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The factors determining female unemployment in South Arica: Evidence from the 2021 Labour Force Survey.

Anele Mfubu [1] and Nsengiyumva Philomene [1*]

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[1] Department of Statistics and Population Studies, Faculty of Natural Science, University of Western Cape PB X17, 7535, Bellville, South Africa; 4111322@myuwc.ac.za, pnsengiyumva@uwc.ac.za
* Correspondence: pnsengiyumva@myuwc.ac.za

Abstract: The persistent high unemployment confronting South Africa, in particular among women continues to be a cause of concern. The study set out to look at the factors driving female unemployment in South Africa in an attempt to contribute to efforts to find a solution to the problem of female unemployment. This study estimated the prevalence of female unemployment and identified its predictors in South Africa. Quarterly Labour Force Survey covering the fourth quarter of 2021 and a weighted sample of 13322 women aged 15-64 years were used. The dependent variable of interest was unemployment, while the independent variables were the age, population group, marital status, level of education, province of residence and geographic type. The analysis was conducted at bivariate and multivariate levels. It was found that female unemployment rates are significantly influenced by factors that include level of education, women in youth age category, differed among population group and marital status. The female unemployment varied significantly among provinces of residence and geographic type, with the highest prevalence rates observed in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng and Limpopo. The study further found high unemployment rate in urban areas while traditional areas had high rates of discouraged job seekers.

Keywords: discouraged job seeker; women; logistic regression; province; South Africa

1. Introduction

This study aims to identify the factors associated with female unemployment in South Africa. In the past ten years, there has been an increase in female labour force participation across the globe, reaching 47% in the 15-64 age groups [1]. Nevertheless, the participation gap between men and women remains large, at over 20 percentage points. In almost the entire world, men are more likely to take part in the labour market when compared to females, resulting in females having lower socioeconomic status due to the labour division in terms of gender [2]. [3] reported that the male employment-to-population ratio in Africa is estimated at 69.2 % compared to the female employment-to-population ratio of only 39.2%. Countries that had female unemployment rate as twice as high as male rate are Arab and Northern Africa, peaking at 44.3% and 44.1%, respectively.

In South Africa, even though women make up a more significant proportion of the working-age population (15-64), with 19787410 being women compared to 19028342 men [4], the actual number of women in the labour force (employed and unemployed) is still less than that of men. The population group that suffered under the apartheid regime bear the cost of this unemployment. Female unemployment rates are higher than males [5]. Of these, the majority are women

between the ages of 15-34, and most of these are Black women who make up 41.0% compared to 8.2% among White women, 22.4% among Indians and 29.9% among Coloured women [6].

2. Literature Review

Studies on female unemployment have shown that age is a prominent factor, and several explanations have been offered for this phenomenon. For instance, [7] have associated youth unemployment with insufficient skills or skills mismatch. On the other hand, [8] associated it with little work experience which is a particularly undesirable characteristic for employers. Another issue was covid-19 pandemic, South Africa experienced changes in aggregate demand which led to a decline in the demand for labour. This meant that first-time job seekers were increasingly having trouble when looking for their first job. On the other hand, older workers' unemployment is largely characterised by difficulties in finding a new job for those who have lost their jobs. Unlike the youth, they are unlikely to reintegrate into the labour market after losing their jobs [7].

In addition, population group is another variable which influence female unemployment. South Africa has a complex history when it comes to race and employment. Black Africans have the highest unemployment rate, which is more or less four times higher than the white population group [9]. The apartheid regime left South Africa with significant racial inequalities in labour market outcomes, employment rates and wages, occupational attainment and segregation, and poverty [10]. Another factor was traditional norms. [11] notes that women in African homes battle for equality; most are still denied education and are perceived as housewives, which in turn affect women employment.

Educational level was found to be a factor that influence female unemployment. Nonetheless, despite the advances in female educational attainment and the expansion of the market economy in South Africa, female labour force participation rates are still low. [12] highlighted the issue of stereotype among men as breadwinners which led to the prioritization of boy's education by parents. Moreover, stereotypes were also perpetuated in school curricula and materials, often leading to occupational gender segregation. For example, girls are less likely to study and pursue careers in highly valued professional and traditionally male-dominated fields, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics [12].

Marital status was also considered when analysing female unemployment. Females work upon marriage reflected cultural norms, which is unpaid care work that undermines their rights to decent work [13]. Married women are generally perceived as caregivers and mothers. However, this confines women to poverty and dependent on other household members, often men, for their livelihoods. In addition, this unequal distribution of unpaid work on women restricts their choices about the location, type and nature of paid work they can engage in [13]. All in all, economically, women within marriages are very different from women outside marriages.

Geographic distribution is another obstacle to lower labour force participation among women in South Africa. Provinces that were affected by the legacy of apartheid bear high rates of unemployment among women. These are provinces that are located some distance from where jobs are accessible, where social housing is mostly located where land is of poor quality, which is usually not where employment opportunities are available, namely "traditional areas" [14]. On the other hand, the provinces endowed with natural resources and concentrated with industries are likely to exhibit lower unemployment rates. However, the influx of the workforce into these provinces is more than the jobs available in the labour market, which causes high unemployment rate. However, little is known about the factors contributing to female unemployment in South Africa. Hence, this study measures the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics and female unemployment in the context of South Africa.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Source of data

For the purpose of this study, a quantitative research design was implemented. This study used cross-sectional design because it used data which was collected at one point in time. The paper analyses secondary data selected from the South African Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) covering the period from 2021 based on fourth quarter (Q4) results. The QLFS is a household-based sample survey conducted by Statistics South Africa. The data were obtained from the labour market activities of individuals in working age between 15 and 64 years old across nine provinces of South Africa.

3.2 Variables in the study

For the purpose of this study, the responses from the question of employment status were categorized into four outcomes which are employed, unemployed, discouraged job seeker, not economically active and coded "1" for unemployed and "2" for discouraged job seekers. The other categories were excluded from the analysis. The predictor variables were age groups categorized as (1)15-24, (2) 25-34, (3) 35-44, (4) 45-54, (5) 55-64. Population group: (1) Black/African; (2) Coloured; (3) Indian/Asian; (4) White. Marital status: (1) Married; (2) Living together like husband and wife; (3) widow/ widower; (4) Divorced or separated; (5) Never married. Furthermore, Level of education: (1) No schooling (2) Never completed primary (3) Primary completed (4) Secondary not completed (5) Secondary completed and (6) Tertiary. Province of residence: (1) Western Cape (2) Eastern Cape (3) Northern Cape (4) Free State (5) KwaZulu-Natal (6) North West (7) Gauteng (8) Mpumalanga (9) Limpopo, and geographic type: (1) Urban (2) Traditional (3) Farms.

3.3 Methods of data analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to establish the distribution of the characteristics of unemployed and discouraged job seeker females. Also, Chi-square test statistics was applied to determine the variables which were statistically associated with female unemployment. At multivariate level, the study used binary logistic regression model to identify how each of the explanatory variables influence the probability of a woman becoming unemployed or discouraged job seeker. For the purpose of binary logistic regression, the omnibus test of model coefficients and -2 log likelihood was measured. Furthermore, Hosmer Lemeshow test was used to measure whether the model fits the data. For both Chi-square test and binary logistic regression, any variable showed a p-value less than 5% considered statistically significant with female unemployment and discouraged job seeker. The last category was considered as the baseline

4. Results

Table 1 below presents the relationship between women's unemployment status and their demographic characteristics. The results below show that 39.4% of unemployed females are between the ages 25-34, which makes the highest percentage, followed by ages 35-44 with a proportion of 25.8%. In the same instance, a high rate of discouraged job seekers also falls within the same age groups 25-34 and 35-44 years with a rate of 34.2% and 24.2% respectively and decreases with an increase in age from this year. Females aged 15-24 are the third highest among the unemployed and discouraged job seekers, with a rate of 18.6% and 20.4%. The Chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the employment status of women and age ($0.001<0.05$).

This study has shown that among unemployed females, African/ Black has the highest unemployment rate of females (*See bottom of Table 1*). Approximately, 91.2% of African/Black females are unemployed while the other population groups have lower proportions, with Coloured 7%, Indian/ Asian 1% and White 0.8%. Africans/Blacks exhibit a high rate of discouraged job seekers yet again with 92.6%, followed by Coloureds who comprise 4.2%, Whites 0.5%, and the lowest rate is observed among Indians with a rate of 0.4%. Chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the employment status of women and population group ($0.000<0.05$).

Regarding marital status, the highest percentage of unemployed females (72.1%) were never married followed by those who are married (16.1%) and the least number is among those who are widows (1.7%). Again, a considerably high rate of discouraged job seekers was never married followed by those who are married (17%). However, the least number of discouraged job seekers is observed among women who are divorced (2.3%). In this instance, Chi-square test statistics revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between employment status of women and marital status ($p=0.093>0.05$).

Table 1 below shows that the unemployment rate is higher among females with at least some schooling than those without schooling especially among those who did not complete their secondary level, they constituted the highest rate of unemployed and discouraged job seekers, with a rate of 45.4% and 36.9%, respectively, followed by women who completed secondary education with 36.9% and 34.7%. Moreover, tertiary recorded the third highest for the unemployed females with 9.8%. In comparison, a significant difference of less than 1% of the unemployed was observed for females who received no schooling at all, followed by less than primary completed or had primary school education with a rate of 4.1% and 2.9%. The lowest rate of discouraged job seekers was found among women with no schooling (1.9%). Chi-square test statistics shown that there was a statistically significant relationship between the employment status of women and level of education ($0.000<0.05$).

In South Africa, approximations indicate that unemployed women are concentrated in Gauteng, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal with a rate of 19.5%, 18,7% and 16.8%, respectively. While Free State, North West and Northern Cape had the lowest rates of 7.9%, 3.9% and 2.9%, respectively. Moreover, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga showed the most significant proportion of females who are discouraged job seekers, with 25.2%, 18.8% and 12.2%. The Chi-square test statistics showed a p-value of 0.001, which does not exceed the cut-off value 0.05, this indicates a statistically significant relationship between women's employment status and the province.

Furthermore, looking at unemployed females by geographic type, the results show that more unemployed females reside in urban areas (61.7%), while farms have the lowest rate of 1.9%. On the other hand, the traditional areas showed the most significant proportion of females discouraged from looking for work (54.6%). Chi-square test statistics shown that there was a statistically significant relationship between the employment status of women and level of education ($0.001<0.05$).

Table 1. The relationship between female unemployment status and women's characteristics in South Africa.

Variable	Unemployed	Discouraged
Age		
15-24	443 (18.6%)	295 (20.4%)
25-34	939 (39.4%)	496 (34.2%)
35-44	614 (25.8%)	351 (24.2%)
45-54	315 (13.2%)	227 (15.7%)
55-64	70 (2.9%)	80 (5.5%)
Population group		
Black	2173 (91.2%)	1376 (94.9%)
Coloured	166 (7%)	61 (4.2%)
Indian	24 (1%)	6 (0.4%)
White	19 (0.8%)	7 (0.5%)
Marital Status		
Married	383 (16.1%)	246 (17%)
Living together like husband/wife	193 (8.1%)	103 (7.1%)

Widow	41 (1.7%)	42 (2.9%)
Divorced	47 (2.0%)	33 (2.3%)
Never married	1718 (72.1%)	1026 (70.8%)
Level of education		
No schooling	21 (0.9%)	27 (1.9%)
Less than primary completed	97 (4.1%)	77 (5.3%)
Primary completed	70 (2.9%)	73 (5.1%)
Secondary not completed	1078 (45.4%)	701 (48.5%)
Secondary completed	877 (36.9%)	501 (34.7%)
Tertiary	232 (9.8%)	65 (4.5%)
Province of residence		
WC	217 (9.1%)	10 (0.7%)
EC	445 (18.7%)	169 (11.7%)
NC	49 (2.1%)	79 (5.4%)
FS	187 (7.9%)	77 (5.3%)
KZN	400 (16.8%)	365 (25.2%)
NW	93 (3.9%)	127 (8.8%)
GP	465 (19.5%)	173 (11.9%)
MP	253 (10.6%)	177 (12.2%)
LP	273 (11.5%)	273 (18.8%)
Type of residence		
Urban	1469 (61.7%)	630 (43.4%)
Traditional	867 (36.4%)	791 (54.6)
Farms	46 (1.9%)	29 (2%)

[1] Source: Author's calculation using Quarterly Labour Survey, fourth quarter, 2021

5. Logistic regression

5.1The factors contributing to female unemployment in South Africa

The study conducted binary logistic regression to identify factors contributing to female unemployment in South Africa. The omnibus test of model coefficients was significant, with a p-value of 0.001. The results from the study revealed that age was significant. The data shows that being a female between 15-24 and 25-34 decreases the chances of being employed by 1.354 and 1.287 times respectively than females in ages 55-64. Regarding education status, the study's findings revealed that having secondary schooling as a higher level of education increases the likelihood of being unemployed by 2.781 times higher compared to women with tertiary education. Moreover, the province of residence was another significant variable but showed a negative β coefficient. For the provinces, taking Limpopo as a baseline category, it was found that being from one of the South African provinces decreased the odds of being unemployed.

The study further investigated the factors influencing the probability of female job seekers being discouraged. The findings from the 2021 Quarterly Labour Force Survey data show that the omnibus test of model coefficients was statistically significant with p=0.001. The results revealed that for every 1-unit increase in age groups 15-24 and 25-34, the likelihood of females being discouraged job seekers will decrease by 0.739 and 0.777 as compared to those in 55-64 age group. Moreover, being a female in the age groups 45-54 increased the odds of being a discouraged job seeker by 1.540 more. Although secondary completion was significant at 0.004 level, β coefficient was negative (-1.023) which indicates that the chances of being a discouraged job seeker among females who completed secondary education will likely decrease by 0.360 times lower as compared to those with tertiary education. Also, being from one of the provinces of South Africa other than Limpopo increases the chances of being a discouraged job seeker.

Table 2. The factors contributing to female unemployment: A binary logistic regression

Unemployed					**Discouraged job seeker**			
	β	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)	β	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age		22.563	0.001			22.563	0.001	
15-24	0.303	9.068	0.003	1.354	-0.303	9.068	0.003	0.739
25-34	0.252	5.060	0.024	1.287	-0.252	5.060	0.024	0.777
35-44	0.048	0.129	0.720	1.049	-0.048	0.129	0.720	0.953
45-54	-0.432	4.323	0.038	0.650	0.432	4.323	0.039	1.540
55-64@								
Population group		3.917	0.271			3.917	0.271	
No School	-0.228	1.258	0.262	0.796	0.228	1.258	0.262	1.256
Primary	0.758	2.515	0.113	2.133	-0.758	2.515	0.113	0.469
Secondary	0.101	0.043	0.836	1.106	-0.101	0.043	0.836	0.904
Tertiary@								
Marital status		3.187	0.527			3.187	0.527	
Married	0.083	0.264	0.607	1.086	-0.083	0.264	0.607	0.921
Living together like husband and wife	-0.083	0.111	0.739	0.918	0.086	0.111	0.739	1.089
Widow/widower	-0.104	0.159	0.690	0.901	0.104	0.159	0.690	1.110
Divorced	0.152	2.088	0.148	1.165	0.152	2.088	0.148	0.859
Never married@								
Level of education		42.063	0.001			42.063	0.001	
No schooling	0.157	0.196	0.658	1.170	-0.157	0.196	0.658	0.855
Less than primary completed	-0.244	0.451	0.502	0.784	0.244	0.451	0.502	1.276
Primary completed	0.124	0.147	0.702	1.132	-0.124	0.147	0.702	0.883
Secondary not completed	0.307	0.884	0.347	1.359	0.307	0.884	0.347	0.736
Secondary completed	1.023	8.442	0.004	2.781	-1.023	8.442	0.004	0.360
Tertiary@								
Province of residence		198.082	0.001			198.082	0.001	
WC	-1.963	31.704	0.001	0.140	1.963	31.704	0.001	7.118
EC	-3.489	86.636	0.001	0.031	3.489	86.636	0.001	32.741
NC	-2.239	37.381	0.001	0.107	2.239	37.381	0.001	9.384
FS	-2.949	71.241	0.001	0.052	2.949	71.241	0.001	19.089
KZN	-3.326	81.452	0.001	0.036	3.326	81.452	0.001	27.826
NW	-2.179	38.861	0.001	0.113	2.179	38.861	0.001	8.836
GP	-2.585	52.780	0.001	0.075	2.585	52.780	0.001	13.260
MP	-2.881	65.702	0.001	0.056	2.881	65.702	0.001	17.836
LP@								
Geographic type		17.123	0.001			17.123	0.001	
Urban	0.113	0.197	0.657	1.119	-0.113	0.197	0.657	0.893

Traditional	-0.254	1.005	0.316	0.775	0.254	1.005	0.316	1.290
Farm@								
Constant	2.566	22.611	0.001	13.014	-2.566	22.611	0.001	0.077

[1] Source: Author's calculation using Quarterly Labour Survey, fourth quarter, 2021

6. Discussion

The aim of the study was to determine the factors influencing female unemployment in South Africa. The results revealed that more women within the youth category (25-34) and middle-aged adults (35-44) were unemployed. In the same instance, women who were discouraged job seekers were also found within these age groups. [15] states that this is the age when most females get married and may regard themselves as housewives rather than as unemployed. Also, report is also consistent with Yakubu's findings, where both authors indicated that this is a period when multiple events such as marriage, fertility, finishing school and migration occur. The reason females within the 15-24 age group were unemployed, according to [16] is that many of them are found to be still engaged in studies. Moreover, youth unemployment in South Africa is concentrated among those who have received some education but lack the industrial and other skills required in the labour market [15]. Furthermore, the unemployment rate is low among females aged 55-64. Firstly, this age group existed during the Bantu education system, which absorbed many of them into the labour force, particularly the formal sector, without having secondary education. Notably, [17] indicated that the Bantu education system was implemented to ensure that Black people would only work as unskilled and semi-skilled labourers. Nevertheless, the South African labour market system is still governed by those who existed during apartheid, such as politicians.

The study also shown that Africans/ Blacks have the highest unemployment rate of females than all other racial groups. According to [18], the high unemployment rate among Blacks is the result of segregation government policies that disadvantaged Black women relative to White women. However, if apartheid supposedly ended two decades ago, why does this inequality still exist? [11] highlighted that traditional African communities still perceive a woman's duty primarily as childbearing and rearing, feeding and caring for the family. Hence why majority of unemployed females are still found among Blacks. The author maintains that Black women in African societies still live in patriarchal norms which deny them the right to decide their reproduction. Furthermore, Black women exhibited a high rate of discouraged job seekers, and the reasons could be the ones mentioned above. Also, this could be the fact that there are no jobs in South Africa, especially since the start of covid-19. It is well known that women are likely to work in informal sectors of the economy that lost the most jobs due to the lockdown regulation such salons, retail, street vendors etc.

Marital status is yet another variable that is widely accepted as a driver behind labour participation. The results reveal that single women and married women have high unemployment rates. Married women tend to do the largest portion of homework and are given the responsibility of taking care of children [19]. On the other hand, the majority of people who are single in South Africa are youth. This can be seen in a report by [20], where it was found that more than half of women in South Africa appear to be single, particularly age group 18-34 and it is important to note that South Africa is dominated by youth that constitutes high unemployment rate in the country.

According to [21], the probability of females to gain employment increases with a higher level of education. However, this relationship in South Africa is not always true for instance the study found that unemployment rate is higher among females with at least some schooling than those with no schooling or primary education. However, since South Africa is dominated by young population and majority of them have schooling, it is safe to say that the low rate of unemployed

females without any schooling belongs to the older generation who are pensioners. [22] maintains that older generations are too tired to work and cannot perform physically demanding duties.

The results from the study also found that women from Gauteng, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal were more unemployed. Firstly, Gauteng has a larger population than any other province and an influx of migrants from neighbouring areas in search of jobs as compared to the number of jobs that are available [23]. Another cause of unemployment in Gauteng is cheap labour that favours people from the outside, this is supported by [24] by noting that South African employers deliberately prefer foreign workers as a source of cheap labour as they are willing to take anything for wages. To support this argument, the author noted the freight industry that is accused of employing foreigners rather than South African people [24].

Regarding the geographic type, the results show more unemployed females in urban areas than in farms. Whereas traditional areas showed the most significant proportion of females who are discouraged job seekers than urban and farm areas. The high rate of unemployed females in urban areas is caused by mass migration; people migrate from rural areas in large groups to urban areas looking for job opportunities. Even with this, urban areas can ill afford to provide employment opportunities to all of the migrated population, thus causing mass unemployment [25]. On the other hand, traditional settlements are located far from where jobs are available, and housing is located where the land is cheap, which is usually not where employment opportunities are available. This, in turn, increases job search costs, generating inefficient labour market outcomes [15]. Additionally, female unemployment is low in farms because, firstly, the population rate is low, also White population mostly occupy farms, and most of the people who live in farms work or own the farms.

Although the focus of the study is on female unemployment, it also looked at the unemployment status, comparing males and females to support the above argument. The study showed a large gap within the 25-34 age group, where females were more unemployed and discouraged job seekers than men. In addition, while male unemployment was high, it was significantly lower for the age group (35-44). This can be attributed to the traditional norms that excluded women from the economy and the differences in how boys and girls were raised [12].

The results from the study show that, compared to males of all races, Black women were more unemployed than men. Whereas the unemployment rate for women from other population groups is lower than it was for men. In addition, when comparing the two genders, the results revealed that Black women were more discouraged from seeking employment than the rest of men in working age. When comparing the employment status by marital status between men and women, the study revealed that the labour force participation rate of women and men is strictly associated with the structure of the household they live. It was found that the unemployment rate was significantly lower among married men or men living with their partners like husband and wife, while the opposite is observed for women. One can conclude that marriage or living with a partner drives up men's labour force participation while it drives down women's. [26] indicated in their report that the root of the differential in access to employment between males and females is the vast skills that women develop in their lifetime as homemakers. These skills however are valued differently economically to skills that boys are encouraged to possess. Hence the results from the study indicated that the unemployment rate is lower among men with tertiary education than women with tertiary education. In terms of employment status by province, the study found that the majority of women in these provinces were unemployed than men. On the other hand, men in traditional and farm areas have a lower unemployment rate than women. This can be qualified to the arguments made by the authors above.

7. Conclusions

Using the Quarterly Labour Force Survey Fourth Quarter of 2021, the study found that female unemployment was influenced by age, population group, marital status, level of education, province of residence and geographic type. More precisely the greatest share percentage of unemployed females in South Africa was found within 25-34 age group and who are single. This is consistent with what has been described as the "demographically dense period of life" by [27]. The study also found that the percentage share of unemployed Black women was higher than other population groups. This composition of the labour market reflects the population distribution of South Africa. Another variable found to have great influence on unemployment was the level of education, particularly those with secondary level of education. Moreover, it was discovered that women living in Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal, Gauteng and Limpopo and also urban areas were more unemployed. South Africa has a minister of women in the presidency, yet the people it is meant to serve are unaware of its obligation. First of all, neither locally nor provincially are there any offices for the Department of Women. This leaves the author with a question that if this institution is far from people, how is it going to achieve its obligation? Therefore, the study recommends that the government must implement outreach programmes that will empower women, especially in rural/Black communities at large. Future research needs to look at the factors contributing to female unemployment by focusing on whether women have ever worked or not. Moreover, research is also needed to measure the unemployment duration among female population.

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