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A Comprehensive Analysis of Key Factors Leading to Unemployment Among Youth in the Maldives

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Abstract:- Youth unemployment is one of the key socio-economic problem that bring social disturbance, and economic recession facing most developing countries. Thus, youth unemployment can be considered as one of the most challenging economic problem faced by the policy makers of the developing countries. This study will examine social and demographic determinants of the youth unemployment in the Maldives. The intensity of the youth unemployment is high in urban areas specifically in Male', which is the capital city of the Maldives where youth face serious difficulty in getting employment opportunities due to numerous factors. According to many researchers it was revealed that this rising trend of economically inactive youth creates the burden to the society in many ways. Yet, little is known about the key determinants behind the youth unemployment in the Maldives.

To shed on light on this problem, researcher conducted this study to assess the determinants of youth employment status in the Maldives and to suggest policy recommendations to alleviate the youth unemployment issue in Maldives. The researcher collected primary data from randomly selected youth and further used Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient technique and multiple regression analysis as the main methodologies for the analysis of data. The findings demonstrate that two significant predictors to influence youth employment status which is education and work experience. Furthermore, this study will contribute to fill the gap of literature review relating to the youth unemployment in the Maldives and will open up gateways to lead future research on youth employment.

Keywords: *Analysis, Key factors, Maldives, Unemployment, Youth.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Youth is a critical stage where individuals transition from childhood to adulthood, expected to settle down and earn a living. This age group is characterized by high physical and mental energy, productivity, and a strong drive for innovation and problem-solving. However, according to the United Nations, young people make up about one-fifth of the global population and half of the unemployed workforce, highlighting youth unemployment as a major issue in both developed and developing countries.

The challenges of youth unemployment are more serious to developing countries because of the high poverty levels demanding all people to work in order to ensure survival. According to ILO, young adults face numerous challenges when entering the labour market, mainly in developing economies. The problem of youth unemployment has become a key issue in socioeconomic and political stability of both developed and developing economies [1]. Maldives has a population of around 533,941 people dispersed across 188 islands. Transparency Maldives highlights that even though the youth is the highly economic productive group in the country the unequal distribution of educational facilities and the healthcare facilities across the atolls makes young people to move to capital city for better employment opportunities and Demmke states that youth in the Maldives faces the critical challenges in unemployment due to this rapid urban rural- urban migration [2,3].

According to Ministry of Youth Development and Sports, lack of employment opportunities combined with little or no opportunities for constructive use of free-time have made youth to take drugs to forget the problems that confront them [4]. Thus, it is evident from the above facts that youth unemployment results not only the economic agony but also the other socioeconomic problems. Although there are some empirical studies conducted with related to the youth unemployment in the Maldives; yet most of studies are limited and relied on the past data. These studies will not

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indicate the recent changes in the labor. According to Human Right Commission, youth unemployment has increased since 1996 and specifically youth unemployment in Male' has risen significantly [5]. The World Bank provides data relating to youth unemployment rate for the Maldives and according to the data average value for the period between 1991 to 2019 was 7.49 % with a minimum of 1.65 % in 1991 and a maximum of 18.41 % in 2019 and further it was observed that there is a persistent increase in the youth unemployment during the aforementioned period [6].

When identifying the causes behind the youth unemployment in the Maldives ILO states that Maldives as a developing country cannot escape from high unemployment rate due rapid rural-urban migration, lack of skills and unrealistic job expectations [1]. World Bank, highlights lack of the socio-emotional and other required skills, insufficient career guidance, unrealistic expectations in terms an acceptable job and expectations of parents with regard to what is an acceptable job and wage for their children leading the youth to be economically inactive in the Maldives [7]. Weaknesses in the education systems, limited facilities for higher education and technical and vocational training and lack of necessary skills to secure the top end jobs, high job expectations and burden from household chores leading the youth unemployment in the Maldives [8].

Rise in economically inactive youth due to aforementioned reasons will not create the economic agony in Maldives but also leads to anti-social and risky behavior including crimes that creates the burden to the society [9]. Therefore, it is significant to identify the causes behind the youth unemployment and taking remedial actions to overcome from this issue. The research related to this study has so far been limited and most of the researches doesn't reflect the recent changes in the labor market conditions. Thus, this is reflecting the gap of the literature review therefore further research is needed to more clearly to identify the causes behind the high youth unemployment rate in Maldives. This study is conducted primarily to identify the social and demographic causes behind the youth unemployment in the Maldives and further to derive meaningful policies to alleviate the issue of youth unemployment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

ILO defined unemployment as 'all persons of working age who were: a) without work during the reference period b) currently available for work, and c) seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in a specified recent period to seek paid employment or self-employment [1]. According to UN youth unemployment is the unemployment of young people comprises the age group between 15-24. However, in practice, the definition of youth varies from country to country depending on its cultural, institutional and political factors. In the Maldives youth defined as the age in between 18 to 34 years [9]. According to UN there are over 1.2 billion young people in the world today and they represent 18 % of the global population and about 90 per cent of them live in developing countries, where around half of the total population lives in rural areas [10]. According to ILO the global labor force participation rate for young people aged 15 to 24 declined significantly between 1993 and 2018, falling by 15 %age points to reach 42 per cent at the end of that period. United nations monthly briefing report highlights that the decline trend in labour force participation is visible among youth due to extended education and delay of labour market entry [11]. According to ILO, even though the involvement of young people highly significant for changing the society for better but lack of employment opportunities preventing them to enter into the labour market [1].

A. Global Perspectives with Regard to the Determinants of Youth Unemployment:

Various scholars have explored the causes and effects of youth unemployment globally. Batu [12] identified that in Ethiopia, youth unemployment is linked to factors such as education, gender, regional location, and marital status, with financial constraints limiting entrepreneurial ambitions. Msigwa and Kipesha [13] found that in Tanzania, gender, geography, education, skills, and marital status significantly influence youth unemployment. Khatun [14] pointed to a mismatch between labor supply and demand as the main cause in Bangladesh, with gender, GDP growth, and tertiary education contributing to higher unemployment rates. Yangchen [15] noted that in Bhutan, factors like gender, location, education, and training duration affect youth unemployment. Ndagijimana et al. [16] found similar influences in Rwanda, including gender, age, education, and geography.

In the Maldives, youth unemployment has been increasing, particularly in Male', with young people aged 15-24 making up a significant portion of the population [2]. The World Bank reports a rise in youth unemployment from 1991 to 2019, peaking at 18.41% in 2019. Factors contributing to youth unemployment include a lack of socio-emotional skills, insufficient career guidance, unrealistic job expectations, and parental pressures. The ILO states that young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, exacerbated in the Maldives by a growing number of foreign workers [1]. UNFPA attributes the issue to a lack of knowledge, skills, and difficulties transitioning from school to work, with higher unemployment among females due to household responsibilities. Rasheed [17] highlighted urban-rural migration, lack of experience, and a mismatch between education and job opportunities. The Human Rights Commission of Maldives [5] noted that youth are deterred by low wages and poor working conditions, further contributing to unemployment.

B. Theories of Unemployment:

- *Human Capital Theory:*

Becker's theory views education and training as investments that enhance future productivity, making individuals more employable and increasing their potential earnings. Wahrenburg & Weldi [18] suggest that investing in education leads to better-paying jobs and shorter unemployment periods. Similarly, Samiullah found that human capital factors like health and education significantly reduce unemployment in Pakistan over the long term [19].

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➢ *Job Matching Theory:*

Burdett [20] suggests that both firms and workers engage in a search process to find the best match between a job and an individual's skills and experience. The labor market is composed of diverse jobs requiring various skills, and workers have different levels of expertise [21] adds that workers seek jobs that align with their education and skills to fully utilize their capabilities and earn higher wages. Firms benefit from this match as it maximizes productivity. This theory emphasizes the importance of skill-job alignment in addressing issues like youth unemployment.

➢ *Social Capital Theory:*

Fukuyama defines social capital as informal norms that promote cooperation between individuals [22]. Machalek & Martin [23] argue that stable social relationships aid in developing human capital, while Bhandari & Yasunobu identify various types of social capital, including structural, cognitive, and relational, as well as bonding, bridging, and linking ties [24]. Claridge explains that structural social capital provides access to networks and resources, cognitive social capital refers to shared understandings, and relational social capital concerns the quality of relationships [25]. Granovetter suggests that strong social networks help circulate information, reducing unemployment [26].

Woolcock differentiates bonding social capital, which involves ties within homogeneous groups, from bridging social capital, which connects heterogeneous groups [27]. Linking social capital offers access to resources outside one's community. In the Maldives, rural-to-urban migration for better job opportunities and resources is common. Granovetter also highlights that weak social ties may limit access to job opportunities. This study will examine how the strength of both strong and weak social ties impacts youth unemployment, focusing on structural social capital [26].

Based on the literature review and as shown in the theoretical framework this study constructed the hypotheses as below.

- H1: There is a relationship between education and youth unemployment
- H2: There is a relationship between training and youth unemployment
- H3: There is a relationship between job preference and youth unemployment
- H4: There is a relationship between work experience and youth unemployment
- H5: There is a relationship between social networks and youth unemployment
- H6: There is a relationship between rural urban migration and youth unemployment
- H7: There is a relationship between bonding with employed groups and youth unemployment
- H8: There is a relationship between gender and youth unemployment
- H9: There is a relationship between age and youth unemployment
- H10: There is a relationship between marital status and youth unemployment

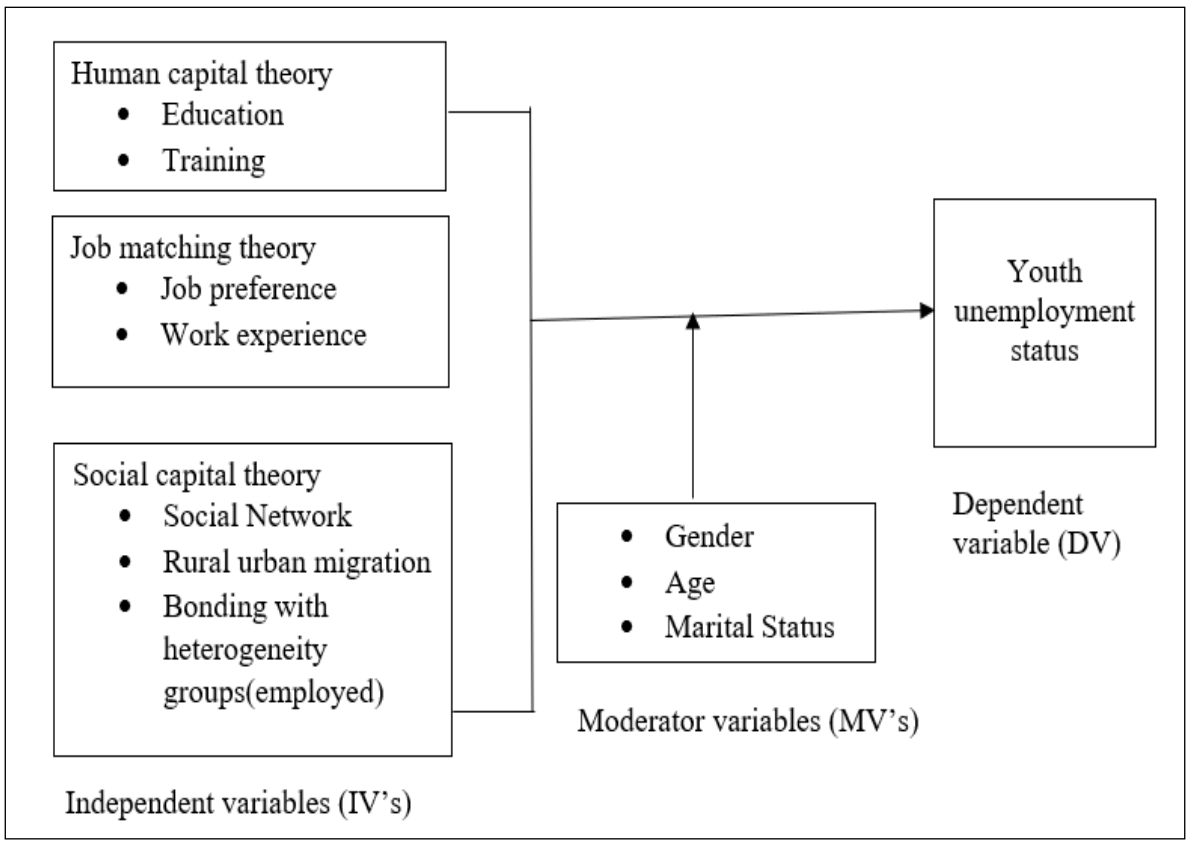

Fig.1 Theoretical Framework

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III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a quantitative research approach to achieve its objectives, with primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. The target population for the study was defined based on the age range that characterizes youth unemployment in the country, specifically individuals aged 18 to 34 years at the time of the survey. To determine the sample size, the researcher applied the formula proposed by Kothari [28] According to the World Bank, the youth unemployment rate in the Maldives was 18.41% in 2019 thus with a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, a sample size of 231 was selected for the study.

A. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researcher used simple random sampling to collect data and ensure an unbiased representation of the target population. A close-ended questionnaire with two sections was employed: Section A focused on demographic characteristics, and Section B included Likert-scale questions to measure the independent variables. IBM SPSS was used for data analysis, applying multiple regression and Pearson's correlation for hypothesis testing. Following Baker's recommendation, which suggests that 10% - 20% of the main sample is suitable for a pilot study [29], the researcher selected a sample size of approximately 10% (n=20) of the total population for the pilot study. The pilot study was conducted by distributing the questionnaires online. Reliability and validity tests were then performed using SPSS software.

➢ *Reliability Testing*

Researcher used Cronbach's Alpha to test the reliability of research instrument. In 1951 Lee Cronbach developed Cronbach's alpha, α (or coefficient alpha) which measures reliability, or internal consistency [30]. The researcher calculated alpha value using SPSS software and the alpha value given below. Since all the Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.7 the questionnaire is considered to be reliable and acceptable.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	**Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient**	**Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items**	**No of items**
Education	0.742	0.728	5
Training	0.845	0.842	5
Employment	0.825	0.820	4
Work experience	0.869	0.863	4
Rural urban migration	0.871	0.872	5
Social networks	0.896	0.903	4
Bonding with groups	0.829	0.828	5
Job preference	0.819	0.831	5

Table 2. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation

	ES	**E**	**T**	**WE**	**M**	**SN**	**BWG**	**JP**	**G**	**AG**	**MS**
ES	1										
E	.338**	1									
T	.165	.124	1								
WE	.576**	.188*	.016	1							
M	.190*	.182*	.247**	.185*	1						
SN	.280**	.168	.152	.191*	.066	1					
BWG	.241**	.125	-.014	.198*	.015	.396**	1				
JP	.191*	.112	.081	.045	.116	.207*	.066	1			
G	-.157	-.033	.130	-.039	-.106	-.128	-.216*	-.220*	1		
AG	-.057	.189*	.109	.124	.052	-.132	-.125	.033	-.010	1	
MS	-.060	.151	.045	.030	-.016	.051	-.136	.137	.146	.578**	1

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 231 sample size, 75% (n=173) of data was collected online, while 25% (n=58) was gathered through field data. For the field data, the researcher visited private educational institutes in the Maldives. Of the 173 online questionnaires sent, 62% (n=108) were completed, while 38% (n=65) went unanswered. However, due to unforeseen circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, only 17% (n=10) of the field data was successfully collected.

A total of 118 respondents participated in the research, with 65.3% female and 34.7% male. The majority (74.1%) were aged 18-34, while 21.2% were 35 or older, and 4.2% were under 17. Marital status showed 50% were married, 44.9% single, 4.8% divorced, and 0.8% widowed. Household sizes varied, with 56.8% having 2-4 members, 22.9% with 5-7 members, and 16.9% with 8-10 members. Household income was primarily in the MVR 10,000-15,000 and above MVR 20,000 ranges, with 28.8% earning MVR 15,000-20,000, and 8.5% earning below MVR 10,000. Among unemployed youth, 22.9% relied on parental income, 11.9% on their spouse's, and 15.3% earned through business.Regarding location, 43.2% were born in Malé, while 56.8% were from other islands. However, 68.6% lived in the Greater Malé Area, and 22% lived on other islands. Education levels varied, with 32.2% having completed a diploma, 23.7% with secondary education, 16.1% with a bachelor's degree, and 7.6% holding a master's degree. Employment status revealed that 67.8% were employed, while 9.3% were not interested in work. Among the unemployed, job search durations ranged from 2 weeks to over 6 months.

A. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation

Table II shows the point bi-serial correlation using Pearson's to analyze the relationship between employment status (dependent variable) and various independent variables, such as Education, Training, Work Experience, Migration, Social Networks, Bonding with Groups, and Job Preference.

Independent Variables: ES=Employment status, E=Education, T=Training, WE=Work experience, M=Migration, SN=Social Networks, BWG= Bonding with groups and JP=Job preference.Moderate variables: G=Gender, AG=Age group and MS=Marital status.**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient test results, indicating positive correlations among all independent variables, ranging from weak to strong. The correlations are as follows: education (0.338), training (0.165), work experience (0.576), migration (0.190), social networks (0.280), bonding with groups (0.241), and job preference (0.191). However, a negative correlation was found between gender (-0.157), age group (-0.057), and marital status (-0.060) with youth employment status. The strongest correlation is between work experience and youth employment status (r=0.576), suggesting that work experience has the greatest impact on employment status. The statistical test was significant ($p < 0.05$) for all variables except for training and the moderate variables gender, age group, and marital status. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for all variables except for training and the three moderate variables.

B. Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents the model summary of Multiple Regression Analysis. The value of R, or the multiple correlation coefficient, is 0.688, indicating a strong positive correlation and a good prediction of the dependent variable, youth employment status. The R-squared (R^2) value of 0.473 means that the independent variables explain 47.3% of the variance in youth employment status.

Table 3. Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.688[a]	.473	.424	2.87950

Table 4. ANOVA

ANOVA[a]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	797.281	10	79.728	9.616	.000[b]
	Residual	887.194	107	8.292		
	Total	1684.475	117			

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Table 4 shows the statistical significance of the regression model. The F-test result ($F(10, 107) = 9.616$, Sig = 0.000, $p < 0.05$) indicates that the independent variables statistically significantly predict the dependent variable, confirming that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 5 presents the unstandardized coefficients, which indicate how much the dependent variable youth employment status changes with each independent variable, assuming all other variables are constant. The unstandardized coefficients for education, training, work experience, social networks, bonding with groups, and job preference are positive, while those for migration, gender, age group, and marital status are not positive. The statistical significance of each variable is shown in the "Sig." column. Education (0.003) and work experience (0.000) are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), while the other variables Training (0.055), Migration (0.970), Social Networks (0.568), Bonding with Groups (0.637), Job Preference (0.181), Gender (0.154), Age Group (0.075), and Marital Status (0.866) are not statistically significant. As evidenced by an F-statistic of $F (10, 107) = 9.616$ with $p < 0.05$, suggesting the model is a good fit for the data. The model explains between 47.3% (R^2) and 68.8% (R) of the variance in youth employment status, with an adjusted R^2 of 42.4%. This means the independent variables account for 47.3% of the variation in youth employment status. Among the ten independent variables, education and work experience were significant predictors, with work experience being the most significant. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected for education and work experience, but accepted for the other variables.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research surveyed 118 respondents, with 34.7% male and 65.3% female. Among the youth age group (18-34 years), 74.1% were employed, 25% unemployed, and 10.2% not interested in working. The study aimed to identify social and demographic factors affecting youth unemployment and analyze their interrelationships. Theoretical frameworks like social capital, human capital, and job matching guided the research, identifying ten key social and demographic factors as independent variables. Using Pearson's correlation, six factors, education, job preference, work experience, social networks, rural-urban migration, and bonding with groups were positively correlated with youth employment status. Multiple regression analysis showed that education and work experience were statistically significant in determining youth employment, while other variables were not. To address youth unemployment, the study emphasized the importance of aligning the education system with labor market needs and improving vocational training. Many respondents highlighted the value of work experience in securing employment, suggesting the need for enhanced vocational education. Policymakers in the Maldives must prioritize developing policies that promote vocational training and strengthen collaborations with higher educational institutions, as these efforts are crucial for addressing youth unemployment.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research achieved its objectives, however the data collection from other islands was done through online questionnaires, which had a low response rate. For more comprehensive and conclusive results, future researchers are recommended to use field data collection methods across all atolls, rather than relying solely on online surveys.

Table 5. Coefficients

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	-2.481	3.360		-.738	.462	-9.141	4.179
	SUM_Education	.236	.078	.228	3.039	.003	.082	.389
	SUM_Training	.218	.112	.147	1.938	.055	-.005	.440
	SUM_Work_Experience	.522	.074	.527	7.010	.000	.374	.669
	SUM_Migration	-.003	.067	-.003	-.037	.970	-.136	.131
	SUM_Social_Networks	.042	.073	.047	.573	.568	-.103	.187
	SUM_Bonding_with_groups	.033	.069	.038	.474	.637	-.105	.170
	SUM_Job_Preference	.117	.087	.101	1.347	.181	-.055	.288
	Gender	-.880	.613	-.111	-1.437	.154	-2.095	.335
	Age Group	-.745	.414	-.166	-1.800	.075	-1.566	.075
	Marital Status	-.096	.567	-.016	-.169	.866	-1.221	1.029

a. Dependent Variable: SUM_Employment

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