

Siyakha Youth Assets: Testing and Evaluating the Impacts of Youth Employability Interventions

2015-2019

Background:

Youth unemployment is a pressing economic, political and social concern in present day South Africa with 3.8 million young people between the ages of 18-25 not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Unemployment rates are closely related to one's level of education and the low skills profile of the majority of young South Africans. Many youth drop out of the education system before completing high school and few hold further or higher education qualifications that may increase their likelihood of finding a job or moving into self-employment. The high cost of investing in further training and education also acts as a barrier to their progression and few young people are saving as an educational investment for the future.

The Siyakha Youth Assets Project was a cluster-randomized, longitudinal research project. Siyakha's primary research objective was to examine the causal impacts of youth employment and financial inclusion programs on financial capabilities, employability, and longer-term employment effects for South African youth.



Study Design:

The clusters (or training sites) were assigned to treatment or control groups with 22 sites in each (44 total). At control sites the implementing partners offered treatment-as-usual, but at the treatment sites a financial capability program was included in addition to the treatment-as-usual. Youth in the treatment sites received financial literacy training and access to a youth-friendly financial product. The study partnered with eight nationally recognized youth employability programs (YEPs) in South Africa. Each program varied in size and scope; however, all of the selected programs offered life skills training, technical and/or vocational skills training, and opportunities to increase work experience. The YEPs represented a broad spectrum of the types of interventions delivered to enhance youth employability. YEPs in this study ranged from one week to one year in length, included a combination of classroom and workplace-based training, and included varying exit opportunities for participants. This meant that program features (e.g. length of program, ratio of classroom to workplace-based training, exit opportunities) could be isolated to assess which features delivered the greatest impact.

Project Award:

\$600,000 US Dollars

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NYDA YouthBuild
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Raymond Ackermen Academy
Harambee
EOH Proserv
Fit for Life, Fit for Work

Funding Partner(s):

Standard Bank South Africa
National Youth Development Agency
National Treasury Jobs Fund
Ford Foundation
British Academy Newton Advanced Fellowship Fund

Research Core(s):

Workforce Development
Financial Inclusion

Findings:

Participants were predominantly African, women, largely unemployed and from poor backgrounds. The average age was 23 years. Three-quarters of the sample were between 18 and 25 years of age. Participants reported low monthly income (R527/\$37 USD per person), few assets and, in 20% of the cases, nobody in the household was employed.

Seventy-one percent of respondents experienced moderate to high levels of food insecurity. They also reported positive financial attitudes and behaviors, including progressive views on savings. For instance, 89% reported budgeting and 60% reported doing something, such as saving, to plan for future expenses. Almost two fifths of the participants were already responsible for the financial or daily care of a child. One fifth said they were expected to contribute to the financial needs of adults. Young women in particular faced expectations around caring for children. Over half the respondents had some previous work experience, with a typical job lasting under a year. Almost 80% of the sample were unemployed at the time of the baseline study and 73% experienced spells of chronic unemployment since leaving school. Only 17% had ever been self-employed.

Respondents indicated a mean (average) cost of work-seeking of R938 (\$66 USD) and a median of R550 (\$39 USD) per month. This represents an amount equal to, or more than, the average monthly per person household income of R527 (\$37 USD). Work-seeking costs included transport costs, administrative costs, printing and copying fees, internet fees, postage, and application fees. In addition, 82% indicated having no, or very few acquaintances, and 84% indicated having no, or very few friends they could turn to for advice and support on work-seeking. Limited social capital for young people acts as a barrier to work-seeking.

Next Steps:

Youth unemployment remains a structural problem that requires systemic labor market and education interventions. But there are also inequalities that shape access to the labor market and these also require attention. Initial evidence coming from follow-up data analysis from post-test results points to how young people continue to be “locked out” of the labor market. These findings show that after participating in a youth employability program, participants are reporting sustained or more positive outcomes on factors that could ultimately help them break through the barriers they face. Additional research and analysis will determine further understanding of the pathways towards long term employment among South African youth.