



Full Length Research Paper

**Socio-Economic Conditions of Unemployed Urban Youths: Evidence from Dilla and Yirgacheffe Towns of Gedeo Zone**

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Received 19 July, 2018; Accepted 16 August, 2018; Published January, 2019

**Abstract**

*In Ethiopia, youth unemployment is becoming a more pressing issue. Scholarly works in the area have exhaustively studied the prominent causes of youth unemployment. By going beyond the causes, this article critically examines the social and economic conditions of unemployed urban youths in the study areas. The researchers have employed qualitative research approach. The study has used both primary and secondary data sources to produce a full-fledged research article. In-depth interview, focus group discussion and naturalistic observation were the instruments through which primary data were collected. Relevant books, journal articles, magazines, official document and research works were consulted as the principal sources of secondary data. The researchers purposively selected 42 key informants and 12 participants of focus group discussions in the study areas. Unemployed youth are facing many social and economic problems including, social exclusion, low self-confidence, carelessness, low saving, mental and physical disease and fear. As a result, some of them were forced to commit crime and drink alcohol. These problems affected the physical, emotional and psychological lives of unemployed youth in the study areas. The study investigated that town administrations took some measures to reduce youth unemployment in the study areas through organizing youth into groups, providing them certain trainings and encouraging them for job creation. However, they were unable to reduce youth unemployment due to the imbalance between number of unemployed youths and job availability, insufficient labor market and financial problems. Finally, in order to address the social and economic problems of unemployed youth in the study areas this article has suggested the following recommendations: enhancing awareness of the communities and youths, building industrial zones in the study areas, promoting youth entrepreneurs and self-employment, providing long and Short term training for unemployed youths, and making convenient business climate for unemployed youths.*

**Key words:** Youth, Unemployment, youth Unemployment, Urban youth, Labor market

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## Introduction

Unemployment is one of the main challenges of the contemporary period in both the developed and developing countries (Amanuel, 2016). The International Labour Organization (2012) report defines unemployment as numbers of economical active population who are without work, but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left their job.

Youth Unemployment is one of the socio-economic problems prevailing in virtually all countries of the world. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2013) report, two thirds of working age youth in some developing countries is either unemployed or trapped in low-quality jobs. Youth unemployment is high and crucial problem in Africa. Many young Africans find themselves unemployed or underemployed in informal jobs with low productivity and low pay (ILO, 2013). According to the study conducted by Martha (2012), in Sub Saharan Africa, youth unemployment rate can be as high as 60 percent.

The problem of youth unemployment becomes even more challenging when it comes to a poor country like Ethiopia. Ethiopia is one of the Sub-Saharan countries which have been facing a high level of youth unemployment which results from imbalance between high population growth and socio economic development (Berhan *et al.*, 2005). Despite the recent economic growth witnessed in Ethiopia, youth unemployment is high and rising (Martha, 2012). Ethiopia is still struggling in the face of a developing economy and the country is still lagging behind in socio-economic transformation and the ability to create sufficient job opportunities for its unemployed citizens.

The study area-Gedeo Zone is a Zone found in the Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. The majority of the population in Gedeo zone particularly in both Dilla and Yergacheffe towns

are youth job seekers and unemployed (Gedeo zone Sport and Youth Bureau, 2015/16). The general objective of the study is to analyze and describe the social and economic conditions of unemployed youth in Dilla and Yergacheffe towns. In line with the above general objective, the specific objectives of the study are to identify the cause of youth unemployment in the study areas, to examine the social conditions of unemployed youth in the study areas, to identify the economic challenges of unemployed youth in Dilla and Yergacheffe towns and to examine the effort of government in addressing the socio economic challenges of unemployed youth in the study areas.

## Materials and Methods

The type of research method adopted for a given research problem could mainly depend on the kinds of knowledge and theories researchers aim to produce. Given the central objective of this study, the researchers utilized qualitative research approach. The study used both primary and secondary data sources to produce a full-fledged research. In-depth interview, focus group discussion and naturalistic observation were the instruments through which primary data were collected. Relevant books, journal articles, magazines, official document and research works were consulted as the principal sources of secondary data.

The population of the study was an unemployed youth living in the study area. Since the focus of the study was analyzing the socio-economic conditions of unemployed youth, the sample frame from which the actual samples were drawn was an unemployed urban youth (15-29 ages) whose level of education ranges from general secondary school completion to university graduate (undergraduate). According to the data obtained from Gedeo Zone Sport and Youth Bureau (2016/17), from Gedeo zone both Dilla and Yergacheffe towns have high number of unemployed youth than others and hence, *Dilla and Yirgacheffe towns* are purposely selected. These different segments of the community

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(respondents) are purposively incorporated and interviewed to triangulate and analyze the condition of unemployed urban youth in the study area. Thus, the study employed snowball sampling to select 30 informants representing variations in gender, levels of education, age composition and duration of unemployment in the study area. Unemployed youth with at least one year duration of unemployment has been included. Based on these criteria, 5 high school completion, 5 college diploma graduates and 5

university graduates were selected from each study area. In the selection of the respondents the balances in age and gender composition were considered. Additionally, key informants such as expert of youth and sport office, Small and Micro Enterprise office and Social Affairs office were included. The data collected from interview, focus group discussion and observation has been analyzed by using qualitative approach.

### Result and Discussions

#### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are described as follow.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Respondents Profile of Unemployed Youth

Characteristics		n	%
Sex	Male	19	63.33
	Female	11	36.66
	Total	30	100
Age	15-20	3	10
	21-24	22	73.33
	25-29	5	16.66
	Total	30	100
Educational background	High School	10	33.33
	10+andabove	10	33.33
	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	10	33.33
	Total	30	100
Marital Status	Single	28	93.33
	Married	2	6.66
	Total	30	100

Source: Own Survey, 2016

Note: n= frequency and %= percentage

#### Sex of Unemployed Youths

As indicated in the Table 1, majority of the participants were male. This result shows that female youths are less likely to be unemployed as compared to males. According to respondents, possible reason for this could be those females are more likely to be engaged in domestic work than male, and therefore not

considered as unemployed. The female population in general, not only in Ethiopia and study areas but throughout Africa has fewer opportunities for education, literacy and social inclusion. This together with gender discriminations could reduce the opportunities of women to participate in the labor market.

### **Age of Unemployed Youths**

Youth below the age of twenty 20 were less likely to be unemployed compared to those 20 years and older. The data also showed that a unit increase in age increased the likelihoods of unemployment.

### **Educational Background of Unemployed Youths**

Educational level of an individual would affect his/her employment opportunity. People with higher educational level are said to be the most productive, and thus secure the best jobs and the highest salaries (ILO, 2014). According to this study it is easier for the secondary school graduate being engaged in employment (for example odd jobs like petty trade) as compared to the certified (Diploma and above). Large imbalance between the number of unemployed youth and available work, financial problems and non-availability of resources to avail full time work are the reason; added by key informants and FGD participants. Thus, youth unemployment in the study areas was caused by lack of sufficient job and lack of effective labor market in the towns.

### **Marital status**

The results of the study show that 6.66% of the respondents were married and they had less chances of being unemployed. This could be because men in Ethiopia are usually supposed to have a job or source of income in order to get married than women. Thus, the need for income would drive married individuals into the labor market. The effect of unemployment on marital status was more pronounced among the male youth as compared to those who were female. This may point to the fact that the female, who get married at an early age in Ethiopia are more likely to concentrate on household chores and raising children in the home rather than looking for jobs; the same is true in the study areas.

### **Conditions of Unemployed Youths**

#### **Social Conditions of Unemployed Youths**

According to data gathered by using different instruments, unemployed youth of the study areas are facing several social problems including: social exclusion, discrimination, loss of friends and community isolation, hopelessness and low self-esteem. As a result, unemployed youth participation in a social life is very low. The informal economy has been able to absorb large numbers of unemployed and underemployed persons and it has been a primary generator of jobs in the study areas. Most youth working in the informal economy lack adequate incomes, social protection and security which increase social problems. The social costs of youth unemployment are serious problems; it contributes to costly social problems such as poor health, the breakdown of relationships and families, increased crime and significant additional expenditure requirements on the government; added by government officials.

Due to these social problems; unemployed youths are facing many challenges in the study areas including poverty, crime, conflict and addiction to different drugs.

#### **Perceptions on Unemployed Youths**

Data gathered reveals that unemployed youths in the study areas face different social and cultural discriminations. Most of them are not able to participate in cultural and social activities as much as employed youths. According to focus group participants, unemployed youth cannot involve in social life such as marriage, birth day and religious ceremonies as well as other civic associations.

Anita (2012) confirmed that youth is a time of transition, from childhood to adulthood. It is the time when young people prepare themselves for their future adult life and find their role in society, including their economic role. When they are unable to do these, their self-esteem is likely to be undermined. In the study areas majority of the unemployed youth either withdraw themselves

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from society or seek alternative ways of expressing their feelings and establish their own identity. Most of them, resort to alcohol and drug abuse and they become rebellious, involved in anti-social activities added by FGDs participants and key informants.

### **Families and Friends Attitude towards Unemployed Youths**

According to FGDs and key informants unemployed youth are living in a harsh situation because they are neither supported by their parents nor having their own job. The aggregate result of data shows that unemployed youth are not getting care from their parent's compared to the employed brothers/sisters. The data shows that unemployed person in a family is considered as a burden and he/she is only consumer, not a producer. Even unemployed elder brother/sister treated badly than the younger brother/sister who is employed added by FGDs participants.

According to the data gathered from unemployed youths, from their personal experience when they work with their friends they face many challenges in their daily lives. These challenges include unwanted name like "*Chista*" (empty pocket) "*Jezba*" (confused), *Duriye* (Gang), *Tesfayekorete*" (hopeless), and "*sirafelagi*" (job seeker). Friends neglect the unemployed youth for low wage, and shabby dress due to their unemployment status in both towns. There was also attitudinal change (dislike or hate, and criticism), verbal attack (lazy, stupid and others) and non-verbal attack (bodily exhibiting unwanted action) as a result of unemployment. These all make unemployed youth aggressive, addictive, hate towards family and even engage in criminal activities. The study conducted by Beshir (2014), also proved that they have felt socially isolated. Thus, they believe that they don't equally participate in the family and community affairs, and they are not important as long as they have nothing to contribute to their families and communities.

### **Psychological Conditions of Unemployed Youths**

The literatures reveal that the psychological wellbeing of unemployed persons decreases immediately after losing their job and - after a further decrease - stabilizes overtime at a lower level of wellbeing; also has an impact on the motivation, self-esteem and emotional stability of a person. Thus, the relationship between unemployment and personality characteristics is best considered as mutual (Beshir, 2014). Not only does unemployed youth have negative economic consequences for the individual, it also creates psychological distress, such as feelings of loneliness, powerlessness, restlessness, anxiety and depression (Hiruy,2012). According to the data obtained; unemployed youth are facing many psychological problems like shame, fear, loose of hope, tension, distress, and even loose of dream for future. Unemployed youth also undergo the problems of low self-esteem. As per the study by ACEVO (2011), psychological imprint of unemployment persists into later life and that poor physical health outcome such as heart attacks later in life increases the probability of unemployment.

This is illustrated by Anita (2012) that there is a strong association between unemployment and health status. From focus group discussions, it was found that youth tend to smoke and drink irresponsibly and end up in bad health as the result of their joblessness. Lack of employment leads to depression and they resort to different things to escape this emotion which ultimately damages their health.

### **Unemployed Youths and Illegal Activities**

Unemployment breeds social exclusion that in turn gives rise to high welfare dependence, crime and anti-social behavior, and makes societies more vulnerable to civil disorder and political upheaval (ILO, 2012). According to Beshir (2014), high unemployment leads to frustration and idleness of youth which led to gang violence, interpersonal conflict, and domestic violence. Similarly, unemployed youth in the study areas

reported feeling “bored, empty, depressed, or constrained by social norms, with few outlets for their energy, lack of opportunities to express themselves, and no adults who understand their needs, listen to them, or talk to them about their concerns.

Unemployed people are deprived of legal income resources (except for unemployment benefits), and, thus, are more likely to derive some income from illegal activities but the relationship is not strong (Amanuel, 2016). The data gathered proves some but not all unemployed youth are associated with a higher probability of committing crimes. The evidence suggests that unemployment mechanically incapacitates individuals and allow crime by providing larger opportunities to commit illegal acts.

There is also strong relationship between unemployment and unwanted addiction such as chewing chat, drinking alcohols, using drugs and other. They are more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes and take illegal drugs, all of which strongly affect their lives that are common in the study areas. At the same time, substance abuse can lead to sickness, health problems and even premature death. Drug users also run the risk of being drawn further into drug dealing and criminal activities.

### **The Effects of Unemployment on the Social and Cultural Lives of Youths**

According to the perception of majority of the key informants and FGD participants, unemployed youth are considered as poor. As a result, most of unemployed youths in the study areas are culturally excluded. They have negative attitude towards the culture and most of them are addicted to chewing chat, drinking alcohol and using drugs. In case of crimes, few crimes like theft and violent conflict have been committed by unemployed youths.

According to the data from both Dilla and YirgaCheffe towns’ Social Affairs Bureau took a number of measures to reduce social problems

of unemployed youth by encouraging them to develop a good behavior, counseling and apprising those who have done good things. However, because of many financial and other related problems the Bureau fails to do sufficient work in the reduction of the level of unemployed youth’s social exclusion. Addressing inequality and the social exclusion of particular groups of young people is a big challenge within the youth sector. Working in a multicultural environment requires strong communication skills and an understanding of collective and individual work. Thus, Social Affairs Bureaus of the study areas are unable meet the need of unemployed youth.

### **Economic Conditions of Unemployed Youths**

The problem of adequate productive employment opportunities in general, and youth employment in particular, is directly linked to the problems of growth and development (Chigunta and Roach, 2005). Early workplace skill development is crucial to future earnings and unemployment early in working life increases the probability of future joblessness. Hence, early unemployment can permanently affect future employability (ILO, 2014).The current and future cohorts of young workers not only face the problem of jobs but also the reality that the low wage and average quality of jobs that are available will be lower. The data gathered from unemployed youths of the study areas shows there are different economic problems that unemployed youths are facing. Many youth fall to meet their basic needs, health services, and fall to involve in economic development activities like saving, production, innovation and transformation. Problems of transportation, disease (both physical and mental), unstable work, and scarcity of food were some of the challenges that unemployed youths are facing.

Persistent and high youth unemployment reduces employability of youth and results in a prolonged period of unstable jobs as prospective employers tend to develop negative perceptions of youth who have been out of work for prolonged periods. For those without adequate

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economic resources to buy consumer goods, there are strong pressures to engage in alternative consumptive activity, and to compensate for the lack of consumer purchasing power by taking the possessions of others (Martha, 2012). Majority of unemployed youth faces problem of homelessness. This implies that almost all of unemployed youth are facing the problems of housing.

Due to this, most unemployed youths experience psychological distress like disorientation which integrates feeling of aimlessness, uselessness, and social isolation and health disorders. Unemployed youths in the study areas spend their leisure time by chewing chat, searching for *temporary work*, (*Kensira*) and others stayed with parents and in church. Prolonged unemployment is more likely to be oppressive, resulting in subsistence living, a loss of personal autonomy and control, frustration, anger, low self-esteem and social alienation.

With regard to health aspects the survey result shows that unemployed youth had health problem including unbalanced nutrition, tension, even few of them are affected by sexually transmitted diseases. These scars can have a negative effect on future employment outcomes and earnings as well as negative consequences on physical and mental health. It will lead to drug and substance abuse, involvement in criminal activities and disengagement from society. These consequences can have a adversary impact not only on the young individuals, but also on their families and on the society as a whole. Youths who are poor have an increased risk of vulnerability to diseases because they are more likely to be in general poor healthy conditions due to malnutrition and other factors.

### **The Effects of Unemployment on the Economic Lives of Youths**

The result of the interview reveals that unemployment reduces saving. Most of youths live with their parents and in rent houses as well. This implies that most of unemployed youths are

living in a bad situation; some of them are unable to manage their lives and their families. In order to reduce these problems, the study areas Small and Micro Enterprise Bureaus have been taking some measures such as organizing youth in to cooperative groups and giving trainings for job creation and technical assistance; but there are many obstacles to provide these facilities for all youths such as among others, financial scarcity, lack of interest, lack of adequate skills and knowledge and communication problems. For instance; clarifying expectations, regular communications, dissemination and feedback are difficult in terms of keeping young people engaged in cooperative groups. Credit is also given to only few youths because of scarcity of finance. Many youths have collateral problem to take money and it is difficult to provide loan to all unemployed youths in the study areas. Certain facilities are provided to youths who are organized in the study areas, but it is not adequate to fulfill the interest of all youths. The youths need the central areas (market place) of the town to sell their products and to get more customers but, mostly the central areas of the town is already occupied by investors and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

### **Measures Taken to Tackle Problems of Unemployed Youths**

Workers who are unemployed for a long period become de-skilled as their skills become increasingly dated in a rapidly changing job market (ILO, 2011). This reduces their chances of gaining employment in the future, which in turn increases the economic burden on government and society. For governments, youth unemployment means they have a reduced taxation base and higher social welfare costs. In order to tackle the socio economic problems of unemployed youths in both study areas the town administrations take some measurements including providing training and credit and/or loan provision. However, majority of unemployed youths responded that, most facilities of government is only at record or principle level

and approximately found to be zero in practice. They mentioned many critics including delay in providing credit, no provision for small trade, none disbursement of equipment's for entrepreneurial activities, no training, no encouragement and other problems.

The data obtained from the interview illustrates that the main problem of youth unemployment in the study areas is the imbalance between number of youths and available job opportunities. The second problem is capacity barriers for small youth-led organizations in completing the application process for funding; these include lack of access to adequate technology and lack of infrastructure or endorsement, miss-match between annual budgets and the needs of unemployed youths in the study areas. In order to identify the needs of unemployed youths, Youth and Sport Bureau of the study areas organized youth into several groups in collaboration with towns' administration. They provided them materials, encouraged them to create job, give them technical training and enhanced financial assistance by collaborating with some governmental and non-governmental organizations, but the data obtained shows that what is done by government offices could not successfully fulfill the needs of unemployed youths because of financial problems, absence of large numbers of NGOs in the study areas and unemployed youths' conflict of interest.

### **Conclusion**

Youth unemployment is the serious problem in both urban and rural areas of the country. The findings of the study reveal that there are social and economic problems that unemployed youths are facing in the study areas. The social problems include social exclusion, loss of identity that leads to low self-confidence, carelessness, discomfort to the cultures, fear and shame. As a result, most of them are separated from their parents, postponed their age of marriage and some youth women are affected by early marriage and unwanted pregnancy. They are also challenged by economic problems like

problems of housing, absence of balanced food, low saving, low quality of living, low health services which results physical disease and psychological disturbance. These all problems reinforce poverty on youths, their parents and community of the study areas in general. As a result of this, unemployed youth engaged in criminal activities like theft, conflict and unwanted addiction. The study reveals that socially discriminated and economically poor youth face mental problems like: psychological tension, fear and shame; as well as physical problems including bodily disease due to imbalanced nutrition and other related problems. To solve the problems, town administrations have been taking measures such as organizing them into groups, providing trainings and credits as well as encouraging them to create job. However, they could not successfully fulfill the needs of unemployed youths due to imbalance between number of unemployed youths and availability of jobs as well as financial constraints.

### **Recommendations**

The following possible solutions are forwarded as recommendations:

- Building Industrial Zone around the study areas: National, Regional, and Zonal governments should construct industrial zone. Industries may absorb a large number of labor forces which will reduce the numbers of unemployed youth.
- Augmenting Sport Activities and Facilities. Sports can reduce unemployed youth's mental and physical stress, psychological disturbance and enhance their physical strength. Even sport is a source of income in all dimensions.
- Promoting Youth Enterprise and Self Employment. Unemployed youth need to be assisted with credit facilities to set up their own income generating projects and equipped with lifelong practical skills with the view that they can become self-employed.
- Long term and Short term training should be given to unemployed youth. Long term training including technical and academic



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program and short term training including monthly, weekly and daily training for job creation and simple technology innovation should be adjusted to unemployed youth. Teaching young people how to identify opportunities, align their interests with market needs, and acquire relevant skills that will let them succeed in sustainable careers will facilitate their wellbeing.

- Making Integrity with youth to reduce crime. Strict laws should be put in place to enforce all young people to stop bad practices such as gambling, smoking, alcoholism, chewing chat, violent conflict and cheating and any other crime. This will reduce theft and increase standards of living by getting basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing.
- Making conducive business environment and Fostering Product Market Competition: Improving opportunities and working conditions for unemployed youth entrepreneurs by eliminating discrimination in access to credit, productive resources and social security.

### Conflict of Interests

There is no conflict of interest with respect to this research.

### Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we are profoundly indebted to our employer organization, Dilla University, which sponsored all expenses that would help us to accomplish this study. We are also grateful to all informants of both Dilla and YirgaCheffe towns for their valuable time and response.

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