A Gendered Analysis of Poverty among the Employed in South Africa

Jabulile Makhalima*

North-West University, South Africa. *Email: jabulile.makhalima@nwu.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Poverty is an obstinate issue in South Africa, with many employed individuals still living in poverty. The gender pay gap and employment in low-income jobs are some of the contributing factors to poverty, particularly for women who, on average, earn 30% less than men. Women are also more likely to be employed in low-income jobs in the care economy, which offers few benefits, such as domestic work or part-time work. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be employed in higher-paying jobs in traditionally male-dominated fields. This study seeks to analyse poverty among employed men and women in South Africa using data from the general household survey by statistics South Africa. The results of the regression analysis indicate that women of colour, particularly those with low levels of education and are potentially in precarious employment, are more likely to be poor compared to men. Policies advocating for gender equality in the workforce need to be reinforced while empowering women and men through education and training.

Keywords: Poverty, Gender, Employment
JEL Classifications: E24, J1, I320

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains a topical issue in the global discourse, especially focusing on the trends in the global south as some areas of the global economy have made significant strides in poverty alleviation, particularly during the pre-Covid-19 years. The importance of employment in the analysis of poverty is paramount, dispelling the notion that "most of the poor do not work" (Liu, 2022). This is especially true for women who, irrespective of their employment status, are considered more susceptible to poverty because of societal and gender-specific biases that are still entrenched in societies (United Nations, 2004; Khosla, 2014). These biases stem from various socio-economic, cultural, and political factors, such as the gender wage gap (Freeland and Harnois, 2020; Premarathna, 2018) where women are often paid less than men for the same job. Although the incidence of poverty among the employed has been widely researched, the extent of their poverty as well as the depth thereof requires attention (Eurofound, 2017). Ferrant et al.

(2014), who conducted a study in Ghana, deduce that men and women experience poverty differently, not only as a result of their gender differences, but also because women are more inclined to take on more unremunerated responsibilities as opposed to men. Parry and Gordon (2021) also found this to be the case for South African women who were particularly disadvantaged as they had to take on more household work and reduced working hours during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of these responsibilities are mostly in the form of a high dependency ratio, especially in patriarchal societies where women are considered to be caregivers; left with little or no time to allocate to earning an income (International Labor Organization, 2019; Hyde et al., 2020; Liu, 2022).

The gender wage gap, which continues to plague societies globally, further exacerbates economic inequalities between men and women, rendering women more vulnerable to poverty (United Nations, 2022). Women, particularly those of a child-bearing age, often forfeit opportunities to advance in the labour

force due to child-rearing obligations in the absence of childcare support (International Labor Organization, 2019). Coffey et al. (2018) further assert that the gender inequalities experienced in care work are likely to translate to discrimination in employment opportunities, the quality of jobs that are available to women and their wages. Gender discrimination is mostly endured by women not only because of their participation in the care economy, but they are also vulnerable to discrimination depending on their level of education or their ability to access financial services in the case of entrepreneurs. Be that as it may, women have made significant strides in accessing education, with tertiary enrolment rates surpassing those of their male counterparts (Forbes, 2022; Statistics South Africa (STATSSA), 2022) and this was reflected by their tertiary education graduate rates, with a total of 26.72% of women graduating globally as opposed to men, at 12.06% (World Economic Forum, 2023). These findings, however, are not reciprocated by the employment rates as fewer women are employed in certain fields such as STEM as opposed to men. Although women emerge to be more vulnerable to the scourge of working poverty, men are equally at risk with the scourge triggered by factors that are in some cases uncontrollable. Some of these are macroeconomic in nature such as a recession, institutional, such labour market policies, and childcare policies. Demographic characteristics such as rising divorce rates or dependency ratios are also instigators of poverty, though of a controllable nature (Polizzi et al., 2022). This study therefore provides a gendered analysis of poverty among the employed in South Africa using the latest general household data by Statistics South Africa. Variables of interest will include population group, marital status, education level and household size.

Section 2 will provide a literature overview of poverty among the employed by perusing previous literature on the gender differences relating to wages across different industries; the depth of poverty experienced by both men and women and why women are most likely to be poorer as opposed to men.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty and its prevalence have been well researched in both developed and developing countries alike; however, it is often perceived that the concept only comprises those who are, but not limited to, either unemployed, destitute and food deprived. The complex nature of the effects of poverty are so far-reaching that even those who are employed are sometimes not spared. The concept of in-work poverty or working poverty and the prevalence of the phenomenon have sparked research interest in poverty and employment studies, mostly with the aim of influencing policy and illuminating the plight of those suffering from the scourge. The quality of labour and not necessarily the quantity is what sets the non-poor from the poor. Therefore, those in precarious employment, seasonal or unremunerated employment are most likely to suffer the ramifications of poverty brought about by little to no income or unfair labour practices (Gammarano, 2019).

Women are inopportunely more prone to suffer from the scourge as opposed to men, particularly in instances where they are in precarious employment and are caregivers with limited support

(Filandri and Struffolino, 2019). Findings from a study in the United Kingdom and Spain found that women, particularly those in the youth cohort, were mostly represented in less secure jobs as opposed to men. Women were also found to have more uncertain labour market prospects and outcomes as opposed to men (Unt et al., 2022). The plight of the employed but poor women has been under-researched until the early 2010s, where a study by Khosla (2014) (cited by Liu, [2022]) found that some parts of the Canadian labour market had *feminised* and *racialised* labour traits with women, particularly working mothers being the poorest. Furthermore, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that working parents, particularly mothers, had to balance working from home and dedicating a considerable amount of time to childcare with childcare centres being closed (Hausmann et al., 2022).

Analysing poverty from a gendered perspective, particularly among the employed, is worthwhile as the latter and its associated consequences can be endured by both men and women due to differing needs and circumstances. Various factors contribute to their differences such as the gender pay gap pertaining to wages earned for similar work. Several developed and developing countries alike are making a concerted effort towards closing this gap (United Nations, 2022); with noticeable progress being made by two countries out of 146 countries that were ranked by the World Economic Forum in 2023. Albania registered a significant reduction in the wage gap at 85.8%, followed by Burundi with an 84.1% reduction. Significant reductions in the pay gap were also realised by bigger economies such as Iceland (78.4%), Singapore (78.3%), United Arab Emirates (77.6%), and the United States (US) (77.3%). South Africa, together with El Salvador, Bolivia realised the highest improvements in their scores by five percentage points and more with Croatia and Lesotho recording the lowest gaps closed at 49.7% and 49.4%, respectively (World Economic Forum, 2023). Such progress is indicative of the policies that are intentional in bridging the gender wage gap that persists.

In-work poverty can also be exacerbated by lack of education. For men and women alike, higher levels of education are linked with increased earnings potential, which may result in one exiting poverty although not immediately, especially for younger individuals who are novel to the labour force (Vaalavuo and Sirniö, 2022). Although artificial intelligence (AI) has been hailed for its ability to reduce poverty (Mhlanga, 2021), it is worthwhile to speculate regarding the unintended effects that it may have, or that it may already have on the workforce with people losing jobs and being replaced by robots; and the likelihood of people being demoted or working fewer hours due to the presence of this technology. The presence of AI may, to a certain extent, be assumed to be a likely instigator of poverty for men and women alike, irrespective of their level of education and training. Contrarily, AI has been found to be effective for workers with technical and vocational skills as opposed to those with a university degree. This is the case in labour markets such as those of Germany where a significant proportion of their workforce has specialised skills that command the development and implementation of AI towards making use of technical and vocational skills, in turn weathering the negative effects of technology on the workforce (The White

House, 2022). Another common factor that affects both men and women, albeit at varying degrees, is marital status. Results from a study by Polizzi et al. (2022) on the OECD countries and the EU-28 countries found that there was a negative and significant relationship between the living together variable and in-work poverty, indicating that co-habiting with a partner does not always render one insusceptible to the scourge of poverty irrespective of being employed. Contrarily, a study by Van Winkle and Struffolino, (2018), conducted in the US, found that women who were married were less susceptible to being working poor. Men, on the other hand, were more vulnerable to being poor, particularly those who were recently married.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data
The paper uses data collected by STATSSA in 2021. Statistics South Africa has several surveys that are conducted on a regular basis, one of which is the General Household Survey (GHS), which collects data from households on several variables on the head of household and the members of the households (in the persons data file). The GHS data is more convenient and appropriate to use as it collects data that includes employment variables as well as other household-level and socioeconomic variables usually used in cross-sectional analyses. The head of household variables will be the variables of interest for this study as they represent the position of the household. Data had to be filtered and cleaned to remain with the cohort of interest, which is that of the employed. This data comprised males and females, those who are still part of the labour force and those who had reported to be economically active. The initial GHS sample size comprised 35,265 cases, and once the data was filtered and cleaned to only include the cohort of interest, only 4279 cases remained.

3.2. Methodology
The study followed a cross-sectional method of analysis using secondary data collected by Statistics South Africa. The method of analysis is appropriate for the kind of study, taking into account the dichotomous nature of the variables under observation. Since the cohort of interest are those who are employed, STATSSA defines employment as those who are in paid employment, either full time or part time. These are individuals who are 15 years and older. Since the primary objective of the study is to estimate the poverty status of the employed, the three national poverty lines that were developed by Statistics South Africa are employed in order to estimate the poverty statuses of the employed at each poverty line. The details pertaining to the method of estimation for each poverty line are elaborated on below.

3.2.1. Estimation of the poverty statuses
The calculation of the poverty statuses of the employed is based on the three national poverty lines of 2021 devised by STATSSA (2021), namely the food poverty line (FPL), the lower bound poverty line (LBPL), and the upper bound poverty line (UBPL). The poverty lines change every year to adjust for changes in inflation and therefore the amount needed to afford the composition of the poverty line. The poverty status for each household is, however, calculated based on the three poverty lines given above.

The poverty lines are depicted in Table 1. Each household has a different poverty line that is determined by the household size; economies of scale and equivalence scales are not considered. The calculation of the head of household poverty statuses is adapted from Makhalima (2022) and was done by way of multiplying the FPL (R624) by the total household size. Should the income of the respondent be less than the household poverty line, then the household is poor. Should the income be higher than the poverty line, then the respondent is non-poor. The same formula is applied for the LBPL (R890) and the UBPL (R1 335). Should the income of the respondent be less than both poverty lines, then the respondent is considered poor. Should the income be higher than both poverty lines, then the respondent is non-poor. Therefore, based on this, poverty status was coded as follows: 0 for non-poor and 1 for poor.

The poverty statuses for each poverty line were therefore denoted as follows: UBPL: poverty status one (PS1); LBPL: poverty status two (PS2) and FPL: Poverty status three (PS3) after taking the household size and income into account.

The household poverty line is therefore calculated as follows;

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} y_i < \left(PL_F * HS \right) = poor\ household \tag{1}$$

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} y_i > \left(PL_F * HS \right) = non-poor\ household \tag{2}$$

Where $\sum_{i=1}^{n} y_i$ is the total household income contributed by the head of household i to n. PL is the poverty line to be used and where F is used as a subscript it implies that a FPL is used and where a subscript is LB, it means the lower bound, and where a subscript UB is used, it means the upper bound poverty line has been used in the calculation. Therefore, poverty status will be used as a dependent variable. Given that there are three poverty lines, three regression models will be estimated as explained in the model specification section.

3.2.2. Model specification
Table 2 illustrates the description and coding of the variables considered for this study. For the purpose of the analysis, the statistical package for social sciences version 28 was used given that data was cross-sectional and dichotomous in nature.

The method of analysis included demographic profiling of variables pertaining to the employed by way of descriptive statistics and a cross-tabulation. Secondly, given that the poverty status is a categorical variable, a conditional probability model was appropriate to investigate the determinants of poverty among the employed. We specify a binary logistic regression model as follows;

Table 1: The national poverty lines of 2021 by STATSSA

Poverty line	Rand amount per month (2021 values)
Food poverty line	R624
Lower bound poverty line	R890
Upper bound poverty line	R1 335

Table 2: Variable coding and description

Variable	Description	Coding
Race (X_1)	Race	Race was a categorical variable with three sub-categorical variables. 1=African; 2=Coloured; 3=Indian, 4=White
Gender (X_2)	Gender	Gender was a categorical variable with two sub-categorical variables. 1=Male; 2=Female
MS (X_3)	Marital status	Marital status was a categorical variable with four sub-categorical variables: 1=legally married, 2 living together; 3 divorced; 4 widowed, 5 single
Education level (X_4)	Education level	Education level was a categorical variable with four sub-categorical variables: 0=No education, 1=Primary school, 2=High school 3=Technical Vocational Education and training 4. Diploma, 5=University and above

In the logistic classification model, the response variable is a Bernoulli random variable: It can take only two values, either 1 or 0. Therefore, poverty status as the dependent variable is denoted as 0 for non-poor and 1 for poor.

$$\frac{p}{p-1} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon_1 \qquad (1)$$

Where $\dfrac{p}{p-1}$ is the poverty status.

β = the coefficient (or slope) of the predictor variables.
X_n = shows the respective categorical variables.

The explanatory variables $X_1 \ldots\ldots X_4$ represent the characteristics of the employed, while β_0, β_1 represent the beta coefficients. The gender variable (X_1) had two categories, namely the male denoted by 0 and 1 for female. The racial group variable (X_2) comprised four categories, namely the African, coloured, Asian, and white. The marital status variable (X_3) was characterised by four categories, namely the legally married, living together, divorced, widowed, and single. The education level (X_4) had five categories classified as no education, primary school, secondary school, technical and vocational training qualification, diploma qualification and university qualification.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 depicts the results of the descriptives for the continuous variable component. Gender is the first variable. At least 65.9% were male compared to 34.1% who were female. The frequency results on the population group indicate that the majority of respondents were African (83.5%) followed by coloured persons and whites who made up 7.3% and 7.2%, respectively. The results on the marital status depict that at least 38.9% of the respondents were married, 35.8% were single, while 14.0% were co-habiting. The results further indicate that 6.1% were widowed, while 5.2% were divorced. The final categorical variable was the education level. The majority of respondents (58.2%) had a secondary school level of education, followed by those with only a primary school level of education at 19.3% At least 5.7% had a diploma from a higher education institution, followed by those

Table 3: Descriptives statistics of the selected variables

Category	Factor	Percentage
Gender	Male	65.9
	Female	34.1
Population group	African	83.5
	Coloured	7.3
	Asian	2.1
	white	7.2
Marital status	Married	38.9
	Living together	14.0
	Divorced	5.2
	Widowed	6.1
	Single	35.8
Education level	No education	8.8
	Primary school	19.4
	High school	58.1
	Technical vocational education and training	3.0
	Diploma	5.7
	University and above	5.0
PS 1	Poor	15.4
	Non-poor	84.6
PS 2	Poor	22.8
	Non-Poor	77.2
PS 3	Poor	32.4
	Non-poor	67.6

with a university bachelor's degree and above (5%). Only 3% had a qualification from a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college, with 8% with no education and training. The final categorical variables were the poverty statuses of the employed based on the three poverty lines by STATSSA. The results for the poverty status categories show that only 15.4% of the employed were poor based on PS1; however, the proportion of those who were poor increased in accordance with the subsequent poverty lines, as depicted by PS 2 (22.8%) and PS3 (32.4%).

Table 4 illustrates the crosstabulation between PS 3 and the categorical variables under discussion. The decision to use PS 3 (which was derived from the UBPL) as opposed to the other two poverty statuses (PS 1 and 2) is due to its relevance as it incorporates expenditure on both food and non-food items. The results show that the African racial group had the highest poverty rate within the racial group category (37.2%), followed by the coloured (17.6%) and Indian racial groups (4.5%). The African racial group was also found to be the most vulnerable to poverty when measured against the poverty status variable (95.7%), while the respondents in the white racial group were all non-poor when measured against the race variable (0%) and the poverty status variable (0%). These results were expected since not only are Africans the most represented in the sample, but also because of the economic hardships faced by this racial group. (Liu, 2022) also arrived at similar findings. The results of the P-value further indicate that the race variable was significant at a 1% level of significance. The second variable is gender. The results reveal that employed females were the most vulnerable to poverty within the gender category (44.2%), while males were the most vulnerable to poverty within poverty status 3 (53.4%). These results were unexpected as men are often better off financially compared to women. The results of the P-value further indicate that the gender variable was significant at a 1% level of significance, accentuating

Table 4: Crosstabulation between PS 3 and the selected variables

Variables	Categories	% within variable		% within poverty status 3		Chi-square test results
		Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	
Race	African/black	62.8	37.2	77.6	95.7	<0.001
	Coloured	82.4	17.6	8.9	4.0	
	Indian	95.5	4.5	2.9	0.3	
	White	100	0	10.6	0.0	
Gender	Male	73.7	26.3	71.8	53.4	<0.001
	Female	55.8	44.2	28.2	46.6	
Marital status	Legally married	74.0	26.0	42.6	31.1	<0.001
	Living together	59.2	40.8	12.3	17.7	
	Divorced	69.2	30.8	5.3	4.9	
	Widowed	47.9	52.1	4.3	9.8	
	Single	67.0	33.0	35.5	36.5	
Education level	No education	58.9	41.1	7.6	11.1	0.003
	Primary school	65.7	34.3	18.8	20.5	
	Secondary school	69.0	31.0	59.4	55.6	
	TVET	69.8	30.2	69.8	30.2	
	Diploma	69.3	30.7	5.8	5.4	
	University qualification	70.2	29.8	3.5	1.5	

the susceptibility of the employed to poverty. The third variable was marital status. The results reveal that those who were widowed were the most susceptible to poverty within the variable (52.1%) compared to the other variables in the category. Those who were single, on the other hand, were unable to afford both food and non-food items as defined by poverty status 3. These results were expected due to the forgone benefits of shared responsibilities. It could be that the respondents are breadwinners with a high dependency ratio, are underemployed or burdened by debt. The results of the P-value further indicate that the marital status variable was significant at a 1% level of significance the final category was the education level. Those with no level of education together with those with only a primary school level of education were the most inclined to poverty within the education level category at 41.1% and 3%, respectively. Lastly, those with only a secondary schooling had the highest poverty rate within the poverty status at 55.6%, followed by those with a qualification from a TVET college at 30.2%. Individuals with lower levels of education are often vulnerable to poverty, particularly those with a secondary school qualification. This assertion is further substantiated by the lower poverty rates for those respondents with a tertiary level of education (university degree: 5.4%, diploma: 1.5%). The results of the P-value also indicate that education variable is significant at a 5% level of significance.

4.1. Results of the Binary Logistic Regression Models
Table 5 below depicts the results of the three regression models that were derived using the three national poverty lines by STATSSA. The first variable was population group. The African sub-category took the place of the coefficient. The results of the coefficients indicate that employed coloureds (PS: 1-1.000, PS 2: −1.106, PS3: −1.063), Indians (PS:1 −1.843, PS 2: −2.027, PS 3: −2.317) and whites (PS1: −19.114, PS2: −19.696, PS 3: −20.280) had a lower probability of being poor across the three regression models. The results further show that employed white respondents had the lowest risk of falling into poverty based on the odds ratio results for regression 3 (.000), further asserting the cross-tabulation results in Table 5. The results of the P-values further show that the coloured and Indian categories are significant

at one and 5% levels of significance across the three regression models. The white category was only significant at a 1% level of significance for regression 2. The results for the racial group category were expected as whites and Asians have also been found to be less likely to be poor based on a study by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). The second variable was that of gender. The male subcategory took the place of the coefficient. The results of the positive beta coefficients indicate that females have a higher probability of being poor across the three regression models (PS1: 0.672, PS2: 0.499, PS3: 0.505). These results are further substantiated by the results of the odds ratio (PS 1:1.958, PS2: 1.535, PS3:1.658) indicating the susceptibility of women to poverty. These results were expected as females are more vulnerable to being poor compared to their male counterparts, irrespective of their employment status. It can also be assumed that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated their poverty. A study conducted by Bleweis et al. (2020) in the United States also found that women, particularly those of colour, are more likely to be poor compared to men irrespective of their employment status. Khosla (2014) arrived at similar findings in a study conducted in Toronto.

The fourth variable of interest is marital status; the married categorical variable took the place of the constant. The positive beta results reveal that the employed are more likely to be poor irrespective of their marital status across the three regression models. The results of the odds ratio (PS2: 2.053, PS3: 2.230) for the widowed depict the pronounced risk of being poor when widowed irrespective of being employed. The results of the P-values further reveal that there is a positive relationship between poverty and marital status at the 1% and 5% levels of significance and this is the case for all the categorical variables. The results for the living together sub-categorical variable were the least expected, particularly due to the benefits of economies of scale that can be enjoyed through co-habitation. The outcomes of the living together category further asserts the findings by Fremstad (2016) that having a partner does not necessarily reduce the likelihood or probability of being poor. Polizzi et al., (2022) further deduce that economies of scale may further be diminished in the event

Table 5: Regression models

Independent variables	food poverty status (PS 1)			lower bound poverty status (PS 2)			upper bound poverty status (PS 3)		
	B	Sig	Exp (B)	B	Sig	Exp (B)	B	Sig	Exp (B)
Coloured	−1.000	<0.001*	0.368	−1.106	<0.001*	0.455	−1.063	<0.001*	0.345
Indian	−1.843	0.011**	0.158	−2.027	<0.001*	0.253	−2.317	<0.001*	0.099
White	−19.114	0.993	0.000	−19.696	<0.001*	0.396	−20.280	0.993	0.000
Gender (Female)	0.672	<0.001*	1.958	0.499	<0.001*	1.535	0.505	<0.001*	1.658
Living together	0.363	0.011**	1.437	0.391	0.002**	1.478	0.617	<0.001*	1.853
Divorced	0.470	0.045**	1.600	0.584	0.005**	1.793	0.536	0.005*	1.709
Widowed	0.641	<0.001*	1.899	0.719	<0.001*	2.053	0.802	<0.001*	2.230
Single	0.318	0.019**	1.374	0.450	<0.001*	1.569	0.355	<0.001*	1.426
Primary school	−0.251	0.139	0.778	−0.126	0.408	0.882	−0.099	0.485	0.906
Secondary school	−0.420	0.005**	0.657	−0.322	0.016**	0.725	−0.266	0.034**	0.766
TVET	−0.199	0.482	0.820	−0.518	0.053***	0.596	−0.435	0.071***	0.647
Diploma	−0.345	0.157	0.708	−0.304	0.160	0.738	−0.169	0.392	0.845
University and above	−0.021	0.930	0.979	0.047	0.829	1.048	−0.090	0.659	0.914
Household size	0.367	<0.001*	1.443	0.367	<0.001*	1.444	0.369	<0.001*	1.446
Constant	−3.149	<0.001*	0.043	−2.637	<0.001*	0.072	−2.099	<0.001*	0.123

Note: Dependent variable: Poverty Status 1,2, 3 (0=non-poor 1=poor), Predictors: (constant), Race, gender, marital status, education level, Reference categories: Race (African); Gender (Male) Marital status (Married), Education level (No education) P-values: *Significant at 0.001 level of significance. **Significant at 0.05 level of significance. ***Significant at 0.1 level of significance.

where a couple decides to have children and one of the partners, in most cases the women, leave the labour force to care for children.

Education level was the fifth variable under observation. The 'no education' category took the place of the coefficient. The negative beta results reveal that those with a primary school, a secondary school level of education, a TVET qualification as well as those with a diploma are less likely to be poor. It could be that these are individuals who have been part of the labour force for many years and have progressed in their respective occupations or have empowered themselves by way of work-based training. The results of the positive beta coefficient (0.047) and the odds ratio (1.048) under regression 2 for those with a university qualification were unexpected as they suggest that those with a higher level of education are unable to afford non-food items as most of their income is allocated to expenditure on food items. It could be that this is a segment within the sampled population that has recently joined the labour force and are earning a low income, they may be underemployed or in precarious employment. The beta (−0.090) and odds ratio (0.914) results for regression 3, however, are in line with the findings by Faharuddin and Endrawati (2022) and Makhalima (2022), who also found that individuals with a higher level of education have a lower probability of being poor. The final variable was household size. The results of the beta coefficient reveal that household size is a precipitator of poverty. The larger the household of the employed, the higher the likelihood of poor being, irrespective of their gender and more especially if they are the breadwinner.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study analysed the poverty status among the employed in South Africa using the 2021 GHS data collected by Statistics South Africa. The findings of the study indicate that that although men were poor based on the crosstabulation results, women, particularly those of colour, are poor and have a higher probability of being poor, confirming the worldwide consensus of the susceptibility of women to poverty. The study also found that the employed were vulnerable to poverty, regardless of their marital status, which was unexpected, particularly for those who are married. The employed were also found to be non-poor if they had a higher level of education and poor if they had a secondary level of education or lower. This was expected and has also been found to be the case by other similar studies. The odds of being poor, however, were lower for those with lower levels of education, which was unexpected, this could be as a result of being employed. It can therefore be deduced that the employed are indeed vulnerable to being poor, more especially women of colour. It can also be deduced that the majority of the employed do not have a tertiary level of education, and therefore the onus is on the employers and the various sectors to empower the labour force with critical skills, particularly women, which will, in turn, bridge the gender gap.

Industries can also look into equipping their labour force with industry-specific micro-credentials, more especially for women without advanced formal education and this may consequently assist them to be on par with those with a tertiary level of education. More support will, in turn, be required by women looking to advance themselves in the form of childcare for mothers. Employers and industry therefore need to be sensitised to the needs of working mothers and caregivers and to provide the necessary support. Poverty alleviation can also be achieved if industry considers the effects of adopting AI and its potential threat on the labour force. One way to guard against the loss of employment is to equip the workforce with skills that will align with the adoption of AI, as well as skills to manage the use of AI. This will, in turn, keep workers relevant, upskilled, and employed.

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