

Investigating the Role of Unemployment on Relationship Breakdown Among the Unemployed Ghanaian Youth

Daitey William¹, Owusu Panin Kwame Baah², Takyi Eddy Mary³, Ahiabu Selasi⁴,
Bonsu Emmanuel⁵

Department of Product Design and Entrepreneurship, AsanSka University College of Design and
Technology, Ghana¹,

Department of Jewellery Design, AsanSka University College of Design and Technology, Ghana^{2,5},

Department of Fashion Design, AsanSka University College of Design and Technology, Ghana³,

Department of Digital Media and Communication Design, AsanSka University College of Design
and Technology, Ghana⁴

E-mail: daiteywilliam@gmail.com¹, kwame.panin@aucdt.edu.gh², maryeddytakyi@gmail.com³,
ahiabuselasi09@gmail.com⁴, nyrogyniusempire7@gmail.com⁵

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between unemployment and relationship breakdown among youth in Ghana. Unemployment among youth has become a pressing issue globally, particularly in developing countries like Ghana. The objective is to investigate how the experience of unemployment influences relationship stability among young adults. The study employs qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus groups to gather data from unemployed youth in various regions of Ghana. Factors such as financial stress, decreased self-esteem, and the strain on interpersonal relationships due to unemployment were some of the perceptions by the unemployed youth in Ghana. The findings aim to contribute to a better understanding of the social impacts of unemployment and provide insights into potential interventions to support youth navigating these challenges in Ghanaian society.

Keywords | *breakdown, Ghana, relationship, social impact, unemployment, youth.*

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment among youth is a critical issue affecting many developing countries, including Ghana. The consequences of youth unemployment extend beyond economic challenges, often permeating into various aspects of individuals' lives, including their relationships asserted by Ampong (2020). In Ghana, where a significant portion of the population comprises youth, the impact of unemployment on relationship stability is a pertinent area of study (Amissah & Nyarko, 2017). The phenomenon of unemployment can be particularly distressing for young adults as they navigate the transition from education to the workforce (Baah-Boateng, 2013). In addition to the financial strain and loss of livelihood, unemployment can have profound social and psychological implications, potentially leading to relationship breakdowns (Ajayi, 1979).

According to Citinewsroom (2024), the country's average unemployed rate increased to 14.7 percent in the first three quarters of 2023. During the same time period, the number of unemployed adolescents aged 15 to 35 increased from around 1.2 million to more than 1.3 million, with females constantly outnumbering males. This is based on data from the Ghana Statistical Service's Annual Household Income and Expenditure Survey Quarter Three Labour Bulletin. According to the poll, the number of young people without work in 2022 decreased only in the second quarter of last year. The substantial increase in female



unemployment rates between the fourth quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023 resulted in a larger unemployment gender gap in 2023 compared to 2022. Between 2023 Q1 and 2023 Q3, over 440,000 people entered the labour force, with more than 60 percent of them finding work (Citinewsroom, 2024). Historically, more females than men have been employed, with the difference averaging around 600,000 and 900,000 for 2022 and 2023, respectively (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Unemployment Rate by Sex, 2022 Q1 to 2023 Q3

Source: <https://citinewsroom.com>

Previous studies were delved into by researchers: Morell et al. (1994) highlight some evidence of psychological adaptation to unemployment in Australia, the study highlights unemployment as a significant cause of psychological disturbance in young people who are initially unemployed, suffering physical ill-health, and psychologically not normal. Also, O'higgins (2001) study takes an in-depth look at the "problem" of youth unemployment and explores different policy responses to it, including education and active labor market policies. The study emphasizes the need for adequate labour market information, policy monitoring and program evaluation to provide more and better-quality jobs for young people, while providing specific recommendations and guidelines for this age group in industrialized, transition and developing countries.

This study focuses on understanding the causes and consequences of relationship breakdowns among unemployed youth in Ghana. By examining this intersection, we aim to shed light on the complex dynamics between unemployment and relationship stability, providing insights that can inform policies and interventions to support youth in similar contexts. The research will delve into the experiences of unemployed youth, exploring the challenges they face and the ways in which these challenges impact their relationships. Key factors such as financial stress, emotional strain, and shifts in self-esteem will be investigated to uncover how these contribute to relationship breakdowns. Ultimately, this study seeks to

contribute valuable insights into the social consequences of youth unemployment in Ghana and to offer recommendations that can assist in mitigating its adverse effects on relationships and overall well-being. Through a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, we aim to contribute to broader discussions on youth empowerment and social development in Ghana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic Strain Theory (EST)

The study focuses on the Economic Strain Theory (EST). According to Stack and Wasserman (2007), Economic Strain Theory is a valuable sociological framework that can shed light on the relationship between unemployment and relationship breakdown among youth in Ghana. This theory posits that economic stress and financial hardship experienced by individuals can significantly impact their well-being, social interactions, and relationships (Conger et al., 1994). In the context of youth unemployment in Ghana, Economic Strain Theory provides a lens through which to examine the repercussions of economic challenges on interpersonal relationships. According to Ayesu (2011), Economic Strain Theory offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between unemployment and relationship breakdown among youth in Ghana. By applying this theory, researchers can uncover the complex impacts of economic challenges on interpersonal relationships and inform evidence-based interventions to support youth facing unemployment in maintaining healthier and more resilient relationships. This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of addressing economic strain as a social determinant of relationship outcomes, emphasizing the interconnectedness between economic well-being and relational dynamics in the lives of Ghanaian youth.

Unemployment among the Youth

According to Inanc (2020), youth unemployment is a global problem affecting many countries around the world. This is a complex issue influenced by many factors. One important factor is the state of the world economy. When the economy struggles, companies may reduce their workforce or freeze hiring, making it harder for young people to find work. Another challenge is the lack of skills and experience of young people. As industry evolves and technology advances, the demand for specialized skills increases (Olubusoye et al., 2023). However, many young people struggle to acquire these skills or gain the necessary work experience, making it difficult for them to compete in the labor market. The education system also plays a role in youth unemployment. In some cases, the education system may not meet the needs of the labor market, leaving young people ill-prepared for the demands of the modern workplace (Kang, 2021).

Also, Fakhri et al. (2020) assert that demographic factors also affect youth unemployment. The number of young people is growing worldwide, which increases the number of job seekers. However, the number of job opportunities offered may not keep up with this growth, creating an imbalance between demand and supply. Inequality and discrimination can make the problem worse. Certain groups may face barriers and prejudices that limit their access to employment opportunities, such as gender, ethnicity, social



background or disability. Technological development has also affected the labor market. Automation and digitization have led to job losses in some sectors, affecting young people who may have sought employment in those sectors (Alfonsi et al., 2020).

Relationship Breakdowns

Rutter (2022) opines that relationship breakdowns can be incredibly challenging and emotionally difficult for everyone involved. Whether it's a romantic relationship, a friendship, or a family relationship, the end of a connection can bring about feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion. There are various reasons why relationships break down. Also, Montserrat et al. (2020) emphasizes that communication issues, lack of trust, incompatible values or goals, and unresolved conflicts are some common factors that can contribute to the deterioration of a relationship. Sometimes, external factors such as distance, changes in circumstances, or differing life paths can also strain a relationship (Simpson, 2020).

Peel & Caltabiano (2021) arguably show that when a relationship breaks down, it's important to prioritize self-care and emotional well-being. In some cases, it may be possible to repair the relationship through open and honest communication, forgiveness, and a willingness to work through the issues together. Also, McGee (2020) also supports the view that it is important to recognize when a relationship may no longer be healthy or fulfilling, and to make decisions that prioritize your own well-being. While relationship breakdowns can be painful, they can also provide an opportunity for personal growth and the chance to find new connections that are more aligned with your values and goals.

METHOD

The approach to the study was qualitative research which helps to gain in-depth insights into the experiences of unemployed youth and their relationships. According to Brown (2019), qualitative research is a method of inquiry used to gain an understanding of people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, or behaviors. It focuses on gathering and analyzing non-numerical data, such as words, observations, or images, to explore and describe complex phenomena (Gornall, 2011). Additionally, the study uses exploratory study to understand the complexities of the phenomenon and identify underlying factors.

Target Population

The Target Population for the study was the unemployed youth in Ghana: it focuses on unemployed youth between the ages of 18-40 who are currently in or have experienced relationship breakdowns in the Kumasi Metropolis (Adum, Tech-Junction, Oforikrom).

Sampling

The study further used the purposive sampling to select participants who can provide rich and diverse perspectives on the topic. Campbell et al. (2020) opine that, purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting participants who meet specific criteria, aiming to include individuals with certain characteristics relevant to the research. The study shows the

distribution of accessible population for the study with assertion of sample size of 30% by Cohen and Manion (1985).

Table Distribution of Accessible and Sampled Population for The Study

Population of the study	Accessible population	Sample size 30%
Adum	45	15
Tech-Junction	30	10
Oforikrom	45	15
Total:	120	40

Source: Fieldwork by researchers (2024)

Data Collection Tools

In-depth Interviews such as the semi-structured interviews was employed with participants to explore their experiences of unemployment and how it impacts their relationships. Focus Group Discussions was organized with selected participants to facilitate group interactions and capture shared experiences and perceptions.

Ethical Consideration and Data Analysis Plan

Every ethical consideration related to research, including authorized consent, risk exposure, and anonymity, was carefully followed. Subjects must have been fully informed about the study and the advantages of participating in order to give their informed consent. All of the respondents were informed by the research that this was only a survey and that taking part in it would not put them in danger on a social, emotional, or bodily level. Face-to-face interviews were conducted and audio recordings were made. Every class that was observed had its voice recorded, and field notes were regularly taken for thematic analysis (Joffe, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Causes of Unemployment on Relationship Breakdown among the Youth in Ghana

Lack of Job Opportunities

One of the main causes of youth unemployment in Ghana is the limited availability of job opportunities. The demand for jobs often exceeds the supply, leaving many young people without employment opportunities. This can lead to frustration as people struggle to find stable and rewarding work that can support themselves and their relationships.

Skill Mismatch

Another important factor is the mismatch between young people's skills and labor market requirements. Many young people may not have the necessary skills or qualifications



for the job opportunities available. Lack of skills can lead to high unemployment rates and hinder the stability of relationships, as people may feel inadequate or insecure about their future prospects.

Economic Factors

Economic challenges and fluctuations can also contribute to youth unemployment and relationship breakdown in Ghana. Limited economic growth, high inflation and a lack of investment in certain sectors can lead to labor market stagnation, making it difficult for young people to find suitable work. Financial instability can strain relationships as couples may struggle to meet their financial obligations and desires.

Social and Cultural Factors

Social and cultural factors can also influence youth unemployment and relationship breakdown. Traditional gender roles and expectations can limit opportunities for certain individuals, especially women, leading to lower employment rates and strained interpersonal relationships. In addition, the social pressures and stigmas associated with unemployment can affect people's self-esteem and self-confidence, which affects their relationships.

Education and Training

Inadequate access to quality education and vocational training programs can increase youth unemployment. Without the necessary skills and qualifications, young people may struggle to find suitable work. This lack of educational opportunities can hinder the stability of relationships, as people may struggle to support themselves and their partners.

Financial Stress and Relationship Strain

Participants consistently highlighted financial stress as a major contributor to relationship breakdowns. The inability to contribute financially to the household or meet social expectations placed strain on relationships, leading to conflicts and misunderstandings. One participant remarked, "I couldn't afford to take care of my partner or contribute to household expenses, and this created tension between us." Another participant made an assertion that, his four years-built relationship broke-down because of the above issue. He said his fiancée asked him amidst their unstable relation 'for how long have you not been working? He replied "two years", his fiancée replied said "I am tired". This brought their four years relationship to a closed.

Loss of Self-esteem and Identity

Unemployment often led to a loss of self-esteem and identity among youth, impacting their confidence and sense of worth within relationships. Participants expressed feelings of inadequacy and shame, which affected their interactions with partners. "I felt worthless and less of a man because I couldn't provide for my family. It affected how I saw myself and how my partner saw me," shared one participant.

Emotional Strain and Communication Breakdown

The emotional toll of unemployment contributed to communication breakdowns and emotional distance in relationships. Participants described feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and depression, which made it challenging to communicate openly with their partners. "I withdrew into myself and stopped sharing my feelings with my partner. It created a barrier between us," explained another participant.

Shift in Power Dynamics

Unemployment often led to a shift in power dynamics within relationships, especially if one partner was employed while the other was not. This imbalance sometimes resulted in feelings of resentment or dependency, impacting the overall relationship dynamic. "My partner started to treat me differently, like I was less important because I wasn't bringing in money," noted a participant.

Impact on Family and Social Support

The lack of employment affected participants' ability to provide for their families and access social support networks. This added pressure strained relationships with extended family members and friends, further exacerbating feelings of isolation and vulnerability.

CONCLUSION

The study showed the connection between youth unemployment and relationship dissolution in Ghana. Youth unemployment has emerged as a major global concern, especially in emerging nations like Ghana. The findings of this study underscore the need for targeted interventions to support unemployed youth and mitigate the impact of unemployment on relationships in Ghana. Policy makers and stakeholders should consider the following recommendations. Employment programs and skill Development where there is investment in vocational training and job creation programs tailored to the needs of youth, equipping them with market-relevant skills and opportunities for employment. Social Support Services for individuals with establishment of counseling and mental health support services specifically designed for unemployed youth, addressing emotional well-being and relationship issues.

Financial literacy and entrepreneurship for promoting entrepreneurship initiatives among the youth and empower them economically and foster resilience in times of unemployment. Community engagement and awareness to foster community engagement and awareness campaigns to reduce stigma associated with unemployment and promote inclusive social support systems. In conclusion, unemployment significantly impacts relationship stability among youth in Ghana, highlighting the interconnectedness of economic and social factors. By addressing the underlying causes and consequences of unemployment, stakeholders can work towards enhancing the well-being of youth and fostering healthier relationships within the community.



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