged by family and peers and perceive themselves as failures for not being employed yet. They expressed feeling misunderstood but retained their hope for future employment. It was also found that youth' perceptions of government are negative due to the lack of intervention towards youth, such as job creation and higher standard schooling. It was found that men and women do experience unemployment differently which reinforces past literature findings on men and women, however, more context was provided on there being differences in the urban South African context. Latent functions of unemployment were also found which provided more context into what actions can arise from being unemployed. Lastly, the conclusion, limitations and recommendations of the present study will be addressed in the final chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the overall conclusion of the research study and the relevant recommendations for future research. The main findings of the research, the relevance of the study and the possible contribution to the greater body of knowledge on the research topic. The limitations found through good research will be discussed. Lastly, the recommendations of the researcher for future studies will be discussed in this chapter. Following the chapter will be the references, thus concluding the thesis.

6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion the study did achieve what it sought to do. Each research question and objective was answered through rigorous good research acts. The researcher explained what psychological impacts unemployed youth experienced. Negative psychological impacts were found such as discontent, depressive symptoms, stress, frustration and anger. Why these impacts occurred were discovered to be due to self/others perceiving them as lesser for not being employed. Those emotions also arose from being compared to employed peers. generally, there is discontent and frustration towards their circumstances. Lack of government intervention was found to be the main cause of youth unemployment. Government failings regarding corruption, poor school education and mass illegal foreigners migrating to the country were significant contributors to youth unemployment. How these impacts manifested was found to be caused by government not intervening which leads to latent functions that result from youth unemployment; crime, corruption and substance use. It was found that stress was in most aspects of an unemployed youth daily life. the youth stressed about being able to purchase necessities, the guilt of asking for financial support from family and the stress of not being able to support themselves or others. Stress was found to be the main psychological impact that created a vulnerability to other negative psychological impacts: depression, sadness, frustration, anger and discontent.

The research found that men and women do experience youth unemployment differently. Men were discovered to experience greater emotional distress compared to women. It was found that men and women had similar struggles while being unemployed, however, men were more burdened by it, feeling emasculated and a failure to their role as a man in their family and community. It was found that the dating amongst youth is also affected by youth unemployment

by reducing the number of suitable men for women to date. Unemployed men were found to be undesirable to young women. Women had more of a burden when they had children because they are expected to provide for their children and doing so unemployed was found to be very stressful. Women were discussed to be able to manage unemployment better than men because men within women's lives were able to financially support them.

The study provided a deeper understanding of the youth unemployment experience and the true feelings of those unemployed youth. Youth unemployment was found to impact the individual negatively in their social life, family life and dating life. Various areas of their lives are affected by unemployment. The study displayed the underlying emotions of those youth but also showcased why they feel those negative impacts at a micro and macro level. Furthermore, the research provided recommendations and encouragement for future studies on youth unemployment from the psychological perspective. The main conclusion of the research findings was that stress was to be the catalyst for negative psychological impacts occurring/manifesting amongst unemployed youth. The unemployment itself was not the catalyst, rather the start for stress to be bred thus resulting in greater negative psychological impacts.

6.3 Limitations

A limitation of the research study was that only two focus groups were done with a total of 16 participants that participated. There could be more varied and significant data that could have been found if the research was more expanded in the data collection and number of participants total. The researcher was limited by the time constraint as well in that regard to produce the study within a two-year period and only one year that included data collection. The study is limited by locations that focus group participants were sampled from, due to not having a wider sample size the researcher's findings may be limited since only two areas in the whole of Johannesburg were covered in the study when sampling. The fourth limitation is that the researcher was not funded by any organization to assist in paying travel costs for participants, all costs fell on the researcher, with a larger coin purse there may have been greater efforts to have more participants and more focus groups.

A limitation of the study was the use of qualitative research methods. Since it is not numerically based which makes pinning down phenomena very difficult because qualitative research looks at relationships and experiences that can make the research more subjective by nature even when objectivity is still required (Bhangu et al., 2023). The potential for researcher bias is a

limitation, like researcher bias, the subjective nature of the research may result in more subjectivity than desired which may limit the study due to human error, preconceptions and personal life experiences of researcher. The researcher avoided this happening by continuously seeking guidance from supervisors who assisted in maintaining the good research acts, such as being more objective where subjectivity may have interfered the study. Lastly, the researcher was limited to only asking questions related to the feelings of participants about their unemployment rather than exploring other factors of unemployment. The study only required the researcher to investigate the psychological impacts of unemployment on an internal level.

6.4 Recommendations

The research encourages that there be more study on the psychological experiences relating to unemployment and expand the topic of unemployment to be more than an economic problem in Southern Africa. Unemployment has been ever present and due to it still being an issue this research implores that more research is done on it to promote more focused therapy and counselling of unemployed youth. The research serves as a stepping stone towards better discussing youth unemployment more holistically. The research mostly reinforced previous literature, however, it was found that stress is the true catalyst of those negative emotions, therapy and counselling can better focus on stress and how to assist people facing stressors relating to unemployment.

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ANNEXURE 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Annexure I. A(instruments)

Demographic instrument questions (sex, age, employment status and education level)

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE	
What is your current age?	• 18 - 23 • 24 - 28 • 28- 34
Which sex do you identify with?	• Male • Female • Prefer not to say.
What is your highest qualification?	• High school diploma/matriculation • Bachelor's degree • Master's degree • Doctorate
What is your marital status?	• Married • Divorced • Separated • Widowed

	• Unmarried • Prefer not to say.
How many people are currently living in your house?	
How many children do you have?	

(Camden, Hughes & Yangchen, 2016)

Annexure I. B (instruments)

Focus group questions

Participants will be welcomed and thanked for taking their time to be a part of the study. The study will be introduced to the participants, as well as the goals of the study will be described again.

1. Why do you think you are unemployed?
2. How does unemployment make you feel about yourself?
3. What do you think other people think of you since being unemployed?
4. What do you think is the cause of youth unemployment?
5. What are your thoughts of youth unemployed in Johannesburg?
6. What stressors do you face being an unemployed youth?
7. Explain how you approach those stressors?
8. What are 3 coping mechanisms that have helped you?
9. What aspects of unemployment are the most difficult?
10. What are your greatest fears regarding your unemployment?
11. When do you think you will feel content with life?
12. Do you feel that men and women experience unemployment differently?
13. Do you think the experience of unemployment is traumatic?
14. What kind of employment would you like to attain in the future?

The participants will be thanked once the point of saturation has been met or when the discussion reaches its natural end after the last question is discussed. The participants will be thanked for their participation, time and effort they lend to the research. Afterwards, the participants and the session will be dismissed. Participants will also be informed that if they have any questions for the researcher they are free to do so.

ANNEXUER 2: IIE ETHICAL CLEARENCE LETTER









Our Ref: M. 740325
Enquiries: research@iie.ac.za

04 March 2025

Proposal and Ethics Clearance for Master of Philosophy in Arts.

Student name: Joella Tsholofelo Itlhobogeng
Student number: [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: IIE/MSA

Dear Joella,

We are pleased to inform you that the Higher Degrees Committee considered and approved your research proposal titled: ***Exploring the Psychological Impacts of Unemployment amongst Youth In Johannesburg***, with minor revisions.

Your ethical clearance application has been approved as well. This means that you may proceed with data collection once you have revised the proposal to the satisfaction of your supervisor.

You are reminded to inform the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee of any changes made to the research methodology or title of the research prior to examination. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly

All the best with your research studies.

Dr Reza Hosseini
Chair: Higher Degrees Committee



ADYTECH House: Inanda Greens, 54 Wierda Rd West, Wierda Valley 2196
P.O. Box 2360, Randburg 2125
Directors: GD Whyte (UK), JOR Oesch, MD Aitken, SCD Lurie
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ANNEXURE 3: GATE KEEPERS LETTER TEMPLATE**Annexure O - Gatekeepers letter**

I, [INSERT FULL FIRST AND LAST NAMES OF REPRESENTATIVE], in my capacity as [INSERT FULL TITLE/DESIGNATION] of [INSERT COMPANY/ORGANISATION/ASSOCIATION NAME], grant permission to JoElla Tsholofelo Itlhobogeng to conduct research at the [INSERT SPECIFICATIONS SUCH AS WHERE AND ON WHICH GROUP(S)] pending the outcome of the ethics committee of the IIE on the envisaged research. The student may only engage with members of the organisation/ company/ association if they can produce the Ethics Letter from the IIE. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve for the people I represent. I also reserve the right to remind the people I represent that their participation in this study is completely voluntary, and that this permission does not imply their participation. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are made available in IIE Libraries as well as on the IIE Repository. The below conditions must be applied whilst writing up the research report:	
Conditions concerning the anonymity of the company/organisation/association:	
The company/organisation/association must be kept <u>anonymous</u> in the research report. ☐ The company/organisation/association may be <u>identified</u> in the research report. ☒	
Conditions concerning the publication of the research report:	
The research report will be made available on the IIE Repository... <u>Immediately</u> after completion. ☒ <u>After</u> a specified number of months has elapsed. ☐	
Number of months, if selected:	

Signature	Date

ANNEXURE 4: PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM

Annexure H - Participant and respondent consent form

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants

To whom it may concern,

My name is JoElla Tsholofelo Itlhobogeng and I am a student at The IIE's IIE MSA Ruimsig. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Prof Erhabor Idemudia and Dr Tinashe Pfigu about my research titled "Exploring the demographic psychological impacts of unemployment amongst the youth in Johannesburg". My study aims to explore and understand the psychological effects or impacts that unemployment has on youth through a focus groups discussion that would be held at IIE MSA Ruimsig tertiary campus. My aim is that through the focus group discussion I will be able to ask questions and gain insight from a group of unemployed youth who may have an opportunity to deeply discuss their experiences being unemployed in Johannesburg, South Africa. Unemployment is difficult but the actual experience has not been discussed or researched enough in the context of the economic hub Johannesburg. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of youth unemployment and hopefully lead to greater strides in reducing youth unemployment to be taken to greater heights now that the psychological consequences of one's socioeconomic standing. I anticipate that this study will produce results that could help young people understand the possible psychological risks of unemployment. Secondly, I anticipate that this study will lead to a more serious approach to youth unemployment to be taken more seriously considering now that the psychological impacts will now be addressed and presented in this study. Lastly, I hope to add not only to the South African psychological body of knowledge but also hope for my research to also be used in multidisciplinary studies/research in South Africa.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have

read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you meet all the requirements to participate in the study which means that I believe you are valuable to my study because I value your perspective and experiences as an unemployed youth. I would like for you to participate in my study because I believe you would benefit my study greatly. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to explain what you will be required to do. You will need to participate in a focus group, a focus group is a prompted discussion which I will facilitate where you and other participants will be in a discussion where I will ask questions and participants will be expected to discuss their answers and thoughts with the group. The focus group is a focused group discussion. When you participate you will need to be in communication with me to schedule the day and time that the focus group is to take place, the focus group will be held at IIE MSA Ruimsig tertiary institute campus. You as the participant will be required to transport yourself to the venue on the agreed upon day and time. You as the participants will also be required to also transport yourself from the venue as well. I, the researcher, will give 100 rands in transport fare to each participant only after the focus group session.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your true feelings and lived experiences while being an unemployed youth. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary.
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so.
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE MSA Ruimsig, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my master's in philosophy and arts (Psychology). You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

JoElla Tsholofelo Itlhobogeng

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr Tinashe Pfigu and Prof Erhabor Idemudia

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Participant or respondent Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by JoElla Tsholofelo Itlhobogeng about the psychological impacts of youth unemployment. The study's aims to explore and understand the psychological effects or impacts that unemployment has on youth through a focus groups discussion that would be held at IIE MSA Ruimsig tertiary campus. The study's aim is that through the focus group discussion insight can be gained from a group of unemployed youth who may have an opportunity to deeply discuss their experiences and feelings being unemployed in Johannesburg, South Africa.

This research has been explained to me, and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to participate in this research and be recorded for the purpose of data collection.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private and confidential.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature	Date
------------------	-------------

ANNEXURE 5: AUDIO RECORDING OR RECORDING CONSENT FORM

Annexure H - Audio consent form

Participant or respondent Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by JoElla Tsholofelo Itlhobogeng about the psychological impacts of youth unemployment. The study's aims to explore and understand the psychological effects or impacts that unemployment has on youth through a focus groups discussion that would be held at IIE MSA Ruimsig tertiary campus. The study's aim is that through the focus group discussion insight can be gained from a group of unemployed youth who may have an opportunity to deeply discuss their experiences and feelings being unemployed in Johannesburg, South Africa.

This research has been explained to me, and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to participate in this research and be recorded for the purpose of data collection.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private and confidential.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature**Date**

ANNEXURE 6: TURNITIN REPORT