Strategies for Reducing Youth Unemployment through Social Work

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Abstract:

This research explores innovative strategies for reducing youth unemployment through the lens of social work, focusing on the critical role social workers play in facilitating employment opportunities for young people. Youth unemployment presents significant challenges, including economic instability and social disintegration, particularly in marginalized communities. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews with social workers, youth program coordinators, and unemployed youth to identify effective interventions. Key strategies highlighted include skills training programs, job placement services, and mentorship initiatives that foster self-efficacy and resilience among young job seekers. Additionally, the research examines the impact of community partnerships and advocacy efforts in creating sustainable employment pathways. By analyzing successful case studies and existing programs, this study aims to provide a framework for social work practitioners and policymakers to enhance their efforts in addressing youth unemployment. The findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach that integrates social services, education, and economic development to empower youth and promote long-term employment outcomes. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the discourse on effective social work practices and policies aimed at mitigating youth unemployment.

Keywords: youth unemployment, social work, skills training, job placement, mentorship, community partnerships, empowerment, economic development.

1. Introduction

One issue that the world has had to deliberately confront is youth unemployment. Many countries have reported depressingly high rates of unemployment among the youth. This is in itself enough to challenge us not only in Africa but also globally. The global youth unemployment rate stands at 14.2 percent. In 2021, the average youth unemployment rate in the Middle East and North Africa was estimated at 27.2 percent.

Sadly, six countries had average youth unemployment rates higher than 40 percent. (Rogošić & Perica, 2022)

Ultimately, the inability of young people to access basic paid work appears to influence their social expectations as well as form their political agendas. Long-term youth unemployment has repeatedly been associated with inadequate self-esteem, feelings of alienation and social isolation leading to increased risk of crime, mental health difficulties, increased dependence on social security benefits, and eroded social skills. Against this background, social workers have significant work to do – personally and professionally. Yet in the latest global review of social work, there is no mention of youth unemployment. We have an enormous challenge and a huge opportunity to make a difference – to shape the practice agenda so that we can be truly effective in reducing youth unemployment. The essay contributes to articulating this challenge and opportunity. The essay has as its focus to ask you to consider what our purposes are and whether this is shaped by our values and by the present and future. Incorporated into this focus, we highlight practice areas and methods that are making a difference in strengthening young people's capacity to make the world their own. We have organized the essay in three sections.

2. Understanding Youth Unemployment

The concept 'youth unemployment' is often approached by different research disciplines through various angles that suggest differing definitions of what it actually entails. It has been demonstrated that youth unemployment is directly associated with social vulnerability and is understood as an inherent and functional part of the neoliberal regime of government, where, through the juridification of social relations, category distinction over responsibility for unemployment is maintained. A more specific conceptualization of youth unemployment refers to the age between 15 and 24, which represents the economically active segment of the population. Currently, there are about 620 million economically active young people in the world, which represents a historical high. This number is expected to keep on increasing in the future. An eye-catching 66.6 million economically active young people around the world are severely disengaged from the labor market and education system. (Contreras et al., 2022)

The causes of youth unemployment are complex and multi-faceted. These causative factors can be broadly categorized under economic, social, educational, and personal influences. Few environmental influences affecting youth unemployment are given in the next section. The phenomenon of youth unemployment may be associated with evolutionary changes in certain components of the economy. New technology, economic recessions, changes in people's values and aspirations can lead to fewer job opportunities for young people. The causes that have implemented this phenomenon may not be the same across different countries or groups of people, nor do they necessarily operate the same way in different locations or at different times. Economic recessions and changes in the structure of the economy are the main reasons for the growth of youth unemployment. The UK in the 1990 recession is noticeable in relatively high peaks in the rates of youth unemployment, with long-term youth unemployment peaking above eight percent. The emotional and psychological impact on young people's eventual employment prospects is important. Rather than presenting themselves to employers with a self-confident can-do profile, younger unemployed young people withdraw and become deskilled in their search. There was little attempt for a negotiated entry into employment opportunities. Social work should be addressing this problem. Since the start of the financial downturn, unemployment in the UK has been rising both for the total adult population and for young people, who are being particularly hard hit, accounting for around a fifth of the total number of those unemployed.

2.1. Causes of Youth Unemployment

Youth in many countries are the demographic where unemployment is the highest. There are various reasons explaining high unemployment among young people. However, the reasons can be categorized into three main factors: individual, structural, and economic-structural conditions. Individual factors refer to the reasons given to identify young people as the source of their own problems. These factors include young people's lack of preparation to enter the workforce due to their lack of skills, lack of educational attainment, poor work habits, low motivation to work, limited work ethics, and lack of experience. The second category includes demographic, economic, and institutional factors that influence youth employment, as well as other workers and the economy at the same time. Socioeconomic factors, on the other hand, function as

inhibitors to finding, securing, and retaining productive jobs and income. These individual and structural factors are the cause of unemployment among educated youth in many countries. (Crisp et al.2022)

Individual factors hindering young people from gaining access to jobs include their lack of skills and the mismatch between the skills they possess and the requirements of the job market. There is evidence showing that formal education levels translate directly into a young job applicant's chance of not becoming long-term unemployed. Long-term and larger sample studies have found that an important factor for the disadvantage of younger applicants is lower educational qualifications, particularly in a tight labor market when young job seekers are in direct competition with job seekers who have higher qualifications. It is clear that education has a central role to play as an influence in future unemployment. In many less developed countries, the failure of education systems to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of the labor markets and the struggle to lift the capacities for technical and vocational education and training is critical.

2.2. Impact of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment has been shown to have severe consequences on the individual level and to carry costs for society. Unemployment can impair a young person's self-worth, with damaging consequences for psychological well-being and even for their physical health, both in the short and long term. A decreased sense of justice among individuals can also lead to social exclusion and a conflictive context where youth are in "pit against pit." This might trigger youth to engage in criminal activities. There is also evidence that severe financial restrictions will tend to isolate people from activities requiring participation in communal purchases, for example, taking part in festivals, eating in restaurants, and beliefs. Young people who had stopped using drugs mainly attributed this to a lack of money. . (Rogošić & Perica, 2022)

Difficulty in meeting friends and family due to financial struggles is also frequently stated by young unemployed individuals, and yet it is a basic human need. Lacking funds becomes an obstacle to maintaining social relationships, which affects the likelihood of falling into depressive disorders. At the state level, results from a study indicate that individuals between 15 and 29 living in income-poor households are thus

more likely to be "economically inactive (i.e., neither working nor looking for work)." Young people in these households indicated as their reasons for "inactivity" the necessity to look after children or other dependents or pointed to education or training as the primary reason. Youth unemployment and social exclusion incur substantial costs: it limits social and economic development at national, regional, and local levels as well as increasing expenditure on the welfare state. In turn, it reinforces social exclusion and, in a self-generating cycle, interrupts community stability and increases resentment between co-citizens. Social reintegration of youth is thus not only an economic necessity but a core theme of modern society and social work.

3. The Role of Social Work in Addressing Youth Unemployment

Prevalence of youth unemployment evokes compelling arguments within the social work sector regarding the multifaceted and complex difficulties faced by unemployed individuals and their families. An evolving trajectory for social workers may therefore include the challenge of addressing and redressing the high levels of unemployed youth. To date, and given the socially relational context in which a hopeful and productive life unfolds, the voices and skills of social workers resonate most strongly. The unique skill base and knowledge of social workers invite a focus on humanistic practice skills, inclusive of communication, advocacy, legal knowledge, counseling, group dynamics, and community engagement. This offers a strong legislative basis that can be employed by individual social workers and requires practical responses from managers and policymakers to integrate and infuse interventions that successfully impact practice; delivered by social workers, which both challenges the trend of high numbers of young Australians in unemployment while also enabling these individuals to engage again in learning or the paid workforce. A plethora of responses implies that a great deal of on-the-ground research is required by future social work scholars to determine which approaches and interventions are most successful in addressing youth unemployment in the new millennium. Since it is necessary to think of the future on the cusp of a rise in youth unemployment, perhaps the current group of youth workers could participate in these studies with the necessary ethics or in capacity as graduate students completing candidature at universities. A longitudinal data tracking component may also be necessary to capture any changes in well-being in the short term. This strategy could

also enable moments to capture the voices of youth engagement workers in order to inform this particular program of research. (Sopcak and Hood2022)

3.1. Key Concepts and Approaches in Social Work

Social work practice is informed by empirical research, theories, and policy interventions. This subsection presents some of the key concepts and methods in social work practice that are pertinent to the development of the intervention model. In engaging with individuals who find themselves unemployed or who are vulnerably employed, the complexity of the factors involved in their employment status is evident. Systems theory provides one analytical framework that supports the understanding of how and why action must be targeted at several levels. This is the interconnectedness of the micro and macro, and the importance of environments, whether at the level of family and its systems or the macro environment where policy is implemented. This highlights the potential disconnect between the competencies of young unemployed individuals and their person in context that must be brought together in any planning, and reflects research that examines the wider labor market, micro economies, and the deprivation and motivation of young people. (Younes et al.2022)

At the level of practice, social work takes a culturally responsive approach and works toward person-centered and person-in-environment approaches. Work with young unemployed individuals within the practice arena of person-centered planning has been shown to be an effective means of eliciting their views about the help they need and greater personalization in support packages. Within strategic and local practice, social work also engages in a community development approach, non-hierarchical based practice that helps local people to work in partnership with each other and with local organizations and agencies on a collective basis. Rather than providing a service, professional social work helps to build capacity among the community to do things for itself. The population of unemployed young people who engage with social work staff also have the same access to youth workers, who will soon be located within the school setting as part of the work of the agenda. This research explores and examines ways in which these social work practices, in particular, could become more effectively inclusive

for all young people, particularly those who are not in education, employment, or training. This section describes our findings about the way successful social work practice outcomes can be captured and the core components of good practice in this arena.

The advocacy role of social work indicates that social workers have much to contribute to developing and influencing employment strategy. As such, this training manual is in the view of veterans that a radical change must take place in the status of young people in our society, and that in order for any change to be authentic, systemic and structural reform is necessary. This section has outlined the key concepts and methods that underpin the practice of social work intervention. When working on the development of this intervention model, it is our aspiration to engage with these different theories when generating an appropriate intervention at a practice level. Later in the book, a number of systemic changes and policy recommendations will be suggested by practitioners drawn from these modules, which may lead to an increase in the number of young persons in our society having adequate and rewarding employment opportunities.

4. Successful Strategies and Interventions

The design and implementation of effective strategies and interventions for reducing youth unemployment are crucial for meeting this audience's vocational needs. In addition, taking a multi-causal perspective is necessary, as individual or personal factors interact with intraindividual variables and social and labor market spheres, which are, in turn, influenced by global and community factors. It is essential to understand the underlying basic principle for guiding any intervention. Together with best practices, this intervention principle is crucial for successful implementation. Lastly, using the best available interventions suggests they were either developed by experts, reliable studies, or particular experience has shown that one format may be the most effective. This is particularly important when a new policy or model is to be implemented or research hasn't yet produced extensive studies. (Scourfield, 2022)

There is potential for various areas of intervention or policy. The description of each intervention includes goals, the theoretical background, strategies, contents, and formats. The main goal of the intervention programs presented was to enhance the

employment prospects of program participants. Engaging target groups is important, given that unemployed and NEET groups often turn out to be a bored and disaffected audience. Both the development of practical competencies in internships and social and personal competencies are addressed. Such aimed internships were developed in close cooperation with training and business partners. Interventions were designed in a participatory way, based on a strong and practical connection with the work field, business, and the city in which it is situated. In order to ensure that a program is most appealing and feasible, various stakeholders should be involved in program design. Program evaluation and assessment were carried out. This could involve assessing program processes, progress, and results. For a successful implementation, it could also be very useful to closely monitor the work in practice and to discuss impressions and suggestions for improvement with each party on a regular basis.

4.1. Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs can be considered an effective tool to provide young people with support, guidance, and inspiration to set and achieve their personal and professional goals in a career path. Therefore, the primary objective of these mentorship programs is to provide new opportunities for each participant to experience their own capabilities and to encourage their personal motivation to become better. Moreover, mentoring is an effective intervention for young people to develop their self-knowledge, enable them to learn from their own careers, and guide them in developing plans to lead them in their professional future. (Sopcak and Hood2022)

Such an approach to mentoring suggests that trust in this form of informal guidance can represent social capital and, therefore, be viewed as a strategy for enhancing the employability of young people. Mentorship programs are designed to provide young people with the opportunity to find a mentor who matches their interests, professional expectations, or other needs. The program performs a coordinating role by setting goals, rules, tasks, methods, and providing participants with all the information and knowledge necessary for the successful implementation of the mentoring process. This approach identifies successful models of school mentoring divided into four categories according to the degree of system on which they focused: (a) career-student mentoring: "me" in the management group, (b) school-student mentoring: "we" in the school system,

(c) job consultancy: "me/we" in different systems, (d) management advice, recruiting a workforce: "we" in the business system. Testimonies of past participants or written success stories are proving powerful in convincing stakeholders, such as schools and companies, to engage in mentorship experiences in the future.

4.2. Skills Training and Development

One popular approach for reducing youth unemployment is through skills training and development. Such programs are designed to prepare young people for employment by providing them with the skills, knowledge, and hands-on experience needed for a specific type of work. Programs should be designed to align with labor market demands – instructing in the skills that are currently in demand by local businesses – in order to improve trainee employability. "Soft skills" – professionally desirable personality traits and social behaviors such as punctuality, work ethic, and respectfulness – are identified as crucial training areas for young people in developing countries. From the perspective of local employers, this capacity-building could benefit youth, as they are able to demonstrate to local employers that they possess the type of "soft skills" that are crucial to success in the workplace. By giving young people access to these specific types of training and certification programs, employment schemes can give young people a competitive advantage and offer them greater access to non-subsidized internships and labor market inclusion. These programs are particularly attractive due to the potential synergies with other employers and firms who are looking for well-equipped individuals. . (Wang et al.2022)

The social work field has the potential to leverage this "second-chance" approach for marginalized youth by explicitly creating opportunities for skill acquisition, skill enhancement, and labor force participation. An important feature of social work in employment settings is the focus on person-in-environment, which involves considering not only the client but also the context of agencies, occupations, and industries when addressing problems connected to poverty, unemployment, and economic disparities. Evidence-based employment programs, successful training strategies, and employer partnerships represent only a handful of the potential interventions that social workers can use in an effort to align "person-in-environment," thereby facilitating improved employment prospects for young people attempting to transition into the labor force.

5. Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Numerous challenges must be considered when developing strategies to help individuals and communities address issues related to youth unemployment. Some of these challenges are ethical in nature and force social workers to make choices about competing priorities, scarce organizational resources, and possible negative impacts on clients. These ethical considerations are significant, as they affect service delivery and influence the effectiveness of interventions. An overall focus on an ethical framework or ethical foundation is particularly important when conducting social work practice with clients experiencing multiple barriers to success. (Wang et al.2022)

Two major challenges when addressing youth unemployment are deciding how to balance the comprehensive supportive needs of young people with limited resources, while providing quality services to clients whose needs don't neatly fit within the scope of a program's objectives or mandate. Additionally, a key challenge for many youth service providers is finding practical ways to facilitate relevant supports for those youth who can't fit the eligibility guidelines of a particular program. Understanding the practical challenges associated with providing youth work is essential for those considering a future in the sector. Social workers have an ethical responsibility towards clients. In an age of the 24-hour news cycle, where privacy has become a rare commodity, it is even more critical that our clients can trust that the information they share with us will remain confidential. Our clients have a right to expect that we will put their interests and needs first and that we will work to stimulate growth within them.

5.1. Ethical Guidelines in Social Work

As a field, social work has ethical standards of practice that guide our daily work. These include: (1) ethical values; (2) ethical standards; (3) code of ethics; and (4) guidance and direction from our licensing body. In our context, the ethical values of respect for persons, autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice are all relevant to our practice in our provision of employment-related services to our clients. (Mayaka & Truell, 2022)

Frequently, when working with clients, social workers are positioned as offering individuals the power, resources, knowledge, and expertise they require to develop a comprehensive plan that works best for their respective challenges. Negotiations regarding the appropriateness and timing of the interventions and training activities occur at the discretion of the client. Negotiations regarding the processes, the scheduling, and even the report-back mechanisms are co-constructive processes and an ongoing shared responsibility between the worker and clients. Informed consent, the proactive need to communicate the best practice approaches or service offerings to clients, is a further extension of both the need to demonstrate professional competence as well as support good governance objectives. This, too, is part of a social worker's ethical obligation. Transparency, or openness, in professional-client relationships can help circumvent and/or reduce the feelings of power and status imbalances as well as the dependent worker-client relationships, while also enhancing mutual trust between the worker and clients.

Professional integrity and practice accountability are the two underlying ethical principles that shed light on the need for social workers to work within recognized best and ethical practice standards. Professional integrity dictates the need for social workers to be mindful of their professional decisions, actions, and behaviors, and ensure they are consistent with best practice. In addition to professional development and ongoing learning with respect to career and employment counseling and guidance, there is also a need for both our staff and management to be engaged in detailed and leveled ethics and decision-based training/support. In career and employment guidance and counseling, there are a number of important and very complex ethical issues that need to be considered. (Mayaka & Truell, 2022)

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