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Male African Unemployment in the Richards Bay Area

by

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Introduction

This report is written at the request of Revd. Harold Terblanche, Anglican rector of Richards Bay in Northern Natal. A survey of unemployed African men in African areas adjacent to Richards Bay (notably Kwa - Mbonambi) was carried out under his supervision between 13th and 19th June 1978. Interviewers were stationed at stores and asked to interview unemployed African men using a simple form; 199 of these forms were completed and handed to me for analysis.

Ten variables can be defined from information on the forms. These were coded for processing on the Natal University UNIVAC-1100 computer using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Response rates varied quite markedly across the variables as can be seen from Table I.

Table I - *Variables and Response Rates - Richards Bay Area Unemployment Survey*

Variable	Number of Responses	Response Rate (%)
Age	199	100
Health	150	75
Education	196	98
Work Wanted	152	76
Last Job Type	180	90
Whether registered for UIF on survey date	46	23
Whether UIF received since becoming unemployed	46	23
Minimum monthly income requirement	199	100
Number of dependents	182	91
Months unemployed	167	84

The UIF variables are excluded from further consideration as the relevant questions were answered by less than a quarter of the sample.

Presentation of results

The picture that emerges from a study of the remaining eight variables may usefully be built up by comparing the Richards Bay Area results with those obtained from a study of rural African wage workers carried out in 1977 and reported by myself in *South African Unemployment: A Black Picture.*[1] The age distribution of the sample is set out in Table II.

Table II - *Age distribution of unemployed African men in the Richards Bay area*

Age group	Number	Percentage
14 or less	8	4
15 to 24	70	35
25 to 44	100	50
45 or more	21	10
	199	100

This suggests less concentration of unemployment among the young than Loots found in Saulspoort (in Bophuthatswana) or Pretoria in 1977; these figures are much closer to those found by Market Research Africa in a survey of the Witwatersrand and Pretoria at much the same time.[2] Unemployment is therefore mildly (but not strongly) concentrated among the young.

Reported state of health is tabulated against age in Table III.

Table III - *State of health vs. Age*

	Health	
Age group	Good	Fair/Poor
24 or less	60 (92%)	5
25 or more	63 (74%)	22
	123	27

Note: Only one respondent reported poor health.

Table III suggests that the young are in somewhat better health than those over 25.

The distribution between three educational levels is set out in Table III and compared with that found in Nqutu (in the KwaZulu interior) in 1977. The distributions are similar.

Table IV - *Distribution of education among male African unemployed in the Richards Bay Area, 1978, and in Nqutu, 1977.*

Level of education	Richards Bay Area	Nqutu
Nil to Std. 2	90(47%)	42%
Stds. 3 to 5	61(31%)	28%
Post-Primary	45(23%)	31%
	196	

Note: The Nqutu data are reported on p.75 of Simkins and Desmond, *op. cit.*

On the question of the distribution of education among the unemployed, it is worth quoting Bromberger to the effect that 'where there is considerable income inequality between white collar jobs and others and where higher education is a passport to entry to those white-collar jobs, there is an inducement for individuals to invest in education and to suffer a period of unemployment at the beginning of their careers while waiting for a job to come along. This phenomenon may assume chronic and extraordinary proportions.'[3] However, the similarity of the Richards Bay and the Nqutu results add to the 'evidence- both of a general sort and of the survey variety... - (which) suggests that this is not yet a substantial determinant of unemployment in South Africa. There are powerful arguments to suggest that it will soon be.'[4]

The Richards Bay Area evidence conforms 'with the hypothesis that education is a primary determinant of job expectations'[5] as may be seen from Table V which cross-tabulates education and type of work wanted.

Table V - *Education vs. Type of Work Wanted - Richards Bay Area*

Education / Type of work wanted	Nil to Std.2.	Stds.3 to 5	Post-primary
Professional/Managerial/ Clerical/ Artisan/Technical/ Routine Non-Manual	10 (14%)	7 (14%)	13 (45%)
Semiskilled	9 (13%)	16 (31%)	3 (7%)
Unskilled or any	51 (73%)	28 (55%)	13 (45%)
	70	51	29

This observation may be strengthened by considering the distribution of the 'minimum monthly income requirement'. The inverted commas appear for a good reason - in general respondents seemed not to quote the income required to support themselves and their dependents (a crosstabulation revealed no association between number of dependents and minimum monthly income requirement) but rather the wage they expect to earn once they find employment. This can be seen from the following two tables. Table VI crosstabulates monthly income requirement by last job type. The divide appears between unskilled labourers and the rest.

Table VI - *Monthly income requirement vs. Last job type*

Last job type / Monthly income requirement	Routine non-manual and better	Semiskilled	Unskilled
Less than R40	7	11	25
R40 to R59	14	14	16
R60 to R79	7	9	15
R80 to R119	11	4	12
R120 and more	8	17	10
	47	55	78
Median	R67	R66	R58

The results for unskilled and semi-skilled unemployed workers obtained in the Richards Bay Area are similar to those obtained in Lebowa nearly a year before. This can be seen from Table VII.

Table VII - *Weekly income requirement for unskilled and semi-skilled unemployed workers in Lebowa, 1977 and Richards Bay, 2978.*

	Unskilled workers		Semiskilled workers	
	Lebowa	Richards Bay	Lebowa	Richards Bay
Weekly income requirement				
R10 or less	16(43%)	27(34%)	7(16%)	13(24%)
R11 to R20	21	51	18(42%)	22(40%)
more than R20	(57%)	(68%)	18(42%)	20(36%)
	37	80	43	55

Note: Lebowa results are taken from p.79 of Simkins, *op. cit.*

There remain two ways of comparing the Richards Bay Area results with earlier work. One is to construct a 'transition matrix' to test whether there is a widespread desire to move between broad job categories. This is done in Table VIII.

Table VIII - *Transition matrix for the Richards Bay Area*

Work wanted	Routine non-manual or better	Semiskilled	Unskilled or any
Last job type			
Routine non-manual or better	27	0	10
Semiskilled	0	25	13
Unskilled	3	1	58

The proportion of off-diagonal elements (denoting a desire to change) is 20%, similar to that found in Johannesburg and Durban.[6] In fact, the figures are not strictly comparable since we have included here those willing to take any work (excluded before). What is clear, however, is that, as elsewhere, there is a limited desire for (or perhaps more accurately, a limited expectation of) change between broad job categories.

Finally, we should consider the distribution of the lengths of time that respondents have been unemployed. Table IX sets out the distribution.

Table IX - *Distribution of the lengths of unemployment in Richards Bay, 1978.*

Period of unemployment	Number	Percentage
Less than 3 months	37	22
4-6 months	27	16
7-12 months	38	23
13-24 months	32	19
More than 24 months	33	20
	167	100

The depressing conclusion emerges that fully 60% of the unemployed have been unemployed for more than six months and one-fifth have been unemployed for over two years. The situation in Lebowa in 1977 was comparable,[7] suggesting a possibly widespread (but not universal as the Kwa Zulu[8] and Loots's Bophuthatswana results[9] show) long-term unemployment problem.

Conclusions:

These results confirm quite closely earlier survey work done on unemployment. It is therefore questionable whether a more detailed study along lines of earlier work would add much by way of new information. It seems more likely that the picture sketched in my earlier survey report could be assumed to hold for the Richards Bay Area as well as other rural areas where unemployed wage workers are to be found.

NOTES.

1 edited by Charles Simkins and Cosmas Desmond and published by the Development Studies Research Group and the Agency for Industrial Mission in July 1978. The report appears on pp. 43-116 of the book, rural results specifically being reported in Chapter III (pp. 73-90).

2 see Simkins, *op. cit.*, p.106.

3 Norman Bromberger, 'South African Unemployment: A Survey of Research' in Simkins and Desmond, *op. cit.*, p.21.

4 Bromberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

5 Simkins, *op. cit.*, p.61.

6 Simkins, *loc. cit.*

7 Simkins, *op. cit.*, p.80. (Table III 8)

8 Simkins, *loc. cit.*

9 Loots, *op. cit.*, Table 30.