

**RURAL URBAN STUDIES UNIT**



UNIVERSITY OF NATAL DURBAN

**A PROFILE OF  
REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED  
IN THE DURBAN AREA**

**ZAMAKHOSI MPANZA**

**DEVELOPMENT STUDIES UNIT**

Centre for Applied Social Sciences

**WORKING PAPER NO. 1**

AN INVESTIGATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG AFRICANS  
SEEKING WORK AT THE LABOUR BUREAUX

A PROFILE OF REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED  
IN THE DURBAN AREA

by

Zamakhosi Mpanza

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### Rural Urban Studies Unit

The Rural Urban Studies Unit was founded in 1983 by the Human Sciences Research Council for the purpose of studying the dynamics of the links between the rural and urban areas of South Africa. It is situated at the University of Natal and works in close co-operation with the Development Studies Unit.

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## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The purpose of the research was to establish a socio-economic profile of the unemployed seeking work through a local administration board.

The broad areas covered by the study included:-

- (i) demographic characteristics in terms of age, sex, marital status, education levels, places of origin and residential status in the area;
- (ii) general household characteristics and the economic role of individuals in the household;
- (iii) the work history, which purports to describe the working life experiences of individuals in terms of patronised economic sectors; positions normally held, wage levels, length of service and reasons behind losing those jobs;
- (iv) socio-economic factors, discussed under two broad headings:-
  - (a) nature of unemployment, which focuses on job-market aspirations and activities of individuals; and
  - (b) effects of unemployment, which focuses on economic hardship, commitments, worst fears emanating from and survival strategies derived to cope with unemployment.

### 1.1 Method

The survey was conducted among work seekers at the labour bureaux in and around Durban. These areas were chosen for two reasons: firstly by law, all unemployed people are supposed to register with the bureaux, secondly the bureaux run placement services which are links between the employer and the work seeker. It was thus anticipated that a fair proportion of the unemployed who had the necessary legal status to be in the area, could be interviewed at these sites.

Because of the investigatory nature of the study, no definite quotas were imposed as to sex, age and number of respondents to be interviewed at various bureaux. It was also recognised that the imposition of quotas would not ensure that the sample interviewed was representative of the unemployed African group because:

- not all unemployed people register with the labour bureaux, e.g. illegal immigrants, some contract workers and apathetic long-term unemployed.
- generally, women have less incentive to register because in many instances they are not entitled to any insurance benefits e.g. domestic workers;
- there is also the effect of the 'silent reserve' Those who pretend to be merely inactive when unemployment is high and only declare themselves unemployed when the job market improves.

Final selection of the sample depended on concession given by individuals to the interview. There were however, few refusals as the topic of the research was a highly emotive one for the interviewees and they hoped that concession to the interview might help in solving their problems.

A structured, pre-coded interview schedule was used in a face to face interview situation with the respondents. The research was carried out over three weeks in January 1984.



## 2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### 2.1 Sex and Age

From the national population survey, it is clear that both the younger age groups and the female component of the African work force, run a higher chance of being unemployed than does the labour force as a whole. The age and sex breakdown of the unemployed interviewed in Durban is given in figure 2.1.1.

Figure 2.1.1

	Total	Male	Female	18-30 yrs	31-50 yrs	50+ yrs
Number	149	91	58	100	41	8
Percentage	100	67	39	67	28	5

The nature of the data prevents one from estimating the overall unemployment rates of the various groups given in the figure, but nevertheless, the very high proportion of people 30 years or less and the fact that women made up 39 percent of the total, suggest that the composition of the unemployed who were interviewed at the labour offices in and around Durban did not differ significantly from that of the country as a whole - notwithstanding the fact that they comprised only the 'legal' residents of the area.

## **2.2 Marital Status**

Fifty two percent of the sample had never been married, 35 percent were married and the remainder (13%) were either divorced, widowed or living with someone.

## **2.3 Educational Qualifications**

There are two conflicting influences relating unemployment and education amongst Africans. Firstly, those with low education levels are less sought after by employers and, other things being equal, are more likely to find themselves unemployed. On the other hand, the relatively recent efforts that have been made to improve African access to education mean that the better educated are more likely to be found amongst the younger age groups - groups who themselves suffer above average unemployment rates as a result of their relative lack of work experience.

Figure 2.3.1 contains data showing the age/sex and educational breakdown of the sample interviewed, and illustrates both of these forces.

**Figure 2.3.1 Educational Levels by Sex and Age**

Level of Education	Total	Male	Female	18-30 yrs	31-50 yrs	51+ yrs
	149	91	58	100	48	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
No Education	5	4	5	2	10	13
Less than Std 3	12	12	12	6	20	50
Std 3-Std 5	21	19	24	19	24	25
Std 6	24	24	24	22	29	12
Std 7-Std 8 (J.C.)	32	37	26	42	17	-
Std 9-Std 10 (Matric)	6	4	9	9	-	-
	100	100	100	100	100	100

From the information in figure 2.3.1 it can be seen that 17 percent of the sample had either no education or only lower primary school education, (which is insufficient to ensure literacy). Higher primary school leavers accounted for 46 percent of the sample and those with Junior Certificate and Matric for 32 percent and 6 percent respectively.

The mean standard of education amongst the unemployed interviewed was standard six, and 62 percent of the whole sample had an education below Junior Certificate. The influence of age on education can be seen from the fact that the majority of those who had had 10 years or

more of education were in the 18-30 years age group. There was no marked difference in the educational levels of males and females.

#### **2.4 Origins and Residence**

Durban is a very rapidly growing city whose boundaries are adjacent to KwaZulu in many instances, which has the effect of invalidating the influx control measures. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to assume firstly, a high rate of in-migration and secondly that, because in-migrants are likely to be disadvantaged in terms of both work experience and education, the in-migration is likely to be reflected amongst the unemployed.

In answer to the question: Where do you stay? 38 percent of the sample indicated that they were born in Durban and 62 percent in places other than Durban. Of those born elsewhere, 32 percent worked in Durban as migrant workers and 68 percent of them had acquired permanent urban rights.

A breakdown of the urban status by age and sex is reflected in the following table.

**Figure 2.4.1 Urban Status of the Unemployed**

Urban Status	Total	Male	Female	18-30 yrs	31-50 yrs	51+ yrs
	149	91	58	100	41	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Permanent Urban rights	80	82	78	80	76	100
Migrant Workers	20	18	22	20	24	-
	100	100	100	100	100	100

The majority of the respondents in both the sex and age categories had a permanent urban status. A vast majority (92%) indicated that they resided in the townships surrounding Durban, and 18 percent in peri-urban areas. Description of accommodation in these areas, showed that 84 percent lived in township houses, 9 percent lived in the hostels and 7 percent lived in 'shacks' or self-built structures.

Two thirds of the sample rented accommodation, 10 per cent owned their own homes and the remaining 24 percent were lodgers.

## **2.5 Previous Economic Status**

Individuals were asked whether they had worked before. The answers given are reflected in the figure that follows.

**Figure 2.5.1 Previous Economic Status**

Previous Economic Status	Total	Male	Female	18-30 yrs	32-50 yrs	51+ yrs
	149	91	58	100	41	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Have worked	82,5	87	78	76	98	100
Have never worked	17,5	13	22	24	2	-
	100	100	100	100	100	100

By far the majority, one hundred and twenty four (83%), of the individuals in the sample had worked before. Amongst those who had never worked before, there was a slight bias towards females (22%) and those in the age group 18 - 30 years (24%). Understandably, no respondents in the over fifty years category had never worked before.

## **2.6 Household Structures**

Individuals surveyed were questioned on their family structures and the 149 respondents together recorded a total number of 788 individuals spanning an array of personal relationships which included relatives and lodgers as part of the household.

The word household was taken to include all the individuals who help in the running of the home through things such as contributing to the

payment of rent, electricity, water bills and food. Dependence was the key consideration, no matter whether the members were in the rural or urban areas, as long as the respondent was dependent on them or they on him, they were taken as part of the family.

The final distribution of families in terms of their spatial location is given in Figure 2.6.1.

**Figure 2.6.1 Family Types by Spatial Location**

Type of Family	Total	Sex of Interviewee	
		Male	Female
	149	91	58
	%	%	%
Urban Family	15	17	12
Rural Family	61	53	69
Urban-Rural Family	24	30	19
	100	100	100

Sixty one percent of the people interviewed only had family members in the rural areas, 15 percent only had family members in the urban areas and 25 percent had family in both rural and urban areas. Thirty two percent of all the members of the households however, lived in rural areas and sixty eight in towns, which suggests that although the mean family size was 6.3 people, somewhat surprisingly the urban families were larger than rural families.

The number of males in the household population, was 374 (47%) and the number of females was 414 (53%). Fifty six percent of the total number were economically inactive members including pre-school children (16%), scholars (36%), and pensioners (5%). Twenty seven percent were unemployed and only 23% were income earners.



### 3. WORK HISTORY

A subsample of 124 individuals who had previously been employed were asked to give a brief history of the last two places at which they had worked before and describe the positions they had held, the salary, and indicate the length of time that they had kept those jobs.

In the following discussion, only the data pertaining to the last job will be used to illustrate the job tendencies of this sample.

Figure 3.1 Breakdown of Employment Patterns in the Sample by Sector

Sector of Employment	Total	Male	Female
	124	79	45
	%	%	%
Manufacturing	33	39	27
Construction	17	33	-
Domestic	36	11	62
Sales	10	9	11
Miscellaneous	4	8	-
All	100	100	100

Figure 3.2 Breakdown of positions normally held in mentioned sectors of the economy

Sector	Total	Manufacturing	Construction	Domestic	Sales	Miscellaneous
	124	43	26	37	12	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Unskilled worker	35	30	81	8	25	33
Operator	30	56	12	-	17	67
Clerk	10	12	4	-	33	-
Driver	1	2	3	-	-	-
Domestic worker	24	-	-	92	2	-
All	100	100	100	100		100

Figure 3.1 shows clearly that the manufacturing, construction, domestic and to a lesser extent sales concerns, were by far the largest employers of those surveyed, (33%, 17%, 36% and 10%) respectively. Females were mostly employed in the domestic and manufacturing sectors. This probably reflects the employment patterns in the Durban area in general, irrespective of the recession.

In Figure 3.2 it can be seen that within these sectors, 30 percent had worked as operators, 35 percent as unskilled labourers and 24 percent as domestic workers.

Of those who had worked in the manufacturing sector, 56 percent had worked as operators, and 30 percent as unskilled labourers. Eighty one percent of those who had been employed in the construction sector had worked as unskilled labourers and of those employed as domestic workers, 8 percent did unskilled labour while 92 percent of them provided personal service normally attributed to domestic work.

That unemployment hits harder at the lower levels than at the higher levels of skills, an indication of the dispensibility of the unskilled, is borne out by the distribution of earnings received in the previous occupation, which is given in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3 Last Employment Sector and Salary Earned**

Amount per Month	Total 124 %	Male 79 %	Female 45 %	Manufacturing 43 %	Construction 26 %	Domestic 37 %	Sales 12 %	Other 6 %
R50-100	28	3	53	5	-	60	8	-
R101-150	26	17	35	30	8	30	42	17
R151-200	17	24	9	21	34	5	33	33
R201-250	16	29	3	21	42	3	17	-
R251-300	8	15	-	12	12	2	-	33
R301-350	1	3	-	2	-	-	-	17
R351+	4	9	-	9	4	-	-	-
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Twenty eight per cent of the sample earned between R50 and R100 of whom 60 percent were domestic workers and 53 percent were women. The majority of the sample (52 percent) earned below R150 per month and only 13 percent had earned above R250 per month.

It is sometimes argued that there is a tendency towards the development of a culture of unemployment that is fostered by the fact that firstly, employment tends to be offered first to those who have work experience and secondly, that employers tend to retrench those hired last - and this is a practice supported by the Union movement. The combined influence of these two practices is, over time, to generate a class of people who increasingly become virtually unemployable. Data relating to the length of time spent in the previous job is given in Figure 3.4 and it supports this view.

**Figure 3.4 Length of Time in Last Employment by Sex and Age**

Time in last Em- ployment	Total 124 %	Male 79 %	Female 45 %	18-30 yrs 75 %	31-50 yrs 41 %	51+ yrs 8 %
1-12	43	34	51	45	32	38
13-24	31	28	33	36	24	-
25-36	8	13	4	9	10	25
37-48	7	4	10	7	5	-
49+						
	100	100	100	100	100	100

While it is not unusual for the unemployed to take temporary employment if and when available, this is generally not taken into account and mentioned by individuals because of its short duration. "Togt", and other types of temporary employment have inherent disadvantages for workers. For instance, temporary employees, though an essential ingredient of the formal employment system, are the last to be hired and first to be fired; they do not enjoy such privileges as steady advancement in rank and increase in wages; they are not entitled to pension on retirement and usually the duration is too short for employees to qualify for UIF when the job comes to an end.

Judging from the data in figure 3.4, there are influences at work in the area that might well give rise to a growing class of people who cannot find work. Forty three percent of those who had worked previously, had not spent more than a year in their last job and 74 percent had not spent more than two years. The situation was noticeably worse amongst the women, where 51% had spent less than a year. Although these rates were higher amongst the younger group, it should be noted that even amongst those aged over 50 years, 38 percent had not spent more than a year in their previous job.

Poor work histories make the prospect of obtaining a job increasingly dim and it certainly seems highly likely that amongst those surveyed, there was indeed a core of people who were probably almost unemployable in the eyes of the employers in the modern sector of the economy.

Indeed, when considered as a whole, the former work history of the unemployed surveyed, present a picture of the 'working/not working poor', people whose efforts even in times of relatively plentiful employment prospects, barely earn them the modest income needed to bring them above the mere survival level. From the data obtained, it seemed that, notwithstanding the fact that the manufacturing and construction were the major employers of labour, the actual salaries paid to those surveyed in Durban were on average much lower than those cited by the National Manpower Commission as obtaining nation wide.

In 1982, for the country as a whole, the average wage rate paid in manufacturing to Africans was R415 per month and in construction it was R244 per month.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the occupational structures of the unemployed surveyed is such that within the job categories there is very little scope for vertical mobility in terms of both position and wages. Domestic workers, drivers and operators remain just that over a long period of time. If other skills are eventually acquired, they are either only suitable for those sectors and particular places "where workers have worked longest and not easily transferrable to new more sophisticated and capital intensive sectors of the economy; or they are not properly acknowledged by former employers. The latter proved true in the data

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(1) Report of the National Manpower Commission for the period 1 January 1982 - 31 December 1982. R.P. 45 - 1983.

collected from the entire sample. None of the respondents claimed to possess 'other qualifications' only one man who had been given a 'certificate of service' when he left his job as a clerk in a manufacturing concern and one other had obtained a 'welding testimonial' from his term in prison.

On the whole, people in the sample begin from a disadvantaged position as work seekers such as being seen as unskilled workers with little or no work history and consequently lack bargaining power in respect of their position and capabilities. They are therefore virtually at the mercy of prospective employers in many cases.

Women are hardest hit in the job market. Among many factors militating against them, lack of legal protection particularly and many other discriminatory practices, mean that women are mostly found in the badly paid and low status occupations and still remain in extremely vulnerable positions in relation to their employers. Because of the high proportion working in Domestic Service the majority cannot even claim from UIF when they become unemployed.

Although it is noted from Figure 3.3 that workers in the older age categories and in particular the men, tended to keep their jobs longer, the younger workers are a cause for concern. Normally, when the economy experiences a downward turn, the younger workers, who are the last to be hired, become the first to be discharged. Further, as a result of the rising aspirations that accompany better levels of education, the young workers have to contend with the problem of being

in a particular employment situation which in their opinion is beneath their education (61% of those who had 8 years or more of schooling were in the 18 - 30 years group) and so many of them tend to change their jobs, often in search of more fulfilling work conditions but jeopardising their work histories in the process.

Further, the length of time an individual stays in a job is important because it affects the rate at which he can claim from UIF as this is calculated on the basis of time spent and salary earned in one particular place. Further, shorter job lengths affect the period over which an individual can be recommended for and be given on-the-job training that is long enough for him to receive paper qualifications for it.

On being asked how they had left their previous jobs, the respondents gave answers that are depicted in Figure 3.5.

**Figure 3.5 Reasons for Leaving the Previous Job by Age and Sex**

Reasons for Leaving Job	Total	Male	Female	18-30 yrs	31-50 yrs	51+ yrs
	124	79	45	75	41	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Resigned	37	30	44	40	29	25
Expelled	16	16	16	17	15	12
Retrenched	32	46	18	36	37	25
Job shut down	15	8	22	7	19	38
	100	100	100	100	100	100



It is clear that the majority of the younger workers and the females in particular took a personal decision to leave their job. This correlates well with the argument advanced earlier, namely, that this group of people are more often than not victims of circumstances which are beyond their understanding and control in the economic setting particularly.

Although men on average tended to have spent longer in their previous job, they too appear to have been the major victims of the ailing economy. The figures show that 54 percent of the men had lost their jobs through either retrenchment or shut-downs. For the sample as a whole, 47 percent had lost their jobs through circumstances beyond their control, while amongst the women this percentage was only 40 percent.

#### 4. THE NATURE OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT

##### 4.1 The Length of the Unemployment

At the time of the survey, 95 percent of the sample had completed work-seekers registration formalities. The length of time that they had been unemployed since registration varied between a few months and two years or more. Frequencies are shown in the Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Length of Time Unemployed

Months	In Category		Cumulative Percent
	Number	Percent	
1-6 months	58	40	40
7-12 months	37	26	66
13-18 months	19	13	79
19-24 months	20	14	93
25-30 months	5	4	97
31-36+ months	4	3	100
TOTAL	143	100	

Mean: 10

#### 4.2 Unemployment Insurance Claims

When asked whether they had received UIF after their last job, a negligible percentage (11%) answered in the affirmative. Although it was not specifically asked in the questionnaire, some respondents spontaneously offered explanations which helped to throw some further light on the reasons for this very low percentage;

- 
- a claim was made that many people do not know the procedure for claiming UIF, especially the time after termination of service. This varied between 3 weeks and 3 months according to various informants;
  - claiming from UIF was considered a waste of time by some because of the number of weeks (2-6) that one is without one's "blue book". The lack of the book, it was felt, could be prejudicial should a job come up while the book is being "sorted out" in Pretoria;
  - UIF was not seen as a significant benefit because it is calculated relative to the claimant's past 'annual' earnings and most of the informants claimed that they had been in employment for only short periods at a time;
  - a relatively large number of informants, such as the domestic workers and a few from South African Railways, claimed that they were not eligible for UIF anyway.

#### 4.3 Job Search Activities

Respondents were asked the ways in which they sought jobs, the types of jobs they sought and the salaries they expected from their targeted jobs. Figure 4.2.1 reflects the answers on the kinds of jobs they sought.

Figure 4.3.1 Kinds of Jobs Sought by Age and Sex

Sector	Total	Male	Female	18-30yrs	31-50yrs	51+yrs
	149	91	58	100	41	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Manufacturing	29	14	43	29	23	-
Construction	6	13	-	6	10	25
Domestic	20	3	36	12	24	25
Any job	30	49	10	37	24	50
Clerical	6	6	7	8	2	-
Driving	3	4	2	3	5	-
Security	2	2	2	1	2	-
Mechanics	4	9	-	4	10	-
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Three things emerge from these tables:

- (i) Economic sectors and economic positions are used interchangeably by the work seekers. Some were definite about positions they sought, e.g. 'driving, clerical', without due mention of the economic sector. Others thought in terms of the employing sector rather than of actual positions.
- (ii) As far as the women were concerned, in contrast with their former work status, where 62 percent were domestic workers, 64 percent sought work other than domestic work.
- (iii) The female subsample was on the whole more definite about the jobs they sought than their male counterparts, 49 percent of whom sought ANY JOB. This can be explained in a number of ways:-

One is that individuals who had worked before, especially unskilled labourers, mentioned sectors with which they were more familiar in terms of employment procedures and work operations, while the new and 'better' educated entrants thought in terms of positions first.

As regards the female subsample, it is probable that because of the limited scope for women in various economic sectors, they find no problem in choosing among a few that are open to them and positions are clear cut in those sectors. Further, education and age have a bearing on whether female workers will look to the industrial or domestic sector for employment whereas these two factors do not affect the scope of employment for males.

Further, it is possible that women generally can afford to be more selective about jobs because they are often not the main breadwinner in the family. Men, on the other hand, are constantly under pressure to find employment of whatever kind in order to provide for the needs of their families.

Physical strength, also, has a decisive influence as to suitability of a job between the sexes.

A closer look at the kinds of job sought and the expected salaries further illustrates this 'need versus reality' dichotomy that the unemployed have to face. Eighty four percent of those who sought domestic employment expected to earn between R60 - R100 regardless of the length of time they had been unemployed. The majority of men, regardless of their educational levels (46 percent of those who sought ANY JOB), expected salaries above R200. The sample mean was R222 and the median R200.

These figures are within realistic estimates relative to the market values (cf National Manpower estimates) and they suggest that although work-seekers have to contend with rising costs of living in the satisfaction of basic needs, they nevertheless keep their needs within the limits of what is actually being offered in the job market.

**Figure 4.3.2 Preferred Methods of Looking for a Job**

	Total	Male	Female	18-30yrs	31-50yrs	51+yrs
	149	91	58	100	41	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Labour bureau	21	18	24	14	32	50
Enquiries through friends and family	16	20	12	17	17	13
Visiting places of employment	57	52	62	61	48	37
Reading papers	6	10	2	8	3	-

Although all respondents were surveyed at the labour bureaux and the majority were registered work-seekers, 73 percent mentioned going directly to places of employment or making enquiries through friends and family as the most favoured methods of looking for a job, against only 21 percent who said they preferred the services of the labour bureau.

Though the above methods may be used simultaneously by a job seeker, each holds special advantages for any individual seeker.

The role of family and friends in helping the unemployed find work is highly regarded. Those who are employed and therefore in a position to monitor changes in the economic sector, usually know when vacancies occur in various departments, neighbouring companies or other sectors.

This information is then passed on to work-seekers through cross-referencing of attractions and faults of each. This is especially important in the domestic sector because of the widely acknowledged fact that domestic employers prefer to employ people who are recommended to them rather than total strangers.

On the other hand, labour bureaux are also acknowledged not only for the important role they play in the dissemination of job-related information but also for the power they command in controlling access to jobs through the permit system which among other things, regulates the availability of employment among holders of various types of permits. (Some respondents had indefinite permits; 30-day permits and others 14-day permits) all of which regulate the job searching activities of holders in particular ways.



## 5. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HARDSHIP

Towards the end of the interview session, respondents were asked what their worst fears were, regarding the future. This was intended to find out what economic hardships they encountered, what further hardships they foresaw and how they proposed to deal with these in the event of further unemployment. Figure 5.1 presents data which reflects fears as expressed by respondents.

**Figure 5.1 Fears Regarding the Future**

Expressed Fears	Total	Male *	Female	18-30 yrs	31-50 yrs	51+ yrs
	146	88	58	98	40	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
House will be closed	11	9	12	8	18	-
No school fees	24	25	24	15	40	75
Lose urban rights	3	5	2	3	5	-
No food and clothing	45	40	50	53	25	25
Repossession of goods	10	11	7	10	10	-
	100	100	100	100	100	100

\* 3 cases missing from male subsample

Inspection of Figure 5.1 shows that the most dreaded effects of unemployment are those seen as threatening, primarily the welfare of the family as a whole.

The fear that lurked uppermost in the respondents' minds was that of a lack of 'food and clothing'. This was mentioned by 45 percent of the sample. This fear permeated through all sex categories and was more vigorously expressed by respondents in the 18 - 30 years age category. Evidently, this disproves the generally held opinion that younger workers are less anxious about being unemployed because they have fewer family responsibilities. On the contrary, among the poor, social organisation based on the nuclear family and household is even more accentuated as a result of the need to adapt and survive in poverty. In this sense younger workers have a definite purpose for seeking employment in order to contribute their share to family needs. Prior evidence had revealed that 113 (76%) of the entire sample regarded buying of food as part of their family responsibility and therefore the inability to fulfill this responsibility became a source of grave apprehension.

The majority of older workers (44%) were, by contrast, more concerned with 'lack of school fees' for their children. This can be seen as an indirect expression of the fear of prolonged starvation and lack of basic necessities that would be perpetuated along the family line if their offspring be forced to leave school; and in consequence end up with inadequate education which would, in its turn, render them less employable like their parents before them.

Repossession of goods and inability to meet rent payments was mentioned by 10 percent and 11 percent of the sample respectively. Earlier, 68 percent of the respondents had mentioned that they were responsible for payment of rent in their households and a mean of R15,00 per month was spent on rent. Inability to pay rent presents a threat to a family or even an individual living in an urban area as it entails closure and evacuation from the house and the consequent displacement of individuals with far-reaching effects. The worst of these can be the break up of the family entity or the necessity for some members - who cannot be otherwise accommodated - to go back to the rural areas. In fact, this fear was verbally expressed by only 3 percent of the sample.

The rest (7%) mentioned matters of a personal nature such as marriage preparations and buying plots of land as the threatened aspects of their life. This too is obviously linked with making provision for family welfare. Taking into account the growing number of inhabitants in peri-urban areas, such as Inanda and Umbumbulu from which part of the sample came, it becomes apparent that preoccupation with buying of plots is closely related to ensuring continued residence in the urban area.

Interviewees had been asked what strategies they had considered to deal with unemployment. This was by far the most difficult question for the respondents to answer. The problem which faced the majority was that none could think of a fool-proof strategy which could alleviate their immediate felt needs or provide long term protection from the effects of unemployment.

Figure 5.2 displays the strategies considered to survive unemployment.

**Figure 5.2 Strategies for Survival**

Means	Total	Male	Female	18-30 yrs	31-50 yrs	51+ yrs
	141	85	56	93	40	8
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Apply for social aid	1	2	-	-	-	25
Put child into a job	7	1	14	2	13	25
Take piece (parttime) job	63	54	71	61	62	25
Keep looking for a job	12	19	5	15	10	25
Go back to school	6	7	5	10	-	-
Sell goods from house	7	8	5	6	10	-
Seek para-statal employ.	4	9	-	6	5	-
	100	100	100	100	100	100

An overview of the means of survival which were considered (Figure 5.2) reflects, at best, the last-resort nature of their options or, at worst, the helplessness with which they viewed their predicament. Almost all respondents could only think in terms of finding employment, if not for themselves, then for their children.

The majority of the sample (63%) had given serious thought to taking piece jobs or 'togt' labour. However, for this to be able to fulfill basic family requirements adequately, piece jobs would at least have

to be plentiful, if not well-paying. Judging by the scores of people waiting around for jobs at the labour bureau, one could see that even piece work jobs were scarce.

Another 12 percent thought that they would simply continue looking for a job as they were doing. These respondents did not make a pretence of expressing hopefulness about this, they simply alluded to diminishing capacity to view any other alternatives.

A further 4 percent considered looking for para-statal employment such as with S.A.P., S.A.R., S.A.D.F. or the mines. This was expressed by seven individuals who were quick to explain that, although they did not like these jobs (they considered them dangerous), they were better because government jobs, in general, are not liable to cyclical and other economic trends that usually result in redundancy.

A number of people (7%), the majority of whom were females (14%), had thought of withdrawing a child from school and entering him or her into the job market. However, it is likely that this would be a futile exercise, considering the number of young workers who were unemployed and the conditions young workers have to face in the job market. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the level to which many women (apparently widows and divorcees) felt the necessity to give this option serious consideration.

Only one individual who was past the age of 65 years was seriously considering applying for old age pension. The reason why he had not already done this was not explained.

The rest of the sample had considered other life support schemes like selling bare necessities such as candle sticks, paraffin, tea and sugar from their houses. Most of the younger ones had considered going back to school. All these considerations were dependent upon finding employment in the interim period.

## 6. PROFILE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG UNEMPLOYED AFRICANS SEEKING WORK THROUGH THE LABOUR BUREAUX

The question of unemployment is seen in this paper against a simple definition that "unemployment occurs when a person who is economically active is unable to find a job that he/she is prepared to take".

The profile of unemployment is thus being compiled against the impact of joblessness among individuals and its effect on their families and their quality of life.

The crucial point for understanding unemployment as found in the sample, is its unequal distribution across society. In essence, those most likely to be unemployed are those already in low paying and insecure jobs; those with least skills, living in depressed conditions and without political or economic power to change their circumstances.

Unemployment was found to be particularly high amongst young workers close to school leaving age; those without any qualification and others in the optimum working period of the life cycle - more than 25 but less than 50 years of age. It is highly undesirable that these youths be left to roam the streets at this vital stage in their lives, for, the accumulation of negative experiences about the job market may in the long run lead to resentment directed not only at specific employers who have rejected applications but also against employers in general. The price for such resentment will be paid by society at large in the form of increased crime and violence.

The short term effects of unemployment can be seen from the downward shift in career expectations and hopes of many young people as demonstrated by the number of respondents who were looking for ANY JOB. This may be borne from observable employment practices such as a constant demand for experience in situations in which young people have to compete on equal basis with older more experienced workers for what jobs there are; a reluctance by employers to pay younger workers full adult rates; and the fact that, in times of economic crises, the young are often the first to be made redundant.

In the long run, the quality of life for young people is diminished by the experience of prolonged unemployment or that of alternating between short-term, dead-end and stultifying jobs.

Unemployment was also found to be rife among women. Women have begun to form a considerable, although neglected part of the labour force. There are many reasons that have accelerated the break away from traditional roles that African women have played for so long. Some of them can be traced to the 'Land Reform Acts' and the extensive resettlement programmes that have indirectly affected the women's role in the traditional family setting, often leaving them without land to till from which to subsist. Today there is also the pressure of inflation on the already meagre household income. The growing number of single parent families, makes the earnings of women essential. Like everybody else, women suffer the effects of redundancies and closure



in those economic sectors employing a fairly high proportion of women. The intensity with which they bear the consequences of unemployment is dependent on the extent of their family responsibilities or on whether two or more members of the household are out of work.

With regard to older workers, it is what was not revealed in the study, rather than what was, that may well be the major cause for concern. The sample yielded only eight individuals or 5 percent of workers beyond the age of 50 years. This, however, should not be interpreted that members of this age group are contentedly employed nor as a sign of toleration and easy acceptance of unemployment. On the contrary, it is most likely to reflect the extent of the collapse of the confidence of workers in the older age groups in their ability to compete with younger, better educated workers in the job market and the loss of hope of ever finding a job again.

Sinfield points this out when he says:"...once older workers lose their jobs, they have very great difficulty in getting back to work.... the danger in these persons being unemployed for many months and years within the period of being economically active is that, they will be entering a stage of greater poverty long before their retirement rather than later and they are less likely to have had the opportunity to save in preparation for the eventual retirement.."1

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1. Sinfield, Adrian, What unemployment means.  
Oxford: Martin Robertson 1981 p. 77.

In this study as in the previous study by Charton,<sup>1</sup> the patterns of the work histories bring out very clearly the 'economically wasteful patterns' of the employment system. For the most part, unskilled workers tend to work in various fields, never staying long enough to acquire the techniques of the sector in which they work. Very little is spent on training, motivating or preparing them for their tasks; consequently, they are unable to transfer skills to new jobs to which they might go, their productivity remains low and employees feel justified in paying them low wages.

Job search activities brought to light that for the majority of the unemployed, there is no single 'right way' to look for work. The level of job search is dependent on the demand for workers in different occupations; on previous experience of finding work; on the differences among those seeking work and on the resources each individual can bring to bear on the activity of searching for a job.

The economic hardships suffered as a result of unemployment are enormous. They show themselves in the self-effacing attitudes towards job expectations and salaries, in the trap of having to borrow from friends or relatives without being able to pay back and also in having to buy essentials on credit or hire purchase with the risk of then being unable to pay and of consequently losing all your purchases.

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1. Charton, Nancy, *The Unemployed African*. Grahamstown: South African Institute of Race Relations 1969.

The inadequacy of the standard of living shows itself in the number of people who live under constant threat of hunger and lack of clothing and also in the number of people who have suspended essential elements like repairs on their houses or sending money home to relatives.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

If the inferences on the rate and effect of unemployment on the quality of life among Africans in the urban area, as cited above, are credible, measures to respond to the needs of all those categories of persons having difficulties in finding a lasting place in the labour market must be adopted in order to avert a social catastrophe.

These measures should include inter alia:-

- the provision of more extensive counselling and employment services to assist individuals to enter the labour market and to help them to find employment which corresponds more closely to their skills and aptitudes;
- the provision of more vocational guidance in schools to match the aspirations of school leavers more closely with their actual prospects in the job market;
- the provision of training programmes for the unemployed to assist the people to acquire a marketable skill.

In this respect, it is crucially important that measures are taken to create those types of jobs that can be fitted by those people presently out of work. It is useless, for example, to encourage the creation of high technology jobs in a situation where the major portion of work-seekers lack adequate formal education.

World wide experience has shown that job creation is a difficult task. However, in South Africa the projections of unemployment on present trends through to the year 2000 highlight how important it is in terms of numbers that this aspect is tackled, notwithstanding the difficulties.

This study highlights the social and economic problems faced by a relatively 'favoured' segment of the unemployed - those who are registered work-seekers with a legal right to search for a job in one of South Africa's major metropolitan regions. The study shows their problems clearly - the problems of the rest of the unemployed - by far the majority will be significantly greater. There is no doubt that, in terms of human hardship and suffering, South Africa's unemployment problem is considerably larger than even the rapidly rising numbers suggest.

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