Chapter 7

Youth in the time of a global pandemic: An analysis of recent data on young people's experiences during COVID-19

Gibson Mudiriza, Ariane De Lannoy, and Youth Capital

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe and potentially long-lasting effects on the lives of many across the globe. Young people have been disproportionately affected (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2020). This is worrying because many young people were already in dire situations before the pandemic. In South Africa, more than 7 million (42 per cent) youth (18–35 years old) were already living in income poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2018), 4.6 million were unemployed, and close to 10 million (52 per cent) were not in employment, education or training (NEET) before the pandemic (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Many therefore already found themselves in a state of what Honwana (2014) calls 'waithood' – a hybrid term comprising 'wait' and 'adulthood' – unable to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to successfully transition from childhood to an aspired, independent adulthood.

South Africa's lockdown measures, aimed at slowing the spread of the virus have caused further disruption to education and training, job and income losses, reduced employment prospects, and greater obstacles to work-seeking for youth. Attempts to remedy the situation and to provide support to young people requires a thorough understanding of the specific impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their lives, alongside engagement with the policy environment.

This chapter therefore explores the pandemic's impact on the lives of youth (18–35 years old) in South Africa, especially in terms of labour market and mental health outcomes, using recent, nationally representative survey data. Specifically, the chapter uses the National Income Dynamics Survey (NIDS) Wave 5 and the National Income Dynamics Survey-Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) Wave

1 and 2 data (see Ingle et al., 2020), and explores how labour market and mental health outcomes of young people changed in the periods before and during the COVID-19-related lockdown. In addition, we draw on the programmatic experience of Youth Capital – a national, youth-led campaign focused on youth unemployment – to reflect on the findings of this survey analysis, and on the current policy context. Based on the above, the chapter provides recommendations for better supporting youth during and beyond this period of increased vulnerability.

Our findings reflect that COVID-19 has exacerbated the plight of youth in South Africa, particularly those who were already vulnerable prior to the pandemic. Young people – especially those who are African/black or coloured, female, have low levels of education, and live in rural areas – have been hardest hit by the economic impact of the lockdown. The government hopes to inoculate 40 million people – the number needed to achieve population immunity – by the end of 2021 (Ministry of Health, 2021), but there are concerns that this is unlikely to materialise (Madhi, 2021).

Thus, the possibility of recurring waves of infections and stricter lockdown measures exists, which would further impact upon young people. Moreover, they will bear the long-term socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. We therefore argue that young people should be a central focus in the country's economic recovery plans. It is imperative that youth are supported in their progression through the education system and in their transition from education onto pathways to sustainable livelihoods – in short, to become thriving adults.

Literature on the impact of COVID-19 on young people

Globally, the impact of the pandemic on youth has been so severe that there have been warnings of the emergence of a 'lockdown generation' (International Labour Organisation, 2020a). To contain the spread of the virus in South Africa, the government implemented a strict, nationwide lockdown in the first half of 2020. During this level 5 lockdown, everyone but essential workers was restricted from leaving their home except to buy food and medicine (Dlamini-Zuma, 2020). The lockdown measures abruptly changed young people's family and social lives. While the virus itself threatened the health and survival of youth and their families, lockdown caused the physical separation of youths from their peers and loved ones, as schools and businesses closed, and non-essential movement and social engagements were prohibited.

As businesses closed down, approximately 3 million workers (18 per cent) lost their jobs between February (pre-lockdown) and April (level 5 lockdown) 2020 (Casale and Posel, 2020). Evidence shows a disproportionate concentration of job losses among already disadvantaged groups in the labour market (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2021; Jain et al., 2020). Youth, (18–35 years old) accounted for just over half of the 3 million job losses. These losses translate into income losses, which is particularly devastating in a country like South Africa where, even before the pandemic, over 40 per cent of young people were living in poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Similar trends have been noted internationally (Lemieux et al., 2020; Adams-Prassl et al., 2020).

Studies further show that the pandemic triggered severe mental health problems during the lockdown (Oyenubi and Kollamparambil, 2020, 2021; Mudiriza and De Lannoy, 2020). Of these studies, Oyenubi and Kollamparambil (2020) found age, gender, race, education, household hunger status, employment status and location to be key factors associated with depressive symptoms. Further, Mudiriza and De Lannoy (2020) found evidence of a significantly high prevalence of symptoms of depression (72 per cent) during lockdown, among a sample of young people (18–35 years old). The study showed that the prevalence of depressive symptoms was unevenly distributed across youths, with higher rates among participants who were older, female, had higher education, and lived in urban informal areas.

Data and measurements

Data

This study draws mainly on data from NIDS, Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM, Waves 1 and 2 (Ingle et al., 2020). NIDS is a nationally representative dataset that has been collected every two years since 2008, with the fifth wave collected in 2017. NIDS-CRAM is a nationally representative survey based on the NIDS Wave 5 sampling frame, limited to those aged 18 years and older at the time of the survey. NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 was conducted between 7 May and 27 June 2020, while Wave 2 was conducted between 13 July and 13 August 2020. While NIDS Wave 5 was collected through face-to-face interviews, NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2 were collected through telephonic interviews due to lockdown regulations.

Apart from general demographic information (age, gender, race and education), these surveys also collected information on income, employment status, occupation, household welfare and mental health

during the pandemic. We limit our analysis to young people aged 18–35 years. Table A1 in the appendix shows the descriptive statistics of the youth sample from NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2.[1]

Measurements

The measurements central to our analysis are labour market and mental health outcomes. We use NIDS-CRAM waves 1 and 2 to derive labour market outcomes for young workers between February (i.e. pre-COVID-19-lockdown), April (level 5 lockdown) and June (level 3 lockdown).[2] We do this to assess the impacts of the various stages of the lockdown on young people's labour market outcomes. Our analysis focuses on the following outcomes: unemployment rate, employment-to-population ratio, and employment loss and gain across different groups of youth.[3]

We also use 2017 NIDS, wave 5 and 2020 NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2 to derive a measure of youth mental health for a pre-COVID-19-lockdown period (2017) and then during-COVID-19-lockdown period (June 2020).[4] To capture mental health, NIDS, Wave 5 relies on the 10-item Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD-10) (Radloff, 1977), while NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2 uses a 2-item version of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) (Kroenke et al., 2003). The CESD-10 and the PHQ-2 scales are self-reported screening instruments for capturing depressive symptoms in the general population, with a score ranging from 0 to 30 for the CESD-10 scale and 0 to 6 for the PHQ-2 scale. Higher scores scales indicate higher levels of depressive symptoms.

While the CESD-10 and PHQ-2 scales are not directly comparable, we follow existing literature and create a binary depressive symptom indicator based on the two instruments to ensure comparability between the surveys (see Oyenubi and Kollamparambil, 2020). We use a cut-off score of ≥ 12 for the CESD-10 scale, which was identified as optimal for South Africa (Baron et al., 2017); for the PHQ-2 scale, we use a cut-off score of ≥ 3, as recommended by Kroenke et al. (2003).[5]

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's experiences

To ensure that our estimates are nationally representative for a sample of youth in South Africa, all our results are weighted using the post-stratified weights provided in the surveys. We use the survey information in its cross-sectional form, which implies that results are representative of the youth

population in the country at a single period in time; the temporal aspects of a specific individual are not considered.

How has the youth labour market changed pre and during COVID-19 lockdown?

A first impression of the impact of the COVID-19-related lockdown on youth labour market outcomes is provided in Table 1. It presents the unemployment rates (narrow and broad rate)[6] for the overall sample and for various youth subgroups during the initial level 5 lockdown period in April and during level 3 lockdown in June. Our results show that for the overall sample, the narrow unemployment rate increased from 30.2 per cent in April to 34.3 per cent in June; the broad unemployment rate increased from 43.8 per cent to 50.1 per cent during the same period. Compared to youth, the adult narrow unemployment rate also increased by 4.1 percentage points, while broad unemployment increased by 3.4 percentage points during the same period. While the lockdown led to an increase in unemployment for both youths and adults in 2020, youth unemployment rates were significantly higher, with the narrow rate twice that of adults. Further, the broad unemployment rate increased substantially more for youth than for adults. The much larger increase in the broad unemployment rate for youth reflects, in part, that more youth became discouraged job-seekers and gave up looking for work. The increase might also be explained by the fact that the unemployed knew that most companies were closed due to lockdown restrictions and therefore stopped looking for employment.

Table 1: Unemployment rate by sub-groups in April 2020 and June 2020

		April		June	
		Narrow	Broad	Narrow	Broad
	Adults (+36 years old)	14.7	31.8	18.8	35.2
	Youths (18–35 years old)	30.2	43.8	34.3	50.1
Age	18–24 years old	41.3	44.2	48.0	64.1
	25–29 years old	31.6	50.3	31.6	42.9
	30–35 years old	20.5	37.1	26.0	44.1
Gender	Male	23.6	43.5	28.4	41.8
	Female	38.0	44.0	41.0	58.4
Race	African/Black	31.1	40.9	36.9	53.2

	Coloured	36.0	71.0	29.2	45.8
	Asian/Indian	46.0	76.4	29.7	31.7
	White	1.5	21.8	8.2	11.4
Education	Less than matric	32.4	38.5	38.8	57.4
	Matric	36.8	44.2	36.6	53.6
	Higher than matric	22.6	54.0	27.8	38.0
Location	Rural	30.3	40.1	42.1	59.4
	Urban	30.1	44.6	32.3	47.5

Source: Author's calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2 data.

The growth in youth unemployment during lockdown is evident across different youth groups. Overall, unemployment was higher among young workers who were already vulnerable in the labour market before COVID-19 struck. Among them are younger youths (18–24 years old); female youths; African/black youths; youths with lower education levels and youths in rural areas. Our results are consistent with national and international evidence (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2021; Adams-Prassl et al., 2020).

Table 2 presents information about changes in youth employment (employment to population ratio) between three different periods: pre-lockdown period in February, level 5 lockdown in April and level 3 lockdown in June. Our results show that the proportion of employed youth decreased from 50.2 per cent in February to 41.7 per cent in April, to 41.2 per cent in June. At the same time, the proportion of employed adults decreased from 64.4 per cent in February to 55.2 per cent in April, before increasing slightly to 57.5 per cent in June. Thus, between February and June, the proportion of employed youths decreased by 9 percentage points, while that of adults decreased by 6.9 percentage points. This suggests that around 1.5 million youths – compared to about 1.2 million adults – lost their jobs between February and June. Furthermore, young people continued to lose their jobs even after the easing of lockdown regulations from level 5 to level 3, while employment levels for adults started to recover. Higher job losses were registered among younger youths (18–24 years old), youths in rural areas, and youths with lower (less than matric) education.[7]

Table 2: Percentage of employed by population sub-group

		February 2020		April 2020		June 2020	
		Number employed	%	Number employed	%	Number employed	%
	Adults (+36 years old)	9,343,975	64.4	8,007,161	55.2	8,121,268	57.5
	Youths (18–35 years old)	8,136,704	50.2	6,754,167	41.7	6,652,147	41.2
Age group	18–24 years old	1,959,228	32.2	1,653,321	27.2	153,569	25.0
	25–29 years old	2,555,592	55.5	2,120,760	46.1	2,308,461	50.5
	30–35 years old	3,621,883	65.5	2,980,086	53.9	2,807,818	51.8
Gender	Male	4,495,373	57.1	4,011,857	50.9	386,5077	49.3
	Female	3,641,330	43.7	2,742,311	32.9	2,787,070	33.6
Race	African/Black	6,661,728	48.1	5,428,579	39.2	5,245,052	38.1
	Coloured	800,874	60.2	655,153	49.2	662,092	50
	Asian/Indian	136,520	44.4	106,587	34.7	185,857	55.2
	White	537,581	76.0	563,847	79.7	559,146	78.2
Education	Less than matric	2,809,942	44.9	2,283,971	36.5	2,116,979	34.1
	Matric	2,423,093	46.8	1,818,486	35.1	1,932,971	38.1
	Higher than matric	2,866,846	60.7	2,619,767	55.5	2,578,004	53.7
Location	Rural	1,393,354	45.5	1,185,080	38.7	1,305,336	32.7
	Urban	6,742,212	51.4	5,567,949	42.4	5,127,313	43.9

Source: Authors' own calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 and 2 data.

Note: The proportions in the table are obtained by dividing the number of employed youths by the youth population in a given period.

Internationally, evidence suggests that during major economic crises workers in precarious jobs with little or no security tend to lose their jobs first, and that many of those workers are youth (see Hašková and Dudová 2017). Our analysis too shows that younger workers faced disproportionate job losses, in part because of their concentration in precarious jobs and occupations hardest hit by the lockdown restrictions. Of those youth who were employed in April and went on to lose their jobs in June, 53.7 per cent were employed in elementary occupations (21.1 per cent), service and sales work (19.8 per cent), and craft and related trades (12.8 per cent).

Among those who were employed were a group of young workers referred to as furloughed: these are workers who were temporarily placed on leave, who reported zero working hours and who reported zero earnings during the lockdown (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2021). The employment figures in Table 2 include employed people who did not work or earn an income during lockdown. Table 3, however, presents results for changes in employment (employment to population ratio), excluding furloughed workers in April (level 5 lockdown) and June (level 3 lockdown).

The results show a significant decrease in employment between February and June for the overall youth sample as well as for various youth sub-groups. The proportion of employed youth decreased by 18 percentage points, from 50 per cent in February to 32 per cent in April. With the easing of lockdown regulations, youth employment increased by 5 percentage points. Across different youth sub-groups, between February and April, employment decreased significantly among youths aged 30–35 years and youths with a matric level of education, while between April and June, employment increased substantially among Asian/Indian youths, youths with matric level of education and youths aged 25–29 years (9 percentage points). The increase in employment between April and June suggests that the easing of lockdown regulations allowed some furloughed youth to return to work.[8] However, despite this increase, employment rates in June were still far below the February rates.

Overall, between February and June, youth employment decreased by 13 percentage points; across the different youth groups, employment decreased significantly among youths aged 30–35 years, youths with less than a matric level of education, youths in rural areas, African/black youths and female youths.[9] These results highlight the importance of providing income protection to those who are already vulnerable to unemployment or low wage employment in the country.

Table 3: Percentage of employed by population sub-group

		February 2020		April 2020		June 2020	
		Total numbers	%	Total numbers	%	Total numbers	%
	Youths (18–35 years)	8,136,704	50.2	5,158,865	31.8	5,99,2609	37.1
Age group	18–24 years old	1,959,228	32.2	1,249,937	20.6	1,406,360	22.9
	25–29 years old	2,555,592	55.5	1,676,534	36.4	2,085,187	45.6
	30–35 years old	3,621,883	65.5	2,232,393	40.4	2,501,062	46.2
Gender	Male	4,495,373	57.1	3,068,512	38.9	3,509,053	44.8
	Female	3,641,330	43.7	2,090,353	25.1	2,483,556	29.9
Race	African/Black	6,661,728	48.1	4,015,420	29.0	4,605,965	33.5
	Coloured	800,874	60.2	529,336	39.8	641,642	48.5
	Asian/Indian	136,520	44.4	87,958	28.6	185,857	55.2
	White	537,581	76.0	526,151	74.4	559,146	78.2
Education	Less than matric	2,809,942	44.9	1,800,121	28.8	1,874,717	30.2
	Matric	2,423,093	46.8	1,309,937	25.3	1,760,061	34.7
	Higher than matric	2,866,846	60.7	2,016,862	42.7	2,333,637	48.6
Location	Rural	1,393,354	45.5	844,167	27.6	1,121,153	28.1
	Urban	6,742,212	51.4	4,313,560	32.9	4,671,662	40.0

Source: Authors' own calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2 data.

Table 4 presents labour market transitions between February and June 2020:[10] very few youths managed to move from unemployment to employment during the different transitions, while many became unemployed. This highlights the challenges young people face in the labour market, and the effects of national lockdown. For example, of those youths who were unemployed in February, only 14 per cent were employed in June, while 34 per cent of those employed in February were no longer employed in June; this figure increases to 40 per cent if we include furloughed workers. The labour market transitions experienced by young workers between February and June point to a high degree of churning and instability in the South African labour market, vulnerabilities that existed pre-lockdown (Kerr, 2018). Evidence has long indicated that many youth experience a constant churning between job searches, finding short-term work and then returning to unemployment, or accessing short-term training and then returning to being NEET i.e. not in education, employment or training (Baldry et al., 2019).

Table 4: Youth labour market transitions between February 2020 and June 2020

Note: The transition dates – February, April and June 2020 – correspond to the information about the labour market collected in Waves 1 and 2. Wave 1 asked respondents about their employment status in February and April 2020, while Wave 2 asked respondents about their employment status in June 2020.

February to April 2020

		April 2020			
		Not employed(%)	Employed (%)	Furloughed (%)	Total
February 2020	Not employed (%)	88.1	6.5	5.4	100
	Employed (%)	28.9	56.9	14.2	100

April to June 2020

		June 2020			
		Not employed(%)	Employed (%)	Furloughed (%)	Total
April 2020	Not employed (%)	83.4	13.3	3.2	100
	Employed (%)	23.9	72.6	3.5	100
	Furloughed (%)	23.0	66.1	11.0	100

February to June 2020

		June 2020			
		Not employed(%)	Employed (%)	Furloughed (%)	Total
February 2020	Not employed (%)	83.6	14.3	2.0	100
	Employed (%)	34.1	59.8	6.1	100

Source: Author's own calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2 data.

Figure 1 presents the employment transitions between February and June. It shows that employment losses and gains varied significantly across different youth groups. While employment losses were generally high among those aged 18–24 years, those with less than matric and those residing in rural areas, employment gains were relatively higher among Asian/Indian, white and male youths. Within groups, female youths were 5 percentage points more likely to lose employment compared to male

youths; male youths were more than twice as likely to gain employment compared to female youths. African/black youths were 29 percentage points more like to lose employment compared to white youths, while white youths were 19 percentage points more likely to gain employment than African/black youths. Across education levels, the probability of employment loss was significantly higher among youths with less than matric compared to youths with more than matric (46 per cent vs 23 per cent).

Overall, the analysis shows that youth unemployment rates were high and increased even more despite the gradual lifting of lockdown measures. The results further show that very few youths managed to move from being unemployed to being employed during the different transitions, while many became unemployed. The registered employment losses were disproportionately concentrated among young workers who were already vulnerable pre-COVID-19, including relatively younger youths (18–24 years old), female youths, African/black youths, youths with less education and youths in rural areas. These youths were both less likely to gain employment and more likely to lose employment during the lockdown. Our findings are consistent with results from other national and international studies that revealed that those already vulnerable pre-COVID-19 suffered disproportionately higher rates of job losses during lockdown (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2021; Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). Thus, existing high levels in South Africa of deprivation, poverty, inequality, hunger and food insecurity among young people and their households are likely to remain.

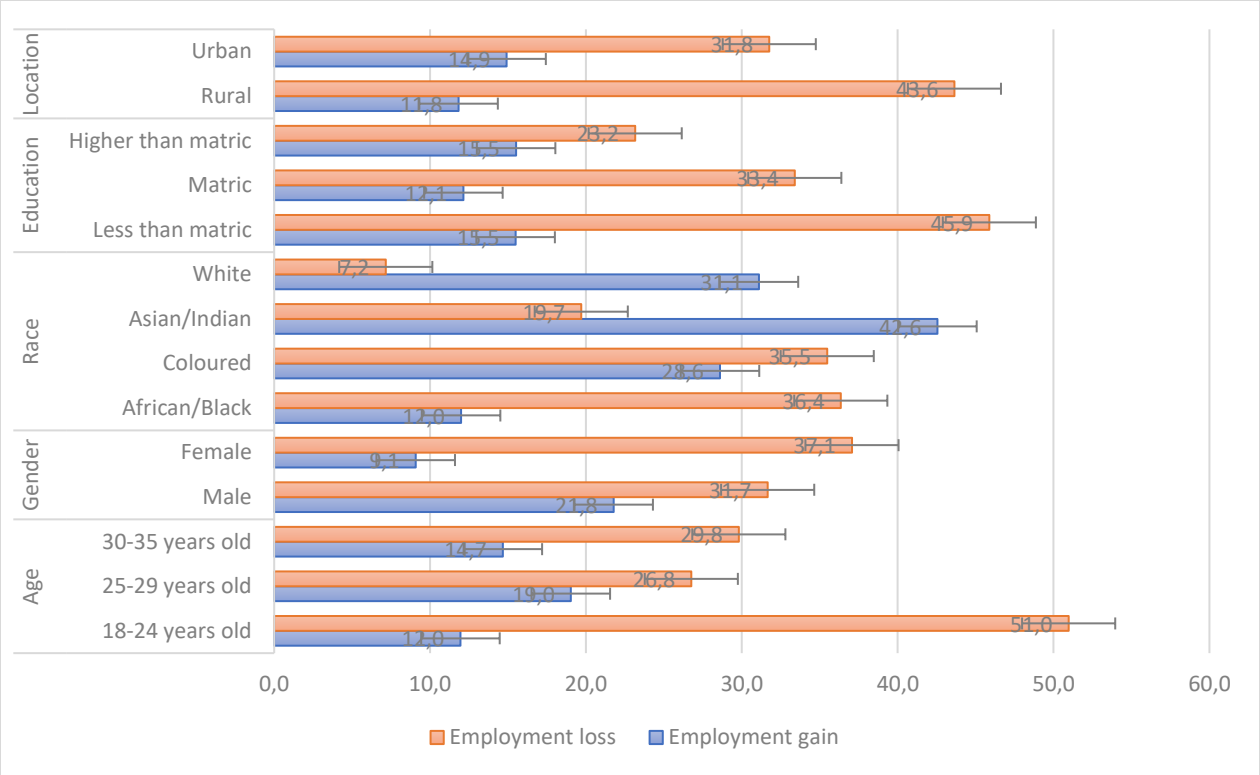

Figure 1: Employment loss and gain between February and June by population sub-group

Source: Author's own calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2 data.

Notes: These proportions are based on the alternative definition of employment that excludes furloughed workers.

How has youth mental health changed prior to and during COVID-19 lockdown?

For initial insights into the impact of the COVID-19 related lockdown on young people's mental health, we compare the prevalence of depressive symptoms among young people in 2017 NIDS, Wave 5 and 2020 NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2. Using a cut-off score of ≥ 12 for CESD-10 scale and of ≥ 3 for PHQ-2 scale, the prevalence of depressive symptoms among youths and adults in 2017 and 2020 are reported in Figure 2. Prevalence increased from 12.8 per cent of youths in 2017 to 23.4 per cent in 2020, while it increased from 15.6 per cent of adults in 2017 to 24.9 per cent in 2020. A sensitivity check of the prevalence of depressive symptoms using relatively lower cut-off scores of ≥ 10 for CESD-10 scale and of ≥ 2 for PHQ-2 scale, revealed a prevalence of 21.9 per cent in 2017 and 38.1 per cent in 2020 for youths and for adults, 27.0 per cent in 2017 and 37.9 per cent in 2020.

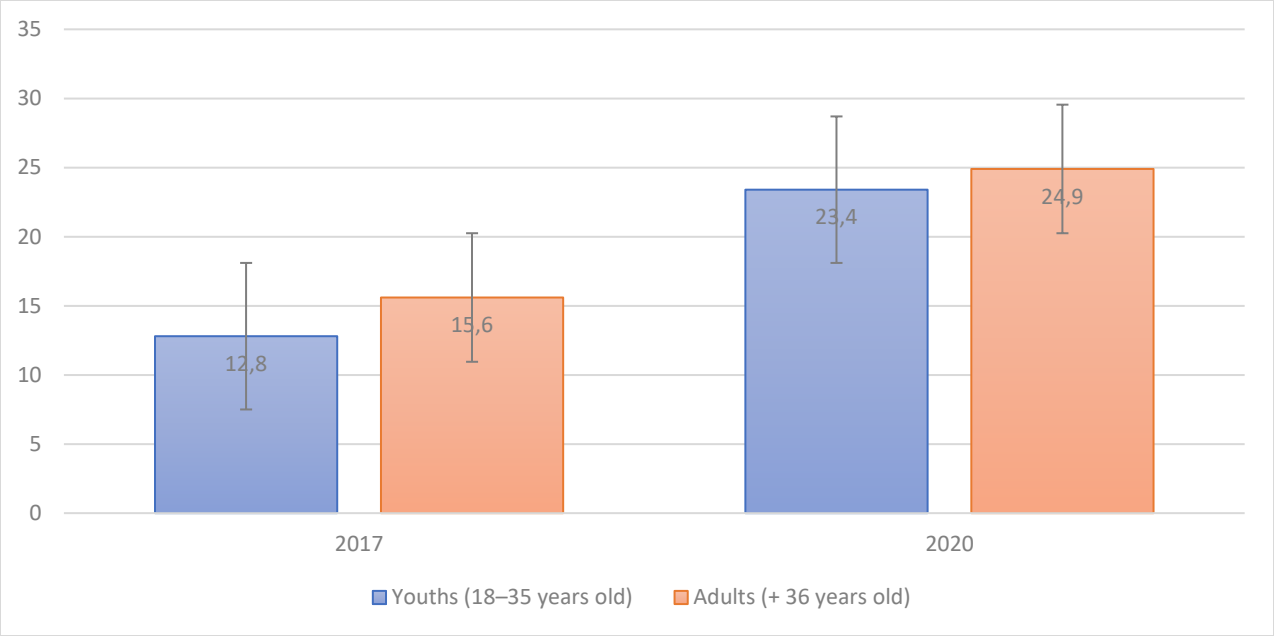

Figure 2: Prevalence of depressive symptoms in 2017 and 2020

Source: Author's own calculation using weighted 2020 NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 data. Confidence intervals of 95% are shown.

Regardless of the cut-off score used, our results confirm a significant increase in the prevalence of depressive symptoms among youths and adults between 2017 and 2020. This increase seems to reflect the impact of COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdown on people's mental health in South Africa. Our findings are consistent with results from earlier studies conducted in South Africa and elsewhere (Mudiriza and De Lannoy, 2020; Oyenubi and Kollamparambil, 2020; Luo et al., 2020). However, our prevalence rate does differ from those revealed in other local and international research. This might be due to differences in sample sizes and time-periods between the various surveys as well as differences in lockdown restrictions implemented in various countries. While the revealed prevalence rate for youths is slightly lower than that of adults, the increase is larger among youths than among adults. It is important to pay close attention to the effect of COVID-19 on young people's mental health to avoid longer-term mental health problems that might severely affect their adulthood.

Figure 3 presents the prevalence of depressive symptoms in South Africa by various youth sub-groups. The results show that, in 2017, the prevalence of depressive symptoms was roughly similar across different groups of youths, with rates ranging from 11 per cent to 15 per cent; in 2020, prevalence varied slightly across different youth groups, with rates ranging from 20 per cent to 33 per cent.[11] A comparison

of 2017 and 2020 results reveals that the prevalence of depressive symptoms increased significantly across all youth groups, with huge increases reported for white, coloured and Asian/Indian youths and youths with tertiary education.

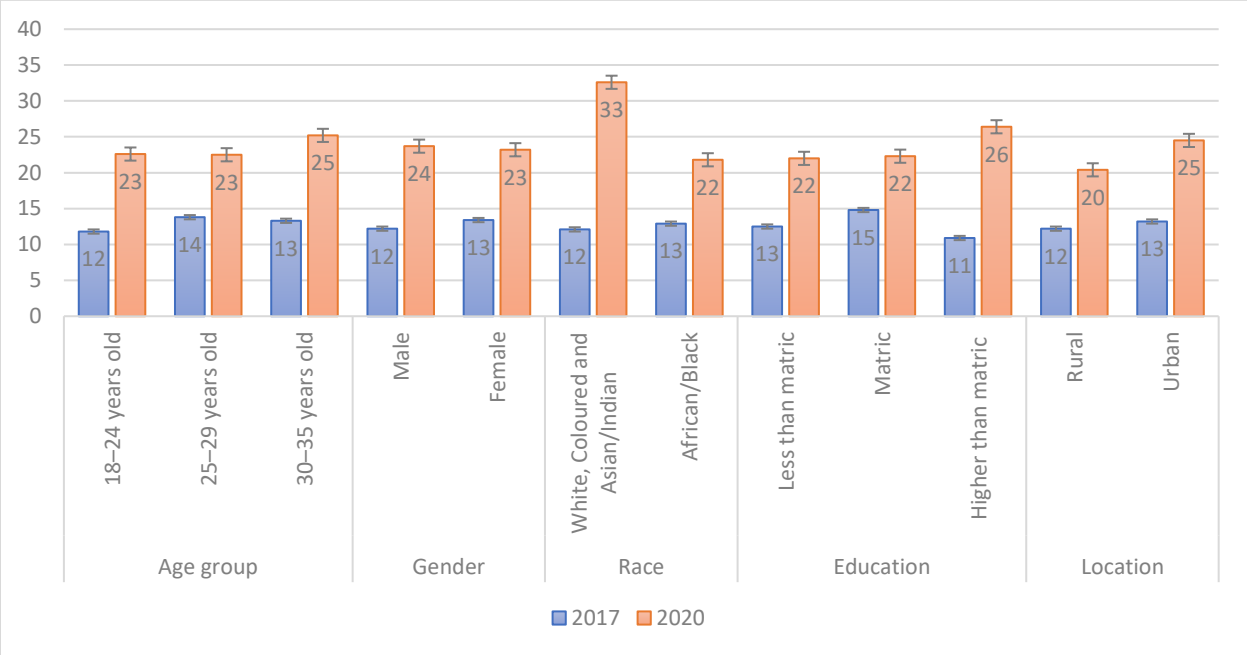

Figure 3: Prevalence of depressive symptoms in 2017 and 2020 by youth characteristics

Source: Author's own calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 data.

Notes: We combined white, coloured and Asian/Indian racial groups into one because of their small sample size. Confidence intervals of 95% are shown.

The higher prevalence of depressive symptoms among youths with higher education corroborates similar findings by Mudiriza and De Lannoy (2020), who used data from an online 2020 survey. Similar results exist for other countries, where this higher prevalence has been attributed to members of the population with higher education rates following greater amounts of distressing COVID-19-related news (Moghanibashi-Mansourieh, 2020). Thus, a shock event like the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have a harsher effect on youths with higher education versus the protection factor of higher education in 'normal' times (Mudiriza and De Lannoy, 2020).

Figure 4 further disaggregates the prevalence of depressive symptoms by labour market status. It shows that this prevalence increased across all categories between 2017 and 2020 with substantial increases

recorded for discouraged and strictly unemployed youths. These results might be explained by the reduced employment prospects and greater obstacles in the search for work for unemployed youths.

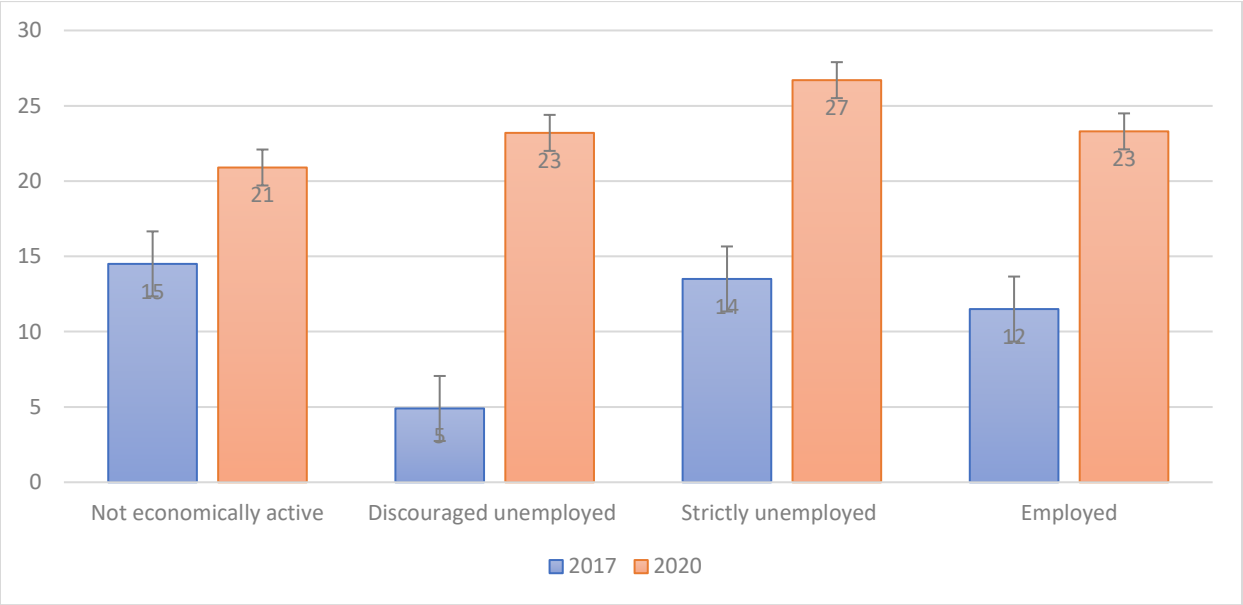

Figure 4: Prevalence of depressive symptoms amongst youth in 2017 and 2020 by labour market status

Source: Author's own calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 data. Confidence intervals of 95% are shown.

Finally, Figure 5 disaggregates the prevalence of depressive symptoms by employment type and occupation in 2020. The results reveal a significantly high prevalence among youths who were running a business compared to those in a regular job. Existing literature suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed disproportionately affected those in informal employment compared to those in formal employment (Benhura and Magejo, 2020). The high prevalence of depressive symptoms among those running a business might be explained by the huge economic losses, due to lockdown measures that led to closures of most businesses. Informal workers are not protected by the contributory social insurance funds that are available to those in formal work (International Labour Organisation, 2020b) and receive less government support (Webb et al., 2020). This leaves them extremely vulnerable and prone to stress and depression during major economic shocks as their businesses face collapse.

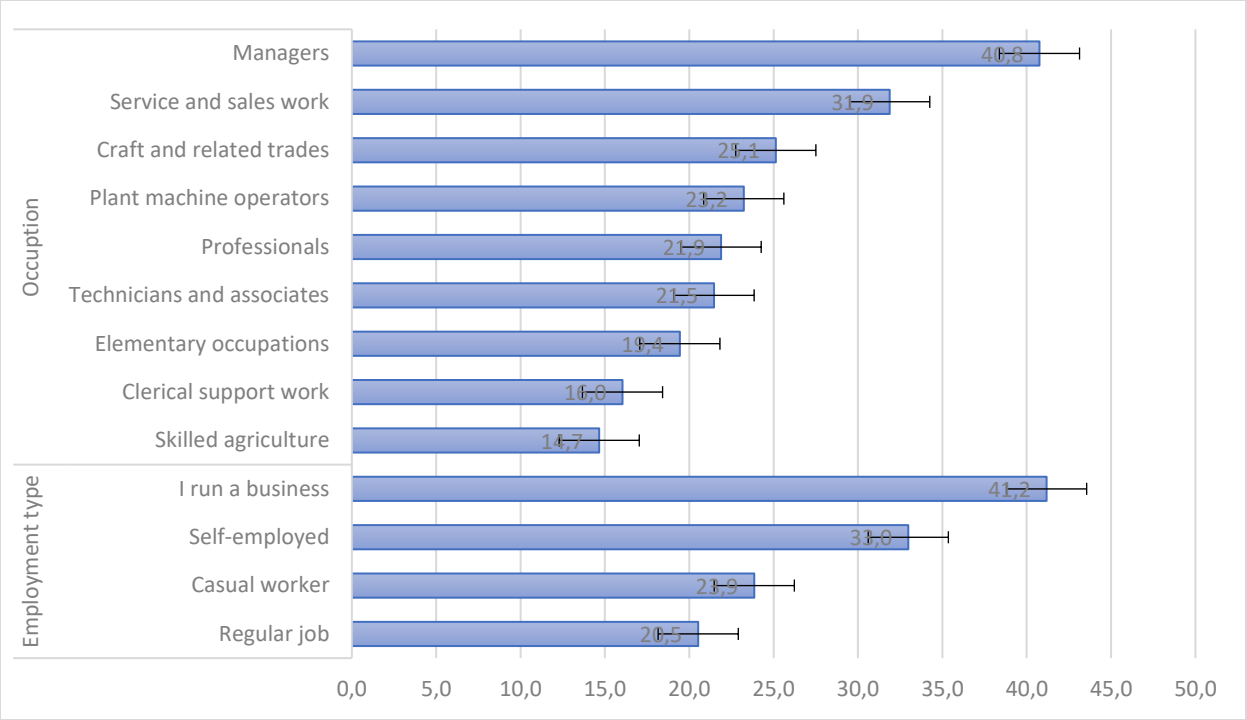

Figure 5: Prevalence of depressive symptoms amongst youth in 2020 by employment type and occupation

Source: Author's own calculations using weighted 2020 NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 data. Confidence intervals of 95% are shown.

Figure 5 further shows that the prevalence of depressive symptoms varies significantly by occupation, with prevalence relatively high among managers and those in service and sales work. Many managers had to make tough decisions with regards to production and staff retention when government mandated the closure of non-essential businesses, possibly triggering higher depressive symptoms amongst this group. Existing research found that managers' illegitimate tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic, like downsizing an organisation, significantly influenced distress, anxiety, and depression for managers (Graf-Vlachy et al., 2020).

The analysis suggests that the COVID-19 lockdown had a significant impact on young people's mental health in South Africa. The results indicate worsening mental health among youths, with an increase in the prevalence of depressive symptoms between 2017 and 2020 for the overall youth sample as well as for different youth groups. Worryingly, research using NIDS-CRAM, Wave 3 data shows that depressive

symptoms continued to increase, despite the further, gradual easing of lockdown measures (Oyenubi and Kollamparambil, 2021).

Discussion and recommendations

The findings in this chapter reflect that COVID-19 has exacerbated the plight of young people in South Africa, particularly those who were already vulnerable prior to the pandemic. The analysis shows that about 1.5 million young workers (18–35 years old) lost their jobs between February (pre-lockdown) and June (level 3 lockdown) 2020. In addition, the data indicates a significant increase in mental health problems among youth. In the face of this and other challenges of the pandemic, there is a unique window of opportunity to think and do differently in our efforts to improve outcomes for young people.

South Africa does not have a shortage of youth development-focused legislative, policy and institutional instruments. These include the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the National Youth Policy, the Integrated Youth Development Strategy and the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI). However, successful youth development requires more than accurate diagnoses and sound strategy. Youth development in the country has been hampered by a lack of coordination amongst key stakeholders across sectors and insufficient monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects (Mtwesi, 2014), and this needs to be rectified. In addition, young people's voices and experiences must explicitly be included in the design and implementation of interventions.

As the national focus shifts increasingly towards economic recovery, young people should feature centrally. It is imperative that youth are supported in their progression through the education system and towards sustainable livelihoods, to become thriving adults. Below, we discuss what we consider to be essential components of support for young people.

Education

Education is a critical enabler for labour market transitions, employability and employment stability. In South Africa, finishing matric (secondary school) and, especially, obtaining a post-school qualification significantly improves employability (Statistics Africa South, 2020). The pandemic has had a significant effect on learners and students. The findings in this chapter show that higher levels of education are

associated with greater job security: young people with a qualification higher than matric experienced far fewer job losses than those with less than matric. This bears relevance not only for youth who were already in the labour market at the onset of COVID-19 but also for those in the education system.

Recent studies indicate severe learning losses, especially among learners attending under-resourced schools (Mohohlwane et al., 2020). These learners are further disadvantaged by a lack of access to online learning due to high data costs (Spaull and van der Berg, 2020). It has been estimated that it may take up until 2028 to recover from these learning losses (Macupe, 2021). This is especially concerning given that, historically, South Africa has faced a massive dropout challenge, with learners in under-resourced schools being disproportionately more vulnerable to this. Repetition rates are estimated at between 11–31 per cent (van der Berg et al., 2019), and 40 per cent of learners who start school do not make it to matric (Van Broekhuizen et al., 2016). For every 100 learners who start schooling, only four go on to graduate with a university degree; an estimated 60 per cent of students graduate from university within five years (van Broekhuizen et al., 2016).

On account of 2020, we can expect these issues to be amplified – with even higher rates of learner disengagement and dropout (Zero Dropout Campaign, 2020). Therefore, it is critical to prioritise engagement with learners and students so that they stay connected to school, college and university, even where physical access is not allowed. Maximising certification – at all levels, but particularly in the schooling system – is important, because having an educational qualification is invaluable for helping young people pursue further formal learning or signal their skills to potential employers (Carranza et al., 2020; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018). Within the basic education system, this can be achieved by implementing the proposed General Education Certificate – a qualification that learners would receive at the end of grade nine – that has been scheduled for roll-out in 2023 (South African Government News Agency, 2020); and by providing catch-up and wrap-around support to learners so that more of them reach and pass matric. Improved educational outcomes can also be achieved by offering more support in the Department of Basic Education's Second Chance Matric Programme, for which approximately 250,000 young people are registered at any given time (Gustaffson, 2020). Within tertiary education, maximising certification also requires providing students with wrap-around support – academic, financial and psycho-social – to help them complete their qualification.

Social assistance for unemployed young people

Before COVID-19, analysis of the 2019 General Household Survey (GHS) data shows that 55 per cent of young people (18 – 35 years) in South Africa were already living in poverty and analysis of the 2020 Quarterly Labour Force Survey, quarter 1 data shows that roughly 47 per cent of young people (18 – 35 years) were NEET[12] (Statistics South Africa, 2018; 2020). Longitudinal research reflects that this group has long experienced precarious journeys into, and within, work (Mlatsheni and Ranchhod, 2017). Historically, this has been disproportionately experienced by young people who are African/black or coloured, have lower levels of education or have entry-level jobs (De Lannoy and Mudiriza, 2019) – the very same groups who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, as evidenced in this chapter. These young people are ill-equipped to cope with economic shocks. Social assistance in the form of cash transfers could be one way to protect youth against an unstable economy and structural unemployment.

While South Africa's social protection system[13] offers various categories of social grants, in general, young people (18–35 years old) do not qualify for social assistance – which is targeted at children, people with disabilities, the elderly and people in urgent and short-term distress (Köhler and Bhorat, 2020). On the other hand, social insurance (which is primarily used to protect those in formal sector employment) delivered through the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), provides short term protection against unemployment, illness, maternity, the adoption of a child and death – conditional on prior formal employment (Köhler and Bhorat, 2020). Many young people have never been formally employed or have informal or periodic, part-time employment, and therefore, do not qualify for UIF.

In response to the adverse effects of the pandemic and resulting economic lockdown, South Africa's government implemented a package of relief measures to expand social assistance. This included the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant of R350 per month, aimed at individuals aged 18 years and older, who were unemployed during the lockdown and who did not receive any form of income or social grant, support from the National Student Financial Aid, or benefits from the UIF (Department of Labour, 2020).

A number of implementation problems that meant that not all intended beneficiaries were reached, leaving a vast number of workers to fall into poverty after losing their jobs (Jain et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these social income grants have provided critical support to the most vulnerable in the country, including

many households with young workers (Köhler and Bhorat, 2020). As a result, the implementation of the SRD grant has intensified calls for the implementation of a Basic Income Grant for those between the ages of 18 and 59.

Indeed, we argue that comprehensive social assistance should be an essential component of economic recovery; this is particularly true with respect to permanent social assistance for unemployed young people – including those who are caregivers who therefore receive the Child Support Grant – as part of a broader work-seeker support plan. This is to protect against economic shocks, but also because looking for work costs money – from data, to transport, to childcare costs. Evidence has shown that young people may spend an average of R938 per month looking for work (Patel and Graham, 2019) and that most young people give up looking for work because of money and family responsibilities (De Lannoy and Mudiriza, 2019). Social assistance for unemployed youth would provide a much-needed safety net to help cover work-seeking costs and counter discouragement (De Lannoy and Mudiriza, 2019).

Mental health interventions

Studies in low- and middle-income countries highlight the strong link between poor mental health and poverty, and the cycle between the two (Lund et al., 2011). This feedback loop reinforces the need for improved access to mental health support, as well as poverty alleviation support. While the existing literature gives an unclear picture of the effects of cash transfers on mental health, current ongoing research in South Africa on the effects of the SRD grant could help us understand the relationship between social assistance and mental health. This chapter indicates the significant increase in depressive symptoms amongst youth, yet access to mental health support is severely constrained. In South Africa, crude estimates indicate that, in 2016 and 2017, only 0.89 per cent and 7.35 per cent of the uninsured population requiring care received some form of public inpatient and outpatient mental healthcare, respectively (Docrat et al., 2019).

Navigation support for young people

The number of young people who have given up looking for work continues to rise (Statistics South Africa, 2020). The danger of economic discouragement is that even if the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan works, we would have already lost a young, productive workforce. To address this, South Africa has

placed transition support – interventions that can guide young people into long-term sustainable livelihoods, increasing their education and skills levels, while building employer confidence – high on the agenda. In the 2020 State of the Nation Address, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the PYEI. The implementation of this intervention appears to have been hampered by the pandemic. However, one element of the plan that has advanced since its launch is the National Pathway Management Network, which includes a number of channels to reach young people including, among others, the SAYouth.Mobi site and contact sites (such as the Labour Centres and those run by the NYDA): these are aimed at connecting young people to work and training opportunities. SAYouth.Mobi, a zero-rated platform, is a significant development with respect to providing support to work-seeking young people – reducing data and transport costs by making it easy for employers to find potential candidates and for candidates to upload their CV and signal their skills.

In a similar vein, the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (at the University of Cape Town) is working with a number of social and academic partners to design a navigation support programme dubbed the Basic Package of Support for Youth. This programme's primary purpose is to ensure that youth who are NEET stay engaged with social and economic structures through the provision of face-to-face, long-term navigation support and referral to local services. Interventions such as these are crucial to support and connect young people as they navigate between educational and employment prospects.

Digital access

Clearly, access to information and social networks is critical for linking youth to opportunities and services. However, many young people in South Africa are barred from leveraging knowledge and networking resources because of the digital divide: the gaps in access to modern information and communications technology (ICT). This chapter refers to the consequences of the digital divide, with respect to unequal access to remote learning and job security. A key contributor to the digital divide is the cost of mobile data, which is prohibitive for many young people. Soon after the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in South Africa, and following recommendations by the Competition Commission towards the end of 2019, two of the largest Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) reduced the cost of one gigabyte of data to R99; and one of these MNOs further reduced the cost to R85 in April 2021 (Business Insider South Africa, 2021). Despite these reductions, data remains expensive in South Africa (Chinembiri, 2020).

One of the government's interventions to mitigate the impact of the National State of Disaster was to zero-rate websites in certain sectors, including health, basic education and higher education and training. We must ensure that these gains endure beyond the immediate, urgent circumstances. Encouragingly, this sentiment has been carried through into spectrum auctioning. In its recent invitation to apply for radio frequency spectrum licenses, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) included a social obligation that requires licensees that are assigned spectrum to zero-rate all mobile content provided by Public Benefit Organisations (PBOs), including .gov.za websites (South African Government, 2021b). To maximise this opportunity, PBOs must design quality content for all young people, including those who are NEET, delivered through platforms able to sustain high traffic volumes. Government must enforce the social obligation of MNOs, and the private sector should accept this obligation with transparency, to ensure expanded digital access.

Another crucial component of digital access is infrastructure. The President's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery plan has set a goal of expanding digital access by developing new models for providing low-income households with affordable, high speed internet through subsidies for broadband and support for public Wi-Fi hotspots (South African Government, 2021a). Along with expanding digital access, it is important to invest in developing digital literacy and skills. Even when young people gain access to devices, working internet and high-quality digital content, research shows that many lack the necessary literacy and skills to use online content (Matli, 2021).

Public employment programmes

Public employment programmes, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), have been implemented by the government in response to longstanding high rates of unemployment. These programmes are designed to provide work opportunities in communities while contributing to the public good. One of the priority interventions in the government's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan is the Presidential Employment Stimulus, which has been designed to build on and complement existing public investment in employment creation. This intervention seeks to directly confront the economic impact of COVID-19 and the exacerbation of poverty and unemployment (South African Government, 2021a).

In the expected, continued economic downturn, public employment programmes could be one of the most valuable mechanisms to support children and learners, while also creating meaningful entry-level work opportunities for young people. Through the Basic Education Employment Initiative, one of the initiatives within the Presidential Employment Stimulus, more than 340,000 unemployed young people were recruited to be Education Assistants or General School Assistants (South African Government, 2021c). They were initially contracted from December 2020 until March 2021, but this was extended to April 2021; and paid R3,500 per month.

To maximise these kinds of opportunities, we must ensure that young people are properly trained and supported to carry out these activities. In addition, the experience must be a valuable opportunity for them that builds their skills and networks and equips them to find their 'next best step' into the labour market or further education.

Conclusion

Already, pre-COVID-19, young people in South Africa were among the most vulnerable groups in the population. High levels of income poverty, low educational outcomes and high levels of structural unemployment keep many youths trapped in a state of 'waithood', unable to transition into the independent and productive lives most of them aspire to. As a result, levels of discouragement among youth have been on the increase. The findings presented in this chapter highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges and vulnerabilities experienced by young people in our country, especially in the areas of labour market transitions and mental health.

While we regard the current focus and drive of the PYEI as a step in the right direction to support more young people in their transition into the labour market, we also present a more holistic set of recommendations which build on existing programmes and policies and which we believe should be included in the country's post-COVID-19 economic recovery plans. As South Africa looks forward, we must ensure that young people's time in the period of 'waithood' is minimised by supporting them in their pathways through the education system, to work and finally into sustainable livelihoods. This requires a targeted and sustained focus on policy and civil society interventions across a broad range of domains, including the provision of study support, quality mental health care, income support, job opportunities

and support and guidance to help young people navigate different systems, and to connect one opportunity to the next in a meaningful way.

References

Adams-Prassl, A., Boneva, T., Golin, M., and Rauh, C. 2020. 'Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: Evidence from real time surveys. *Journal of Public Economics*, 189, 1-33.

Baldry, K., Graham, L., and De Lannoy, A. 2019. 'The agency and resilience of NEET youth and what we can do to support them. Evidence from a synthesis of qualitative research with young people in South Africa'. *SALDRU Working Paper No. 253. Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (*SALDRU), University of Cape Town and Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg.

Baron, E. C., Davies, T., and Lund, C. 2017. 'Validation of the 10-item centre for epidemiological studies depression scale (CES-D-10) in Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans populations in South Africa'. *BMC Psychiatry*, 17(6), 1-14.

Benhura, M., and Magejo, P. 2020. 'Differences between formal and informal workers' outcomes during the COVID-19 crisis lockdown in South Africa'. *National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey Wave 2 Report No. 2.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Business Insider South Africa. 2021. 'Vodacom cuts data prices – here's how it compares to Cell C, MTN, Telkom and Rain*'.* https://www.businessinsider.co.za/vodacom-cuts-data-prices-heres-how-it-compares-to-cell-c-mtn-telkom-and-rain-2021-4, accessed 17 April 2021.

Carranza, E., Garlick, R., Orkin, K., and Rankin, N. 2020. 'Job search and hiring with two-sided limited information about workseekers' skills'. *CSAE Working Paper* WPS/2020-10, Oxford.

Casale, D., and Posel, D. 2020. 'Gender and the early effects of the Covid-19 crisis in the paid and unpaid economies in South Africa'. *National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey Wave 1 Report No. 4.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Chinembiri, T. 2020. 'Despite reduction in mobile data tariffs, data still expensive in South Africa'. *Research ICT Africa, Policy Brief [2].* Https://Media.Africaportal.Org/Documents/Tapiwa-Chinembiri-Mobile-Data-Pricing-Policy-Brief2-2020-FINAL.Pdf., accessed: 31 March 2021.

De Lannoy, A., and Mudiriza, G. 2019. 'A profile of young NEETs: Unpacking the heterogeneous nature of young people not in employment, education or training in South Africa'. *SALDRU Working Paper No. 249*. SALDRU, University of Cape Town.

Department of Higher Education and Training. 2018. *Statistics on Post-School Educaton and Training in South Africa*. Pretoria, South Africa.

Department of Labour. 2020. Notice 215 of 2020 - COVID -19 Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (C19 TERS). *Government Gazette*, 26 March 2020.

Dlamini-Zuma, N. 2020. *Declaration of a national state of disaster.* Pretoria. http://www.cogta.gov.za/index.php/2020/03/22/nkosazana-dlamini-zuma-gazetted-regulations-on-the-state-of-disaster/, accessed: 31 March 2021.

Docrat, S., Besada, D., Cleary, S., Daviaud, E., and Lund, C. 2019. 'Mental health system costs, resources and constraints in South Africa: A national survey'. *Health Policy and Planning*, 34 (9), 706–719.

Gonzalez, S. P., Gardiner, D., and Bausch, J. 2020. *Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being: Survey report 2020.* ILO, Geneva. Www.Ilo.Org/Global/Topics/Youth-Employment/Publications/WCMS_753026/Lang--En/Index.Htm., accessed 23 February 2021.

Graf-Vlachy, L., Sun, S., and Zhang, S. X. 2020. 'Predictors of managers' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic'. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, *11* (1), 1-6.

Gustaffson, M. 2020. *Broadening second-chance Matric opportunities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.* Research on Socio-Economic Policy (ReSEP), Stellenbosch University.

Hašková, H., and Dudová, R. 2017. Precarious work and care responsibilities in the economic crisis.

European Journal of Industrial Relations, 23 (1), 47–63.

Honwana, A. 2014. '"Waithood": Youth transitions and social change', in Foeken, D., Dietz, T., de Haan, L., and Johnson, L. (eds) *Development and Equity: An interdisciplinary exploration by ten scholars from Africa, Asia and Latin America.* Leiden: Brill, 28-40.

Ingle, K., Brophy, T., and Daniels, R. 2020. *National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) panel user manual. Wave 2 Release August 2020. Version 1.* SALDRU, University of Cape Town.

International Labour Organisation. 2020a. *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fourth edition Updated estimates and analysis*, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_745963.pdf, accessed 23 February 2021.

International Labour Organisation. 2020b. *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition, Updated estimates and analysis*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_745963.pdf, accessed 10 December 2020.

Jain, R., Budlender, J., Zizzamia, R., and Bassier, I. 2020. 'The labor market and poverty impacts of Covid-19 in South Africa'. *SALDRU Working Paper No. 264*. *SALDRU, University of Cape Town,*

Kerr, A. 2018. 'Job flows, worker flows and churning in South Africa'. *South African Journal of Economics*, *86*, 141–166.

Köhler, T., and Bhorat, H. 2020. 'Social assistance during South Africa's national lockdown: Examining the COVID-19 grant, changes to the child support grant, and post-october policy options'. *National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey Wave 2 Report No. 9.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Kroenke, K., Spitzer, R. L., and Williams, J. B. W. 2003. 'The patient health questionnaire-2: validity of a two-item depression screener'. *Medical Care*, *41* (11), 1284–1292.

Lemieux, T., Milligan, K., Schirle, T., and Skuterud, M. 2020. 'Initial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Canadian labour market'. *Canadian Public Policy*, 46 (S1), S55--S65.

Lund, C., de Silva, M., Plagerson, S., Cooper, S., Chisholm, D., Das, J., … Patel, V. 2011. 'Poverty and mental disorders: Breaking the cycle in low-income and middle-income countries'. *The Lancet*, *378* (9801), 1502–1514.

Luo, M., Guo, L., Yu, M., and Wang, H. 2020. 'The psychological and mental impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on medical staff and general public--A systematic review and meta-analysis'. *Psychiatry Research*, *291*, 1-9.

Macupe, B. 2021. 'Covid sets education back years'. *Mail & Guardian,* Https://Mg.Co.Za/Education/2021-01-30-Covid-Sets-Education-Back-Years/ , accessed 5 February 2021.

Madhi, S. A. 2021. 'South Africa failed to get its act together on vaccines: here's how'. *The Conversation.* https://Theconversation.Com/South-Africa-Failed-to-Get-Its-Act-Together-on-Vaccines-Heres-How 153384 , accessed 5 February 2021.

Manea, L., Gilbody, S., Hewitt, C., North, A., Plummer, F., Richardson, R., … McMillan, D. 2016. 'Identifying depression with the PHQ-2: A diagnostic meta-analysis'. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *203*, 382–395.

Matli, W. 2021. 'Young South Africans are shut out from work: They need a chance to get digital skills'. *The Conversation*, Https://Theconversation.Com/Young-South-Africans-Are-Shut-out-from-Work-They-Need-a-Chance-to-Get-Digital-Skills-142756. , accessed 23 February 202).

Ministry of Health. 2021. Minister Zweli Mkhize public briefing statement, South Africa's COVID-19 vaccine strategy, 3 January 2021, *Https://Sacoronavirus.Co.Za/2021/01/03/Minister-Zweli-Mkhize-Public-Briefing-Statement-South-Africas-Covid-19-Vaccine-Strategy-3-January-2021/, accessed 5 February 2021*.

Mlatsheni, C., and Ranchhod, V. 2017. 'Youth labour market dynamics in South Africa: Evidence from NIDS 1-2-3'. *REDI 3x3 Working Paper No. 39.* SALDRU, University of Cape Town.

Moghanibashi-Mansourieh, A. 2020. 'Assessing the anxiety level of Iranian general population during COVID-19 outbreak'. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, *51*, 1-5.

Mohohlwane, N., Taylor, S., and Shepherd, D. 2020. 'COVID-19 and basic education: Evaluating the initial impact of the return to schooling'. *National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey Wave 2 Report No. 11.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Mtwesi, A. 2014. 'An overview of youth policy'. *The Journal of the Helen Suzman Foundation*, 74, 37–41.

Mudiriza, G., and De Lannoy, A. 2020. 'Youth emotional well-being during the COVID-19-related lockdown in South Africa'. *SALDRU Working Paper No. 268*, SALDRU, University of Cape Town.

Oyenubi, A., and Kollamparambil, U. 2020. 'COVID-19 and Depressive symptoms in South Africa'. *National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey Wave 2 Report No. 12.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Oyenubi, A., and Kollamparambil, U. 2021. 'How has the easing of lockdown influenced Depressive Symptoms in South Africa?' *National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey Wave 3 Report No. 3.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Patel, L. and Graham, L. 2019. 'A South African case study: how to support young job hunters'. *The Conversation.* Available at: Https://Theconversation.com/a-South-African-Case-Study-How-to-Support-Young-Job-Hunters-110511., accessed 11 February 2021.

Radloff, L. S. 1977. 'The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population'. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, *1*(3), 385–401.

Ranchhod, V., and Daniels, R. C. 2021. 'Labour market dynamics in South Africa at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic'. *South African Journal of Economics*, 0 (0), 1–19.

South African Government. 2021a. 'Building a Society that Works: Public investment in a mass

employment strategy to build a new economy'. Https://Www.Gov.Za/Documents/Building-Society-Works-Presidential-Employment-Stimulus-South-African-Economic, accessed 10 February 2021.

South African Government. 2021b. Government Gazette. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa: Notice 535 of 2020. Https://Www.Icasa.Org.Za/Uploads/Files/Ita-for-the-Radio-Frequency-Spectrum-Licences-for-Imt-Spectrum-Bands.Pdf, accessed 12 February 2021.

South African Government. 2021c. Presidential Employment Stimulus Progress Report January 2021. Available at: Http://Www.Thepresidency.Gov.Za/Documents, accessed 11 February 2021.

South African Government News Agency. 2020. Roll-out of general education certificate scheduled for 2023. *Https://Www.Sanews.Gov.Za/South-Africa/Roll-out-General-Education-Certificate-Scheduled-2023,* accessed 5 February 2021.

Spaull, N., and van der Berg, S. 2020. 'Counting the cost: COVID-19 school closures in South Africa and its impact on children'. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 10 (1), 13.

Statistics South Africa. 2019. *General Household Survey. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Authors.* https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/801, accessed 10 December 2020.

Statistics South Africa. 2020. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey – Quarter 1 Data. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Authors.* https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/823., accessed 31 January 2021.

van Broekhuizen, H., der Berg, S., and Hofmeyr, H. 2016. 'Higher education access and outcomes for the 2008 national matric cohort'. *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers: 16/16*.

van der Berg, S., Wills, G., Selkirk, R., Adams, C., and Van Wyk, C. 2019. 'The cost of repetition in South Africa'. Working Papers 13/2019. Stellenbosch University, Department of Economics.

Webb, A., McQuaid, R., and Rand, S. 2020. 'Employment in the informal economy: implications of the COVID-19 pandemic'. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 40 (9/10), 1005-1019.

Zero Dropout Campaign. 2020. *School Dropout: The Pandemic Edition - Building resilience in our schooling system – before and after Covid-19*. DGMT: Cape Town.

Appendix

Table A1: Sample characteristics

		NIDS W5		NIDS-CRAM W1		NIDS-CRAM W2	
		Total numbers	%	Total numbers	%	Total numbers	%
	Total sample	18,610,811		16,209,041		16,137,862	
Age	18–24 years old	6,813,878	36.6	6,076,602	37.5	6,151,965	38.1
	25–29 years old	5,514,620	29.6	4,602,087	28.4	4,567,244	28.3
	30–35 years old	6,282,313	33.8	5,530,352	34.1	5,418,653	33.6
Gender	Male	9,292,844	50.0	7,880,144	48.6	7,835,157	48.6
	Female	9,278,934	50.0	8,328,896	51.4	8,302,705	51.5
Race	African/Black	15,617,193	84.3	13,863,053	85.5	13,763,498	85.3
	Coloured	1,479,058	8.0	1,331,404	8.2	1,323,035	8.2
	Asian/Indian	419,991	2.3	307,418	1.9	336,520	2.1
	White	1,019,305	5.5	707,165	4.4	714,809	4.4
Education	< Matric	9,791,842	53.2	6,252,890	38.7	6,203,040	38.6
	Matric	5,244,102	28.5	5,177,973	32.1	5,077,810	31.6
	Matric+	3,380,777	18.4	4,721,845	29.2	4,800,267	29.9
Location	Rural	5,976,575	32.1	3,059,293	18.9	3,995,905	25.5
	Urban	12,634,236	67.9	13,128,841	81.1	11,692,787	74.5

Source: Author's calculation using weighted 2020 NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 data.

Notes: Statistics are weighted to ensure national representation. Where total numbers do not add up to the total sample, this is due to respondents who refused to answer or skipped questions.

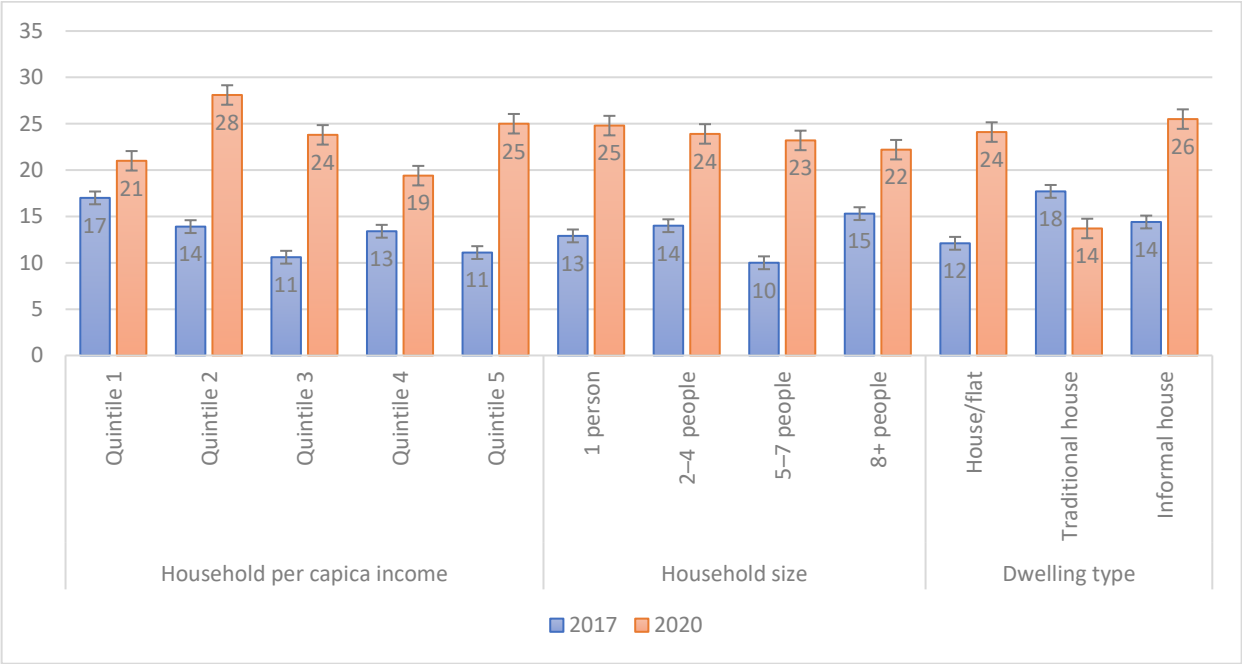

Figure A1: Prevalence of depressive symptoms in 2017 and 2020 by household characteristics

Source: Author's calculation using weighted 2020 NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 data.

Confidence intervals of 95% are shown.

[1] The statistics show that the sample of youth decreased by about 13 per cent between NIDS Wave 5 and NIDS-CRAM Wave 1, while it decreased slightly by 0.44 per cent between Wave 1 and Wave 2. This decrease in sample size can be attributed to attrition, a common problem for longitudinal surveys; it may also be due to different data collection methods.

[2] Wave 1 survey was conducted between 7 May and 27 June 2020. However, the survey asked respondents about their employment status in February and April 2020; Wave 2 was conducted between 13 July and 13 August 2020 and asked respondents about their employment status in June 2020.

[3] We derive the youth unemployment rate by dividing the number of unemployed youths by the number of youths in the labour force, which consists of all employed and unemployed youths. We get the employment-to-population ratio by dividing the number of employed youths by total youth population. For job loss/gain, we divide the number of youths who lost/gained a job in a given period by total youth population in the initial period.

[4] We could not use NIDS-CRAM, ave 1 because the survey did not collect information related to mental health.

[5] For robustness checks, we use a cut-off score of ≥ 10 for the CESD-10 scale that has been used in other studies in South Africa (Eyal and Burns, 2019). Further, we use a cut-off score of ≥ 2 for the PHQ-2 scale as suggested by Manea et al. (2016).

[6] Narrow (strict) unemployment rate is obtained by dividing the number of youths who are actively searching for work by the number of youths who are employed plus actively searching for work. Broad (expanded) unemployment rate is obtained by dividing the number of youths who are unemployed – those who are actively searching for work plus those who are discouraged job-seekers – by the number of youths who are employed plus unemployed.

[7] Against these huge job losses across other youth groups, interestingly, the proportion of employed white youths increased slightly by about 2.2 percentage points between February and June.

[8] Comparing Table 2 and 3 show that the proportion of furloughed young workers decreased from 24 per cent in April 9.9 per cent in June.

[9] Our analysis shows that employment decreased by 19 percentage points among youths aged 30–35 years, 15 percentage points among those with less than matric level of education, 17 percentage points among those in rural areas, 15 percentage points among, African/Black youth and 14 percentage points among female youth.

[10] The transition matrix in Table 4 provides a measure of the rate at which young people find or lose employment between two time periods.

[11] The same trend is evident when we look at the prevalence of depressive symptoms among youths by household characteristics (household income quintile, household size and dwelling type) with the prevalence increasing across all characteristics between 2017 and 2020 (see Figure A1 in the appendix).

[12] These poverty figures have been drawn from 2019 General Household Survey (GHS) data; however earlier data, in Table 2, was drawn from the NIDS-CRAM dataset.

[13] As described by Köhler and Bhorat (2020), South Africa's social protection system comprises social assistance (which protects the poor using cash or in-kind transfers) and social insurance (which protects individuals against adverse events). South Africa has three primary social insurance measures: the Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Road Accident Fund and the Compensation Fund.