

Aug-2017

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Kabo Diraditsile

Mosetsanagape Alice Ontetse

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## Recommended Citation

Diraditsile, Kabo and Ontetse, Mosetsanagape Alice (2017). Lived Experiences and Consequences of Unemployment on Women: An Empirical Study of Unemployed Young Women in Mahalapye, Botswana. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 18(4), 131-143. Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol18/iss4/10>

## **Lived Experiences and Consequences of Unemployment on Women: An Empirical Study of Unemployed Young Women in Mahalapye, Botswana**

By Kabo Diraditsile<sup>1</sup> and Mosetsanagape Alice Ontetse<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

Studies have shown that the experience and consequences of unemployment affect people differently depending on, for example, age and gender. The purpose of the present study was to identify factors that contribute to unemployment among young women aged 20-35 in Mahalapye village, investigate the effects of being unemployed, determine sources of support available to unemployed young women, and identify the gaps in state assistance in this regard. The study utilized a survey research method and adopted a descriptive research design. Cluster sampling was used with the sample size being one hundred (100) unemployed young women in Mahalapye. A face-to-face questionnaire method was adopted to collect data and the study was cross sectional. Since the research was quantitative the Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to analyse data. The results showed that unemployment among young women in Mahalapye is a problem and young women are seriously affected by being unemployed. The study also revealed that high poverty levels result from unemployment and that this is linked to young women becoming engaged in criminal activities. A number of programmes have been put in place by government and other stakeholders to curb unemployment but the study indicated that a majority of the respondents have not benefited from these programmes. Low coverage, limited information about programmes, complicated help seeking processes, and lack of resources were identified as gaps in the provision of these programmes. Further research is needed to describe and elucidate in greater detail the effects of unemployment on young women of different ages and in different contexts.

*Keywords:* Young women, Lived experiences, Unemployment, Poverty, Botswana.

### **Introduction and Background**

Unemployment is an issue in all regions of the world. In this regard the ratio of women to men is much higher, which suggests that women are more affected than men (Bjorklund et al., 2015). According to the International Labour Office (2014) women constitute a larger proportion of the working poor in the world. These are people who work but do not earn enough to improve their living standards or to meet their families' needs. In most African countries, the supply of workers far exceeds demand, the result being extremely high rates of unemployment (Todaro & Smith, 2012). Okojie (2013) stated that the African continent has been challenged by numerous disasters with several symptoms comprising of poverty, drought, HIV and AIDS. Underlying all

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<sup>1</sup> Kabo Diraditsile is a PhD researcher at Waseda University in Tokyo. His interests are in social governance, social policy, poverty and social development issues. He has contributed chapters to books and authored refereed journal articles covering various issues including poverty, social welfare, youth development and programme evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> Mosetsanagape Alice Ontetse is pursuing her Masters in Social Work at the University of Botswana and her area of specialty is youth and community practice. Her interests are in poverty, unemployment, women empowerment, youth empowerment and social development.

these is the factor of unemployment which, to some observers, is thought to be the main issue of concern in the African sub-region. Furthermore, Diraditsile (2017) posits that unemployment among the youth has become the main issue of concern to policy makers in African governments. According to Diraditsile & Rankopo (Forthcoming) many young women in Botswana are unemployed and thus there is need for the creation of job opportunities for this group in particular.

The youth stratum constitute a larger proportion of the labour force, if positively mobilised, the youth can be an important instrument of economic growth and development in any economy because of their total number, drive, passion, and innovative ability (Msigwa & Kipesha, 2011). Globally, youth unemployment has increased by 3.4 million from 2007 to 2012 (International Labour Office, 2012). Unemployment is also high in the Africa region with Swaziland having 26.3% and 26.8% respectively in the years 2007 and 2010 (Brixiova & Kangoye, 2012). The problem of unemployment in the country is highest among the youth; women and the less educated who are most vulnerable to this phenomenon. As postulated by (Siphambe, 2007; Nthomang & Diraditsile, 2016) youth unemployment in Botswana is of great concern because many people reside in villages and rural areas and some migrate to urban centres in search of greener pastures. This puts a strain on employment opportunities in urban areas. It is estimated that youth unemployment is high at 45.9% among females and 36.0 among males (BIDPA, 2010).

According to the Botswana Revised National Youth Policy (2010) youth refers to young people aged 15-35 years. It further states that this is the stage of human development when critical decisions of life are made such as obtaining decent employment. For this study focus will be on young women aged 20-35 as many of those who are under 20 years of age are believed to be still in school. Unemployment can be defined as a situation whereby youth are involuntarily jobless due to lack of employment opportunities. Jeffry (2012) states that unemployment occurs when people do not have jobs, and have actively tried to find jobs within the past four weeks. Fajana (2010) defines youth unemployment as a circumstance where youth who are willing and have the potential to work are unable to find materially rewarding jobs.

This paper is structured as follows. Following an introduction and background to the study, the paper presents a theoretical framework to explain the conditions which shape women's lives and explores why many women are still unemployed. It will be followed by another section on the method adopted in the study for data collection, results, and analysis. The final section will include recommendations and conclusions.

### **Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory**

The theory provides an analytical framework to examine social arrangements that contribute to the oppression and marginalization of people. It provides a lens that can be used to examine and deconstruct systems of power. The feminist perspective is that unemployment is fundamentally a gender issue that cannot be fully understood through any lens that does not include gender as the central component of analysis (Dobash & Dobash, 2009). The authors further assert that the patriarchal domination of women stems from the long cultural history of legally sanctioned male subordination and outright ownership of women. Despite the complexity of unemployment, the most fundamental feminist insight is quite simple: unemployment among women cannot be adequately understood unless gender and power are taken into account. The theory challenges the existing social structures where men dominate in almost all fields and women are treated as mere objects.

According to Curran & Renzetti (1996) generally women have been ranked lower than men in the patriarchal society. A woman is still defined in terms of the traditional female role of, primarily, being a housewife. Feminist theory holds that unemployment is a result of male dominance and female subordination brought about by culture. This inequality has its roots in Botswana whereby men were treated as being superior to women, gender stereotypical roles manifested themselves in the labour market where men were considered to be more important than women. The findings of the present study show that women are more unemployed than men and that they depend on part time jobs or odd jobs and family support to meet their basic needs. The findings also demonstrate that the idea that a women's place is in the home is still prevalent in the minds of many people.

## **Method**

### *Design*

The present study adopted the descriptive research design. According to Babbie (2007) descriptive research design is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way. Therefore this research design was chosen because the study proposes to describe factors that contribute towards unemployment among women and descriptive research helped the researchers to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and to describe "what exists" with respect to female youth unemployment.

### *Survey Research*

This study utilised a survey research method to understand unemployment among young women in Mahalapye. According to Dawson (2006) survey research explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that is analysed using statistically based procedures. With this method it is easy to use a probability sampling designs, it is descriptive in nature and the findings can be generalised to the larger population of study since it uses a large sample compared to the qualitative research method. The researchers used this method because the aim was to obtain information that can be quantified and generalized from a sample to the population of interest. Newman (2007) confirms that quantitative methods enable researchers to summarize massive sources of information and facilitate comparisons across categories and over time. Since the study was cross-sectional, survey was found to be the best method for a cross sectional study. This survey utilised face to face questionnaire.

### *Study Population and Sample*

A study population is generally a large collection of individuals that are to be studied. Therefore the study population in this case was all female unemployed youth in Mahalapye aged 20-35 years. The actual number of the study population was unknown because there are no statistics specifically for unemployed women in Mahalapye. The study sample size was one hundred (100) unemployed young women in Mahalapye. The participants were unemployed women between the ages of 20-35 years old, holding different educational qualifications.

### *Sampling Technique*

This study adopted cluster sampling. According to Babbie (2007) this is a probability sampling technique that is used to identify potential subjects in studies where it is impossible to

make up a complete list of elements constituting the target population, such as all unemployed young women in Mahalapye. The researchers used this technique because the possibility existed that a complete list of unemployed young women in the area would not be obtained whereas a complete list of clusters of the population could be created. Therefore, instead of selecting individual units from the population, the researchers divided the population into clusters. Wards were used as clusters and 10 wards were chosen. A list of unemployed young women for each ward in the study site was obtained from social workers in the area. Each list was then sampled and 10 respondents from each cluster were randomly selected to respond to the questionnaire.

### *Data Collection*

There are two types of questions in survey research, namely open-ended questions and closed-ended questions (Dawson, 2006). In open-ended questions respondents are asked to provide their own answer to the question. In closed-ended questions respondents are asked to select an answer from a list provided by the researcher. The second type facilitated easy quantification of the answers because coding space was built into the questionnaire format at the time of its design. The type of questionnaire chosen, which is face-to-face, adopted both open ended and closed ended questions. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face to the respondents. This type of questionnaire helped the researchers to provide clarity on some of the questions to respondents. Another important factor is that the questionnaire was translated into the local language to cater for unemployed young women who do not understand English. In this way researchers ensured that all respondents understood everything and were not exposed to any harm.

### *Data Analysis*

Statistical data in the form of tabulations were used. The purpose of this study was to understand experiences of unemployment for young women. Quantified data was analysed through the use of descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, and charts. Since the study was quantitative the researchers used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis. Furthermore, the researchers identified underlying meanings for open ended questions and summarised all data with the aim of identifying major themes.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Often, though not always, social research represents an invasion of people's lives, as it seeks to gather personal information, and as such, respondents should be protected (Babbie, 2007). Therefore, social research is directed by ethical considerations that the researcher is obliged to follow and apply. The project was approved by both the research ethics council at the University of Botswana, and in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The participants were informed, orally and in writing, about the purpose of the study. They were also assured confidentiality and informed that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and could be terminated at any time without explanation. The researchers kept in mind that questions about general well-being and life conditions in relation to the informants' unemployed status could lead to thoughts with which the young women might need to deal. A plan of action for managing such possible situations was developed. The action included, inter alia, phone numbers and addresses of professional counsellors.

## **Results and Discussion**

The analysis and interpretation resulted in a number of themes which include: educational attainment and unemployment; rate of unemployment between young women and their male counterparts; factors that contribute to unemployment among young women; effects of unemployment on the unemployed young women; services in place to help unemployed young women; and gaps identified in the provision of such services.

### *Educational Attainment and Unemployment*

The results of the present study show that a majority of respondents had a junior and senior school certificate as compared to tertiary qualifications. Siphambe (2007) also argued that the most challenging unemployment problems are posed by the unemployment of youth with primary and secondary education. This is in line with the findings of this study as a majority of respondents (76%) had primary and secondary certificates and only a few had tertiary qualifications. Those with tertiary qualifications are least affected by unemployment because for them they have diploma and degree qualifications enabling them to search for employment opportunities. Access to a formal job is increased with one's educational attainment. This is confirmed by Diraditsile & Rankopo (forthcoming) as they point out that unemployment tends to differ with the educational attainment levels of individuals. That is, some women do not obtain jobs because of their lower qualifications.

### *The Rate of Unemployment for Women and Men*

The study has revealed that unemployment is an issue in Mahalapye. Most of the respondents (97%) indicated that this is the case. Moreover, (88%) stated that unemployment is prevalent among young women rather than men. This finding is consistent with the statement of the International Labour Office (2010) indicating that, in 2008, unemployment among women was higher as compared to that of men. Likewise it has been stated that young women in most economies suffer more from unemployment than their male counterparts (United Nations, 2012). Furthermore, Siphambe (2007) stated that youth unemployment in Botswana was more severe among female youth (48.0%) than among their male counterparts (34.6%). This clearly indicates that women face the challenge of unemployment to a greater extent than men. This is in agreement with Feminist theory as Gilchrist, Howarth & Suvillan (2007) indicated that gender inequalities between men and women lead to more women being unemployed since resources benefit men as is the case in Mahalapye. The Feminist theory also concurs with the findings of this study as it states that women are faced with conflicts surrounding gender inequalities and the fact that they have been ranked lower than men in African culture.

### *Factors Contributing to Unemployment among Young Women*

Gordhan (2012) have argued that many economies do not create enough jobs to match the supply from educational institutions. Findings of the present study confirm this as a majority of respondents indicated that there are no job opportunities in the area and young women lack appropriate skills required by the labour market. This is also in line with a review by Statistics Botswana (2013) which states that many young people leave school without the requisite skills or competencies needed in today's economy. In consequence face joblessness, high unemployment rates, and serious difficulties in obtaining a firm position in the labour market. Moreover, research conducted by Wong (2012), consistent with the findings of the current study, indicated that lack of skills and knowledge for employment affects young women's ability to find formal jobs. This

explains why some graduates are unemployed whereas they have high qualifications. It suggests that the skills they have acquired at school may no longer be needed by employers in the job market.

The current research has shown that more resources are available in urban areas than in rural areas leading to limited opportunities for young women in Mahalapye. Based on the present study findings unemployment among young women in Botswana also emanates from cultural and other factors that lead to gender bias against women in accessing employment in the formal sector. As a majority of respondents (70%) indicated that nowadays women are trying to join the labour market but, due to limited job opportunities, they tend to be faced with the issue of unemployment. Another important factor which is not sufficiently evident in the literature review is that a majority of respondents (56%) reported that government consider young women's needs while nearly half of the respondents (40%) indicated that the government does not consider the needs of women. They stated that government creates opportunities for all not taking into consideration that men and women are different.

The study findings revealed that a majority of respondents (66%) have never worked while a few (34%) indicated that they had once obtained a job. This shows that there is occupational segregation of workers by gender in Botswana's labour market in that female workers are generally limited to a narrow range of occupations. Women dominate the unskilled and semi-skilled blue-collar jobs that pay less than the skilled blue-collar jobs dominated by men. A few who obtained work were in low paying jobs such as in supermarkets, restaurants, grocery stores, Chinese shops, filling stations, butcheries, as receptionist, office cleaners and security guards. It is also a concern to discover that a majority of respondents (63%) reported that they have been unemployed more than 5 years.

#### *Impacts of Unemployment on Young Women*

The present study revealed that being unemployed makes women very unhappy and more vulnerable. The challenges they face every day are overwhelming. This finding is supported by previous research. Chigunta (2010) pointed out that, due to inadequate employment opportunities in the formal sector, unemployed young people may be forced to engage in involuntary work and other livelihood sources not accepted by society. These include commercial sex work and crime. It is worth highlighting that every one of the young female informants in the present study clearly indicated how unemployment had caused feelings of shame, and guilt as well as ill health. These findings are in accordance with previous research reporting that the effects of unemployment among young people need to be highlighted and that youth unemployment in itself should serve as a warning signal (Axelsson et al., 2007; Limb, 2011). Another impact of unemployment on young women (as deduced from the present study) is that a number of participants clearly indicated having increased their alcohol intake directly connected to their period of unemployment.

#### *Socio-Economic Impact of Unemployment on Young Women*

The present study findings show that there is a link between unemployment, poverty, and crime, in that, when people cannot earn an income from legal, appropriate, and socially acceptable work, some turn to illegal activities. The challenge of social and crime control then becomes a serious issue as the rate of unemployment is increasingly unchecked (Limb, 2011). Findings of the study have confirmed that high poverty levels, as a result of unemployment, affect a majority of respondents (76%) to a worrying extent. This was emphasized by the World Bank (2013) that stated that lack of employment opportunities has an impact on the increasing poverty level among

young women all over Africa. Also a significant minority of participants in the study (34%) indicated that unemployment affects engagement in commercial sex work and thus exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Several studies (Kulik, 2002; Aghatise, 2003; Bjorklund et al., 2015) states that being unemployed also encourages commercial sex work as a means of survival in several African towns and cities.

A majority of study respondents (63%) also indicated that unemployment significantly increases criminal activity level. This is in line with a study conducted by Dorling (2009) which indicates that youth unemployment creates socio-political and economic problems within societies. Among these is criminal activity. The findings have also emphasised that unemployed young women are involved in alcohol and drug abuse. A majority of respondents (40%) reported that unemployment affects alcohol and drug abuse to a large extent. This is supported by Okojie (2013) who indicated that youth unemployment in most African cities is evident 'idleness', where youth gather at bars and entertainment places to drink or use drugs to fill the abundant time they have at their disposal.

#### *Psychological Effects of Unemployment on Young Women*

The study has found that young women face feelings of hopelessness, loss of self-esteem and confidence, depression, and suicidal ideation. A majority (75%) indicated that unemployment seriously affects stress level, nearly half (43%) indicated that this phenomenon has an impact on their sense of hopelessness; a significant minority (26%) stated that their self-esteem is reduced due to having no means of survival and 24% indicated that their confidence is greatly reduced due to being unemployed. These findings are supported by (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Dorling, 2009) as the authors argued that the issue of unemployment among young women is linked to psychological distress, hopelessness, low self-esteem, depression, and lack of confidence. Even though the respondents have indicated that the impact is high, it is clear from the findings that the rate at which unemployment affects young women's stress level in Mahalapye is higher than other psychological impacts such as confidence and esteem. The impact of unemployment on young women's self-esteem and self-confidence is lower than what was expected based on the review.

#### *Mental Effects of Unemployment on Young Women*

The findings reflected that young women's mental health is affected by being unemployed. The respondents indicated that they experience excessive rates of disturbed sleep and depression. A majority (60%) stated that being unemployed does not really induce suicidal feelings. This is inconsistent with Egunjobi (2007) who stated that many social problems such as suicide become more severe in times of high unemployment. However, unemployed young women in Mahalapye do not appear to develop suicidal feelings even if they face the challenge of joblessness and survival. Thus, in this regard, the literature based on western research cannot necessarily be generalised to situations in Africa regarding the development of suicide ideation due to unemployment.

#### *Support Services Available to Unemployed Young Women*

When asked about financial services, offered by government and the private sectors, which aim at creating employment opportunities, it was clear that unemployed young women were not aware of most of the services and programmes. A few respondents (23%) indicated that they are aware of the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA), Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA), and Young Farmers Fund (YFF). Sixteen per cent (16%) mentioned Livestock

Management and Infrastructure Development (LIMID); National Master Plan for Arable Agriculture and Dairy Farming (NAAMPAAD); Integrated Support Programme for Arable Agricultural Development (ISPAAD); and Youth Development Fund (YDF). From these findings it is clear that unemployed young women do not have much knowledge about programmes put in place by government to help them. It clearly shows that they are rarely involved in the development of these programmes hence lack of knowledge about their existence with serious limitations regarding access to and utilization of these services.

The above findings are in agreement with those of Diraditsile & Rankopo (forthcoming) that women in poverty usually cannot afford to participate in social, community, and political activities. They further indicate that poverty often creates a negative impact on one's self confidence, which further perpetuates the social exclusion of women in economic development. Findings of the present study have also shown a majority (95%) of respondents had never benefited from available services and programmes. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) indicated that they had never requested assistance from the concerned offices. This shows that there is limited promotion of these programmes as the respondents stated that the process of seeking help is very complicated. This is an indication of poor coordination of services and programmes resulting in lack of awareness of these programmes by the unemployed young women who are anticipated beneficiaries.

The findings of the present study also show that a majority of respondents (76%) had never benefited from government services. Reasons pointed out for having not benefited given by a significant number (36%) include having not shown any interest in seeking help. Twenty three percent (23%) indicated that some programmes required a certain age and they did not qualify because they were over the stipulated age. For example, BNSP takes youth who are below the age of 30 years which means those who are above 30 years are not included.

The study has discovered how unemployed young women manage to cope with the demands of this status. Just over half (53%) indicated that they depend on the ipelegeng programme, which is a government initiative whose main objective is to provide short term employment, support, and relief whilst at the same time carrying out essential development projects that have been identified and prioritized through the normal development planning process. This is followed by 39% who stated that they depend on the ipelegeng programme together with odd jobs (doing people's laundry, cleaning yards). Findings clearly show that the ipelegeng programme is the most frequently utilised, even though is not reliable. This is supported by Nthomang & Diraditsile (2016) who argue that many youth programmes in Botswana lack sustainability as they are not based on any grounded research or empirical evidence. Unemployed young women are being forced by this circumstance to be engaged in ipelegeng since they do not have any means of production and therefore no option but to take advantage programmes created by the state since most of them have low academic attainment.

#### *Gaps Identified in Provision of Services and Programmes to Unemployed Young Women*

There is a deficiency of information and understanding of the challenges young people face. The challenges, as indicated by the present study, include corruption, limited knowledge of the programmes, and mismanagement of funds. A majority of respondents (88%) indicated that provision of services is not widespread and most are congested in urban areas. Furthermore, little information is provided about these services clearly demonstrating that policy makers do not really understand what unemployed women need and that completing application forms for programmes is complicated. The findings are in accordance with Diraditsile (2017) who states that evidence

indicates that many youth intervention programmes meant to empower the unemployed youth in Botswana are of low coverage.

### **The Way Forward to Addressing Young Women's Unemployment**

This section presents a set of recommendations as to what should be done in light of the key findings of the study to help unemployed young women aged 20-35 years in Botswana. It is important to provide a set of recommendations in order to deal with the issue of unemployment. The Government of Botswana, together with other private stakeholders should, create job opportunities in rural areas as the study has revealed that there are no such opportunities in Mahalapye. These should consider that not all women are educated or possess the requisite skills for employment. Programmes to develop such skills should be developed by the state and the private sector.

More industries, as suggested by respondents, should be brought to the area to absorb a number of the unemployed young women. Findings of the study have indicated that unemployed young women lack knowledge about programmes and services put in place which are assumed to help them in acquiring employment opportunities. Awareness should thus be improved. There should be improvements of existing programmes to meet the demands of unemployed graduates and those who have never been to school. These programmes must be monitored, evaluated and promoted during *kgotla* meetings, outreach sessions, use of billboards, and formation of support groups that can disseminate information and educate the public about available initiatives. This will be important in raising awareness in the community.

Unemployed young women should be involved in policy development as they understand their problems and how they can be helped. It is therefore important that they be consulted to ensure active participation. All concerned stakeholders should develop programmes that are specific to various groups of youth, for instance, gender, educational attainment, geographical area, and interests should be taken into account. There is need for more research to be done using both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain in-depth information about the phenomena and to generalise findings to related areas of concern. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data can improve evaluation by ensuring that the limitations of one type of data are balanced by the strengths of another.

### **Conclusions**

The aim of the study was to investigate the experiences and consequences of unemployment among young women aged 20-35 in Mahalapye. The results show that they were strongly negatively affected by being unemployed and that the problem of unemployment among young women is also a global concern. The major findings of the study indicate that unemployment among young women is greater than that among young men. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the main factors that contribute to unemployment in this area are lack of job opportunities, limited skills (no relevant qualifications), and failure of government to distribute resources and services fairly across the country.

It can also be deduced from the findings that unemployment affects young women as they face various challenges such as poverty; exposure to sexually transmitted infections resulting from commercial sex work and drug abuse; sleep disturbances; feelings of hopelessness; and high levels of stress. Among other things, unemployment leads to feelings of being excluded from society and

of shame, guilt, and concern. Unemployment also seems to be a risk factor for increased bad habits and unhealthy behaviour among young women, for example, increased alcohol consumption. The present findings indicate that even young women experiencing shorter periods of unemployment seem to be negatively affected. Unemployment seems to have negatively affected young women's lifestyle, emotions, self-esteem, and identity. It also gives rise to unhealthy behaviour, all of which may in turn influence how their adult lives develop. For example, it might be a trigger for developing depression.

The findings suggest that there are both sound socioeconomic and health-related reasons for trying to reduce and counteract unemployment among young women. Evidence from this study suggests a majority of the unemployed young women were not aware of the programmes available to them and they do not benefit from them. It has also been found that there are some gaps that hinder young women's abilities to be beneficiaries of these services and programmes. Among these gaps are: low coverage and limited information about programmes; complicated process of seeking help and lack of resources such as land to qualify to be a beneficiary. Further resources and research are also needed to design, describe, and evaluate interventions and action plans intended to improve young unemployed young women's health and well-being and alleviate their unemployment related problems.

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