

NATURE, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN BALOCHISTAN: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is a critical public policy issue in developing nations. However, there remains a scarcity of public policy research addressing this problem in the context of developing and emerging nations. In particular, there is a scarcity of research that examined the causes, nature, and consequences of youth unemployment in Balochistan, Pakistan. Accordingly, this study examines the nature, causes, and consequences of youth unemployment in Balochistan. By engaging diverse stakeholders such as students, employers, policymakers, educators, and experts, the research aims to unveil the struggles faced by marginalized youth of Balochistan. It intends to unearth the nature and root causes of youth unemployment, identify essential employment skills, and emphasize the role of government and public institutions in nurturing youth employment. The study delves into the underlying reasons for ineffective government interventions, critically analyzes existing strategies to counter the crisis, and the contextual framing of youth unemployment in Balochistan. Employing a blend of semi-structured interviews, surveys, and data triangulation, the study endeavors to bolster the credibility of its findings and propose pragmatic, evidence-based policy recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

To develop more in-depth insights into the youth unemployment phenomenon, the present study utilizes a mixed methods approach to examine the natural causes and consequences of youth unemployment in Balochistan. It employs a pragmatism paradigm that integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques to develop in-depth insights into the youth unemployment issue in Balochistan. The research involves two phases. The initial phase collects survey data from 101 youth and 38 employers in Balochistan. The second phase conducts qualitative data collection in two stages. Short interviews are held with 31 youth and 8 employers from various districts, representing all ten universities in the province. Next, in-depth semi-structured interviews are conducted with 10 key informants, including senior university staff, government officials, policymakers, and international development agency members. The purposive snowballing technique is used for participant selection.

The interview guides are developed from an extensive review of emerging literature, focusing on policy debates and empirical work related to youth unemployment. Qualitative data is collected through recorded interviews and transcriptions, while quantitative data is gathered via adapted surveys. The youth survey is based on the International Labour Organization's 2009 school-to-work transition survey, with 54 questionnaire items, while the employer survey comprises 32 items. Ethical considerations are upheld with participants' consent.

Descriptive analysis is applied to survey data, and thematic analysis guides the qualitative data examination, following Braun and Clarke's guidelines. The analysis is conducted in three phases,

exploring skill sets, technical knowledge requirements, and avenues for nurturing these skills at universities and through government intervention. Policy recommendations for addressing youth unemployment are developed based on interview findings.

To ensure research quality and strengthen the validity of research findings, a triangulation approach was adopted. The notion of triangulation involves integrating the findings via multiple sources of data collection from various sources and ensuring consistency of findings. Accordingly, the findings were based on the triangulation of interview and survey data, enhancing the credibility, transferability, and overall value of the research outcomes in the real-world context.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide in-depth insights into youth unemployment in Balochistan, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative insights. The findings are classified into nature, causes, and consequences of unemployment.

Nature of Unemployment

The study underscores a significant youth unemployment rate, with a substantial number of graduates remaining unemployed even a year after completing their education. This trend mirrors global concerns, highlighting the socio-economic consequences of high youth unemployment. Strikingly, rural-urban migration is prevalent, as rural youth seek better prospects in urban centers. Paradoxically, many perceive limited job prospects within Balochistan, revealing the absence of formal support networks, a common issue in developing economies. The analysis underscores a noticeable skills gap among graduates, with statistics indicating that 64% of job applicants are rejected due to poor writing skills and 67% due to insufficient technical skills. This skills mismatch underscores the urgency of interventions such as vocational training and curriculum alignment with industry requirements. The scarcity of jobs, as indicated by 80% of surveyed youth believing the Balochistan job market offers limited opportunities, is exacerbated by an underdeveloped industrial sector. These challenges drive migration and underemployment, with 80% of youth acknowledging this limited job market and migrating for better prospects. Retaining local talent emerges as a pivotal concern.

Causes of Unemployment

The quantitative analysis underscores the significant impact of a limited job market, with 80% of youth perceiving it as constricted. This intensified competition for jobs is exemplified by the migration trend, as 53% of respondents reported working in cities different from their hometowns, particularly among females (39%) compared to males (32%). A mismatch between education choices and job requirements further exacerbates the issue, as indicated by 67% of rejected job applicants lacking adequate technical skills and 64% having poor writing skills.

Qualitative exploration augments the understanding of these causes. The dearth of industrial development and a weak private sector contributed to limited job opportunities, driving a preference for government jobs. This inclination resonates with the fact that 81% of respondents believe a university degree is vital for a decent job, and 27% aspire to work in the public sector. Moreover, gender disparities hinder female employment due to cultural norms, aligning with global observations. The qualitative analysis also underscores how perceived corruption and unequal employment prospects amplify youth unemployment.

Consequences of Unemployment

The quantitative data highlights a pronounced NEET rate (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) in Balochistan, surpassing the national average. This signifies limited access to education and employment for a significant portion of youth. This aligns with previous research that underlines the impact of youth unemployment on educational and labor market outcomes. Gender disparities also emerge, with an employment-to-population ratio of 11.3 for females compared to 38.6 overall, echoing wider studies that address unequal employment opportunities.

The qualitative exploration delves into psychological and behavioral consequences. Unemployment imparts negative effects such as low morale, stress, dissatisfaction, and reduced self-confidence, paralleling prior research linking youth unemployment to mental health challenges. Additionally, youth unemployment is linked to increased crime rates and social unrest in Balochistan. Frustrated youth may resort to criminal activities, aligning with global research that connects youth unemployment to social instability and criminal behavior.

Brain drain emerges as another significant consequence, with talented youth migrating for better opportunities. This resonates with studies highlighting limited local prospects driving brain drain. Trust deficit between unemployed youth and the government also surfaces, mirroring prior research emphasizing the importance of effective policies and initiatives to rebuild trust in the system.

CONCLUSION AND KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study delves into the challenges surrounding youth unemployment in Balochistan and presents practical policy recommendations for government, policymakers, and stakeholders. A significant youth unemployment rate and rural-urban migration highlight the scarcity of job opportunities. Predominantly, graduates' skills gap and underdeveloped industries contribute to the problem. The importance of digital skills for employability is emphasized.

Causes of unemployment encompass a limited job market and an education-employment mismatch that hinders opportunities. Rural-urban migration intensifies competition. Weak private sectors and cultural norms perpetuate the problem, while corruption perceptions and gender disparities exacerbate it.

The consequences of youth unemployment align with existing literature. These encompass educational and mental health repercussions, social issues, and brain drain. The trust deficit between unemployed youth and the government also hampers solutions.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive and collaborative strategy is essential. Following are the key policy recommendations: Recommendations include promoting private sector engagement, gender-inclusive policies, career counseling, entrepreneurship, industry-academia linkages, and more. The goal is to unlock the region's potential, ensuring economic growth and social well-being. Following are the key policy recommendations:

1. **Promote Private Sector Engagement:** Encourage public-private partnerships and establish Special Economic Zones to attract investment and create jobs.
2. **Gender-Inclusive Policies:** Support female workforce participation through facilities and gender-responsive policies.
3. **Career Counseling and Guidance:** Strengthen career counseling, job fairs, and industry exposure for students.

4. Entrepreneurship and Soft Skills: Foster entrepreneurship and provide soft skills training for employability.
5. Industry-Academia Linkages: Connect academia with industry through seminars and guest speakers.
6. Decentralization and Inclusive Policies: Decentralize funds and prioritize underprivileged areas.
7. Development of Border Markets: Establish border markets to capitalize on cross-border trade.
8. Revise Education System: Offer relevant, market-driven education with technical and vocational skills.
9. Encourage Local Industry: Support small businesses for job creation.
10. Strengthen Policymaking: Involve stakeholders, especially youth, in policy development.
11. Address Brain Drain: Create attractive local opportunities to prevent talent migration.
12. Public-Private Initiatives: Encourage innovation in the coastal region.
13. Enhance Financial Literacy: Empower youth with financial skills for entrepreneurship.
14. Promote Skill-based Education: Introduce practical training in early education.
15. These recommendations, when realized, hold the potential to combat youth unemployment, driving economic prosperity and overall well-being in Balochistan.

The study acknowledges limitations, such as potential biases in data and unexplored factors. The dynamic nature of the labor market necessitates ongoing policy adaptation and the lack of collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders remains crucial for refining strategies.