

Unemployment Among Youths in Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Sociological Insights

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Abstract: Unemployment under youth is considered one of the most significant issues in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. This review article aims to examine the main socio-economic, educational, and political factors that influence youth unemployment rates, their effects on youth's social and economic well-being, and the politics and initiatives that could reduce the region's unemployment rate. The article approaches the mentioned phenomenon from a sociological perspective by focussing on important ideas and theories to offer an in-depth investigation regarding its roots and implications. A qualitative desktop research method was conducted to investigate the main topic of the study. In addition, the collected data was investigated using a thematic content analysis. A number of essential issues, including an over reliance on the petroleum industry, educational mismatch within the labour market, and the reliance public sector employment are key reasons beyond youth unemployment in the mentioned region. This review study comes to the conclusion that the region's unemployment rate has reached a critical point. Public and private sectors have to find effective pathways to create a stable future for the population in question.

Keywords: Unemployment, Youths, Educational Mismatch, Economic and Political instability, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

1. Introduction

Globally speaking, youth unemployment is a serious problem in the Iraqi Kurdistan regions. The lack of employment opportunities negatively impacts the mental and economic well-being of young people (Dzaye, 2023). Currently, the international community generally endorses the right to labour and acknowledges it as a fundamental right and this revolves around the International Declaration of the Rights of Man (IDRM). At the same time, youths of any nation, as a permanent societal dynamic potential, are one of the most important keys within society (Lake et al., 2021).

Specifically, in Arab Islamic societies, and more particularly within the historical and cultural characteristics depicted by scholars specialized in kinsman, the treatment of the societal subject in question, has a sociological advantage as well. However, many Islamists encourage the participation of youth in constructive labour and are believed to be worthy of being rewarded in the afterlife (Yaman, 2021; Freajah, 2020).

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Moreover, in Islamic societies, Islamic teachings highlight the significance of financial stability and safeguarding under young Muslims from destitution, lack of education, and ethical decay, with the aim of preserving the identity and cultural heritage of the Islamic society. Since, Kurdistan Region is part of Arab Islamic Iraq, the above also counts for the Kurdish society.

1.1 Research Problem

Unemployment is considered one of the most significant issues. Individuals in all societies experience negative social and psychological effects in terms of unemployment. Iraq, to be more specific, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, has been under the effects of tyranny in the eighties, a series of trade sanctions in the nineties, and the war of 2003 in particular, thus, the mentioned happenings have been the main reasons for the deterioration of the whole society economically, socially, politically, and so on. The agony of unemployment has been the most essential consequence of these reasons. In 2024, a population growth census in Iraq, including Kurdistan Region records a high percentage of working-age youths, The percentage of the working age, was between 15 to 64 years and is 63.7% (Baban, 2024). In another latest report shared by The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (2025), the unemployment remains an issue in Iraq including Kurdistan region. Young adults face a 27.2% unemployment level, part of which is stimulated by an imbalance in the jobs marketplace and an insufficiency of qualified workers.

In the current paper, the situations of unemployment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and the consequences of this phenomenon are discussed based on previous works conducted by different researcher, institutions and associations. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), unemployment pertains to an individual who is "not currently employed, is seeking employment, and is ready and able to work". Unemployment is a societal problem, not only for the jobless themselves but for everyone in the same society (ILO, 2023). Additionally, this results in a lack of social integration, which is an indicator of increasing mental health problems and a decline in optimism among the jobless individuals in the society.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are the following:

1. From a sociological perspective, what are the socio-economic, educational, and political factors that affect unemployment among youth in the Kurdistan region of Iraq?
2. What impact have unemployment on mental, social, and economic well-being of youth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?
3. What policies and interventions are being implemented by the government and NGOs to reduce unemployment among youth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the above research questions, the aim of this review article is to deal with the complex problems of youth unemployment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq through a detailed sociological review. Therefore, the study outlines the following research aims:

1. Identifying key contributing factors: To analyse the socio-economic, educational, and political factors that significantly influence youth unemployment rates in the region.

2. Assessing the impact on social and economic well-being: To evaluate how unemployment affects the social and economic well-being under young people, including aspects such as mental health, social cohesion, and economic stability.
3. Assessing the current policies and interventions: by evaluating the efficacy of present programs and policies in order to lower youth unemployment and to highlight the shortcomings and/or opportunities for development.

After discussing the goals, the current paper aims to give readers a thorough grasp of youth unemployment and practical guidance on how to enhance the employment opportunities and the overall well-being of youths in the Iraq's Kurdistan Region.

2. Literature Review: Unemployment Among Youths from A Sociological Perspective

Youth unemployment is a serious issue that reflects broader societal patterns. Sociological theories offer interesting insights into the factors behind unemployment through the study of the interactions between social institutions and individual agencies. In addition to offering a thorough grasp of the definitions and essential concepts from a sociological perspective, this section explores four significant sociological perspectives to better understand the complexities surrounding youth unemployment through structural functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and postmodernism.

2.1 Definitions and Concepts from A of Sociological Perspective on Youth Unemployment

In order to comprehend unemployment from a sociological standpoint, one needs to review essential concepts that clarify how relationships and societal systems impacts (un)-employment. The followings explain a number of crucial concepts associated with unemployment from a sociological perspective:

1. Youth unemployment: in a general sense, unemployment can be defined as the condition where individuals who are actively seeking work are unable to find employment. From a sociological perspective, it also encompasses the social, economic, and psychological impacts of not being employed. However, unemployment among youths refers to the situation where individuals aged between 15-24 who are actively seeking employment are unable to find work. It is often higher than the general unemployment rate due to factors like inexperience, lack of skills, and economic fluctuations (International Labour Organization, 2023).
2. Education Mismatch: when there is a discrepancy between the kind or degree of education young people obtain and the skills that employers require, it is known as educational mismatch. This mismatch can lead to higher youth unemployment as graduates struggle to find relevant employment (Green & Henseke, 2014).
3. Social Exclusion: refers to the marginalisation and lack of access to social, cultural, and economic resources that some group such as unemployed young people experience. It includes the broader effects of unemployment on an individual's ability to participate fully in a society (Sen, 2000).
4. Precarious Employment: refers to positions that are unstable, pay poorly, and do not guarantee a job, which are often prevalent among young worker. Their financial security and long-term career possibilities are impacted by this kind of work (Standing, 2011).

5. Labor Market Segmentation: this idea argues that the labour market is divided into segments, the primary and secondary labour markets. Young people are frequently employed in the secondary market, which provides lower salary, fewer benefits, and less work stability (Piore, 1979).
6. Social Mobility: the ability of individuals to move up or down on the social and economic ladder is named as social mobility. High rates of youth unemployment may hinder social mobility by limiting opportunities for progress in the workforce, as well as well-paying jobs and economic advancement (Bourdieu, 1984).
7. Identity and Self-Esteem: are two concepts that are very crucial in understanding how unemployment impacts young people. Unemployment can affect youths' sense of self-worth and identity, leading to psychological distress and a diminished sense of social belonging (Goffman, 1963).
8. Social Capital: this concept can be described as the networks, interactions, and social ties that facilitate access to opportunities and resources. Strong social capital can improve youths' employment prospects, but a lack of social ties can make unemployment worse (Putnam, 2000).
9. Alienation: this concept established by prominent sociologist Karl Marx, emphasises the alienation of people experience in a capitalist society from others, themselves, and their place work. Youth unemployment can be made by a lack of fulfilling employment and stable finances (Marx, 1844).
10. Youth Bulge: this term is used to describe a demographic situation in which a significant amount of the population is less than thirty years. This bulge might strain the labour market and increase the risk of high youth unemployment rates (Cincotta & Engelman, 2000).

Thus, by examining the structural, social, and psychological factors that contribute to youths' work opportunities, the aforementioned sociological explanations offer an in-depth knowledge of youth unemployment. Additionally, in order to address youth unemployment, it also presents a comprehensive approach that addresses various components and how they interact with each other.

2.2 Unemployment Explained from a Sociological Perspective Theories

Examining youth's unemployment from a sociological lens requires dipping into theories that investigate the interactions between institutions, social structures, and personal experiences. This paragraph addresses the various manners in which sociological theories; including postmodernism, structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism explains unemployment among young people.

2.2.1 Structural Functionalism

According to Durkheim (1893), structural functionalism claims that society can be seen as a complex system made up of interrelated elements that work together to ensure social order and stability. According to this viewpoint, unemployment particularly among youths, might be seen as an indication that a social structure has failed to function appropriately (Durkheim, 1893).

Furthermore, from a functionalist perspective, youths' unemployment can be a sign of a mismatch between the job market and the educational system. Young job seekers' talents and the companies required could differ if education fail at providing students with the skills they need or failed to adapt to changes in the

economy. These disparities throw the social order off balance and draw attention to the need for more consistency with labour market, in addition, demands and educational reform (Parsons, 1951).

2.2.2 Conflict Theory

Karl Marx (1867) influenced the conflict theory, which is concerned with conflicts that arise between various social classes and the inherent differences of capitalist systems. According to Karl Marx, economic structures promote competition and division, which can make unemployment among vulnerable groups such as youths even worse (Marx, 1867). Furthermore, from a conflict theory viewpoint, an unequal distribution of opportunities and resources is the cause of youth unemployment. The already powerful and wealthy tend to gain more from the capitalism system, whereas young people, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds, may encounter obstacles when trying to get into the workforce. According to Weber (1946) asserts that the stratification system maintains inequality, which has an impact on social mobility and employment opportunities (Weber, 1946).

2.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism

This theory, developed by Blumer (1969) and Mead (1934) that emphasises how social meanings and everyday interactions influence people's views and actions. This viewpoint investigates the relationship between youth unemployment and society attitudes and labels (Mead, 1934). Thus, symbolic interactionism emphasises how young people's self-perceptions and job-seeking behaviour are influenced by labels and cultural expectations. Youths who are called "lazy" or "unemployable," for instance, may internalise these labels and experience a decline in motivation and self-esteem. Such labelling, according to Becker (1963), can result in a self-fulfilling prophesy, where people live up to the expectations put on them and so prolong their unemployed status (Becker, 1963).

2.2.4 Postmodernism

According to Lyotard (1979), postmodernism emphasises the fragmented and inconsistent characteristics of contemporary society while challenging the narratives and the universal principles of modernity. This viewpoint emphasises the importance of subjectivity and identity while criticizing the traditional approaches of understanding unemployment (Lyotard, 1979). Thus, in other words, postmodernism contends that no one paradigm or story can adequately explain youth unemployment. Rather, it is needed, to take into account a variety of viewpoints, such as the impact of changes in the worldwide economy, shifting cultural norms, and the fragmented traits of identity. For example, the sharing economy and unconventional job arrangements provide youths with opportunities and challenges that traditional models have ignored. According to Bauman (2000), the state of the economy today promotes a "liquid" labour market where uncertainty and fluidity have taken the role of predictability and stability (Bauman, 2000). All in all, the above-mentioned various and complex sociological theories provide explanations for youth's unemployment. The conflict theory focusses on structural inequality, while structural functionalism emphasises systemic mismatches, and symbolic interactionism examines the significance of social identities, and the lastly postmodernism challenges conventional narratives and stresses the fragmented structure of contemporary employment. However, by combining these viewpoints, men would be able to

better understand the many issues that youth are experiencing in the labour market, and obtain an in-depth understanding of the complex factors that supports youth unemployment.

2.3 Youth Unemployment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

2.3.1 Historical Context

The historical context of youth unemployment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq reflects a complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors that have shaped the region's labour market. An overview of the main historical changes and their effects on youth employment is provided in this paragraph, along with a discussion of significant occurrences, current developments, issues, and responses associated with youth unemployment in the region. Following post-war reconstruction, early economic challenges were noticeable in Iraqi Kurdistan. After the Gulf War (1990–1991) and the no-fly zone was established, the Kurdistan area went through a phase of development and rehabilitation efforts. Rebuilding infrastructure and stabilising the economy, which had been severely damaged by years of violence and sanctions, were the characteristics of the 1990s. Despite these attempts, the economy was still facing several obstacles, such as high rates of youth unemployment (Ibrahim, 2007, pp. 91-113). Another issue is that youth in this region experience high rates of unemployment as a result of political unrest and the effects of the Iraq War. Additionally, the Kurdistan Region faced substantial transformation during the 2003 war and the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Additionally, after obtaining greater autonomy by the Kurdish authorities, they started to have more control over the region's economic policies. Nonetheless, the economy was significantly impacted by the political unrest that emerged after the war. The influx of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) strained resources and public services, exacerbating unemployment issues (McDowall, 2004). Nevertheless, there was a period of economic growth and oil dependency in the period of mid-2000s, as the oil sector fuelled economic growth in the Kurdistan Region. The discovery and exploitation of oil reserves provided significant revenue, which spurred infrastructure development and increased investment in various sectors. However, this economic growth was accompanied by a heavy reliance on the oil sector, which created imbalances in the economy and limited the development of other sectors (Gunter, 2011, pp. 48-60).

Furthermore, other trends that effected youth unemployment together with the government responses can be identified as complex problems. According to Erim (2015, p. 50), in the Kurdistan Region's youth unemployment increased throughout the 2010s. Even with economic growth, benefits were not shared equally, and many young people had trouble securing a stable employment. The region's educational system faced challenges in aligning curricula with labour market needs, leading to a skills mismatch. In an attempt to solve these problems, the government launched a number of programs, such as job development and vocational training, although their effectiveness was limited.

According to a study conducted by Dzaye (2023, p.169), regarding the significance of matching educational programs to labour-market in Kurdistan region of Iraq. She argues that there is the need to make educational curricula aligned with the needs of the labour market to reduce mismatch between education and employment among youths. Her suggestions are the need to enhance public-private partnerships, improvement in education-especially enhancing the curriculum-encouraging entrepreneurship, encouraging the youth to build their skills, social protection measures, promoting

governmental programs, promoting monitoring by the ministry, and spreading the word on the importance of labour unions (Dzaye, 2023, p.170).

2.3.2 Current Situation

Currently, as we live in 2024, youth unemployment is still a major problem in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Recent reports indicate that young people's unemployment, especially for those between the ages of 15 and 24, is significantly higher than the national average. Youth unemployment rates in Kurdistan Region of Iraq are estimated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and a number of local sources to be between 20 and 25 percent. This indicates that the problem persists despite numerous government initiatives to address it (International Labour Organization, 2023). Another article by Edward and Rawanduzi (2018) indicates that the unemployment rate among young people in the Kurdistan Region is between the ages of 15 and 24 is 18 percent. While almost half of the population is younger than 19 years. They add, that the frustration among youths will only increase if chances are not made available to them. However, the reasons for this high rate of unemployment goes back to the past years. This started in 2014 when the region lost its budget from the central government, and it has been made worse by the 2016 crisis, the costly campaign against ISIS, and the loss of oil income in Kirkuk (Edward & Rawanduzi, 2018).

In addition to that, a recent survey by Rudaw Research Centre (2023) on ‘‘Youth and Employment Situation in the Kurdistan Region’’, cited that (43.9%) of young people in the Kurdistan Region are employed, (26.6%) are students, and (15.7%) are housewives. The unemployment rate among young individuals is (13.6%), while it is (0.2%) among the disabled and ill. There is a significant gender gap in employment, with (61.5%) of males and only (16.1%) of females working. The unemployment rate among females is (13.5%). Soran has the highest rate of employed youth (51.7%), followed by Zakho (50%) and Raperin (47%). Erbil has a high percentage of employed youth (46.8%), followed by Sulaymaniyah (42.2%) and Duhok (41%). Halabja has the lowest employment rate, followed by Garmian. Garmian has the highest rate of youth unemployment at (29.6%), followed by Duhok at (21.8%), Raparin, and Zakho at (16.7%) (Rudaw, 2023, pp. 2-14).

According to Al-Muhsin (2023) and Kassem (2023), in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq the primary factors that contributes the high unemployment rate among youths is due to the oil dependency, economic instability and educational mismatch (Al-Muhsin, 2023, pp. 45-58; Kassem, 2023, pp.77-93). Furthermore, other recent developments and ongoing challenges have increased the unemployment among youths as the Kurdistan Region has experienced more difficulties, such as the 2014–2015 financial crisis, which was made worse by declining oil prices, and the responsibility of handling a substantial influx of internally displaced people and refugees as a result of regional wars. The COVID-19 epidemic put further burden on the economy, resulting in higher unemployment rates and worsening economic conditions. Youth unemployment remains a critical issue, with many young people facing barriers to entering the job market (Al-Tamimi, 2020).

Looking at the future prospects and policy directions, future efforts to reduce unemployment among youths in the Kurdistan Region will need to take a multipronged strategy, such as expanding the economy beyond oil, funding for education, career training, and generating more equitable work opportunities for youths.

Besides, as Hama (2021) argues, the policymakers in the Kurdistan region still have to keep looking into different ways to enlarge job opportunities among youths and to promote economic growth on long-term (Hama, 2021). Every point mentioned above about the historical background and current state of youth unemployment in Iraqi Kurdistan is influenced by a number of political and financial developments that have had an effect on the labour market. Next, developing effective policies that reduce youth unemployment, promote economic stability, and progress in the region requires an awareness of historical factors ranging from the post-war reconstruction phase to the challenges of recent economic crises.

2.4 Factors Contributing to Youth Unemployment

In Kurdistan region of Iraq, unemployment among youths is a crucial problem that is impacted by different social and economic factors. However, it is important to comprehend these factors in order to expand the strategies that address the issue in question.

2.4.1 Economic Factors

The high prevalence of youth unemployment in the region may be primarily caused by political unrest and instability. Periods of instability in politics and conflicts, including tensions with the central government in Baghdad and run-ins with militant groups, have occurred in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Therefore, and because of this uncertainty, young people have fewer job possibilities, which has hindered economic growth and prevented foreign investment (International Crisis Group, 2022).

The region's dependency on petroleum revenue is another economic aspect that affects youth unemployment, as mentioned previously. The economy of the Kurdistan Region is heavily reliant on oil exports, making it depending on fluctuations of the international oil price. As a result, the recent decline in oil prices has led to reduced government revenue and budget cuts, which has an impact on public sector employment and development programs that may create jobs for youth (World Bank, 2021).

In addition, further economic aspect influencing the high rate of youth unemployment is the insufficient economic diversification. In Iraqi Kurdistan, despite sporadic attempts to diversify the economy, the majority of the population still depends on the governmental sector and the oil industry. Moreover, the lack of a diversified economy limits opportunities in other industries such as manufacturing, technology, and services, which are needed to handle the growing number of job seekers (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2023). The lack of infrastructure and investments in this region is another economic factor influencing youth unemployment. Inadequate infrastructure and insufficient levels of private sector investment continue to hinder job creation and expansion in the economy. Modern infrastructure is necessary to support company operations and entrepreneurship, both of which are essential for creating jobs (UNDP, 2021).

2.4.2 Social Factors

One of the main social factors that leads to high rates of youth's unemployment in the region is the educational mismatch. As there is a significant mismatch between the skills acquired through the educational system and the skills demanded by the labour market. Many graduates lack practical experience and vocational training, which limits their employability. Educational reforms are needed to align curricula with market needs (UNESCO, 2022). The demographics of the young people in the area

are another social aspect that raises youth unemployment. With a high percentage of youth, the population of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is extremely youthful. Due to the fact that there are more young individuals entering the workforce than there are open positions, this demographic trend puts more strain on the labour market (Kurdistan Region Statistics Office, 2023).

Another social factor that influences unemployment among youths is related to the Kurdish social and cultural norms. Traditional family structures and expectations, among other social and cultural aspects can have an impact on youth employment. These standards can sometimes limit the type of occupations that are considered acceptable or feasible for young people, particularly women (Middle East Institute, 2021).

Furthermore, the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2022) reports that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq offers limited opportunities for young people to start their own businesses. Even while entrepreneurship has the ability to reduce unemployment, there are still obstacles to overcome; such as difficult regulatory environments, restricted access to money, and insufficient business support services. These factors make it difficult for young entrepreneurs to start and sustain businesses. Thus, by having tackled these economic and social factors, Kurdistan Region's policymakers can effectively target interventions to lower youth unemployment and promote a sustainable improvement in Kurdistan Region.

2.5 Impacts and Consequences of Youth Unemployment

2.5.1 Individual Level Impacts

Youth unemployment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has a major adverse impact on the youths' socioeconomic well-being and mental health on an individual level. High youth unemployment rates might cause economic instability because unemployed people find it difficult to sustain their families and themselves, which makes them more dependent on unstable sources of income (Kurdistan Region Statistics Office, 2022). According to a report by UNDP (2022), this economic strain often translates itself into a reduced access to essential services and opportunities, and further entrenching socio-economic disparities (UNDP, 2022). Unemployment has a major social and psychological impact on youths in Iraqi Kurdistan, as argued by Korkmaz (2022). Increased jobless rates are a contributing cause to higher social disappointment, mental health issues, and a feeling of marginalisation among youth. The overall stability of society may be impacted by feelings of hopelessness and pessimism among youths based on a lack of employment prospects (Korkmaz, 2022, pp. 35-50).

In addition, another recent report, published by World Bank (2024), indicates that psychologically seen, the uncertainty and lack of purpose associated with prolonged unemployment can contribute to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, which, in turn, may affect the overall life satisfaction and personal development (World Bank, 2024). Also, aspirations are additionally harmed by these difficulties, which can lead to a feeling of powerlessness and drive youths towards radicalisation or illegal activity as a coping mechanism (International Crisis Group, 2023).

2.5.2 Societal Level Impacts

Youth unemployment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has major social consequences that extend beyond individual struggles and affect the stability and growth of the larger communities. Since disappointed youth are more likely to become radicalised or participate in protests and conflicts, high rates of youth

unemployment could contribute to social unrest and political instability (International Crisis Group, 2023). Additionally, in order to create a sense of disengagement among marginalised groups and to weaken social cohesiveness, a lack of economic opportunity may worsen social inequality (UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, a large, neglected workforce is a missed opportunity for improved productivity and economic progresses, therefore persistently high unemployment rates can hinder innovation and economic growth (World Bank, 2024). Thus, this structural issue highlights the need for comprehensive policies to solve the job gaps and promote social stability because it affects the region's social cohesions as well as economic growth.

2.6 Policies and Interventions

2.6.1 Government Initiatives

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq has implemented several policies and interventions aimed at lowering youth unemployment as a result of realising how urgently it needs to expand economic opportunities and provide support for its young population. Multiple programs orientated on entrepreneurship, job creation, and vocational training have been introduced by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (Abdullah, 2023, p.96). The Kurdistan Regional Government has launched a number of programs targeted at enhancing youth employability and skill sets. The Youth Employment Program is one of the initiatives intended to bridge the skills gap between educational system and the job market by providing internships and vocational training (UNDP, 2022).

Despite the aforementioned initiatives, a number of difficulties still need to be fixed, including the requirement for improved implementation and coordination of more significant political and economic challenges that have an impact on the region's abilities to sustain economic stability and establish jobs. Furthermore, a broader approach to reduce youth unemployment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is required, which includes incorporates institutional development, educational reform, and economic diversification. Thus, investing in manufacturing, technology, and agriculture can reduce reliance on the oil industry and create a greater variety of job opportunities. Next, Also, improving the educational system in accordance with the standards of the labour market, potentially through enhancing career counselling and vocational training. Last but not least, the government institution should carry out initiatives to create employment more skilfully in order to improve the financial management and governance (Osman, 2024, pp. 21-36).

2.6.2 NGO and Civil Society Efforts

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations have greatly improved the youth unemployment rate in Iraqi Kurdistan through a range of specific projects. Organisations such as the Kurdish Red Crescent have been essential in enhancing the employability of youths in the region by providing career guidance, employment placement support, and vocational trainings (Kurdish Red Crescent, 2021). In addition, non-profit organisations like the Iraqi Al-Amal Association have made entrepreneurship a priority by offering mentorship programs, small-scale loans, and training on company development to youths in the region to establish their own companies (UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, to impact a more substantial structural changes, civil society organisations play a crucial role in raising public awareness regarding the difficulties faced by jobless youths (International Crisis Group, 2023). When combined, the programs offered by these NGO's represent new economic opportunities and reduce the

knowledge gap between the labour market and educational institutions, by ensuring socioeconomic stability in this region.

3. Methods

3.1 Qualitative Desktop Research

This study analysed youth joblessness within the context of the Iraqi Kurdish region using a qualitative research approach. This review article adopts a desktop-based research approach that makes use of secondary data collection tools to determine challenges that jobless youth are facing. The desktop-based research involves collecting, analysing, and synthesizing available data that is attainable using different credible secondary sources including publications, reports by governments, journals, datasets of statistics etc. The advantage of this method is that it offers a cost-saving and time-effective way of obtaining insights into the trends, causes, and implications of youth unemployment. In addition, secondary data enables a wider analysis by aggregating findings from several studies, providing an all-round view of the issue while maintaining credibility and validity through authenticated sources.

Withing the contexts of this study, this method offers an in-depth understanding of youth unemployment by exploiting varied data points, enabling the review to provide an evidence-based discussion of trends and policy interventions without the necessity for primary data collection. In addition to that, classical theories from published articles and books were used to analyse the issue of un-employment among youths though a sociological perspective. The researcher gave great consideration to where and when data was collected. As a result, only publications containing cases of youth unemployment were chosen.

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the gathered data. The researcher repeatedly read an article in an attempt to understand the content that is relevant to the aims and objectives of this study. Only information related to the objectives was gathered, analysed, and evaluated, leading to the creation of themes that flow from the objectives. Furthermore, the researcher carefully took into account all ethical considerations granted by Tishk International University.

3.2 Limitation of the study

As mentioned above, the method of desk research has its own benefits but is limited in certain aspects. Its main disadvantage is that it solely relies on already-existing data which may not match exactly with the objectives of the study. The information could be old, not available and/or collected for other purposes limiting the applicability and relevance to the current study. It also creates a situation where little or no control is exercised over quality and accuracy of the source, and consequently bias or inconsistencies may arise. In addition, it may also limit access to restricted high-quality data and hence its breadth of information available. Also, no primary data collection would mean there can be no original insights or context-specific details pinched at least leaving some gaps in the analysis. So, in this current study it can be mentioned that the secondary data did not provide enough information regarding this issue, especially in the research area of youth unemployment within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Despite various data was used, it may not accurately reflect what is happening in the region currently.

4. Results and Discussions

This section elaborates on youth unemployment in Kurdistan Region of Iraq from a sociological perspective based on the three main themes which were based on the study's objectives; to find out underlying factors, which can be considered as most important; to examine their effects on social and economic well-being; and to assess the policy decisions and interventions instituted today. The discussion paragraph delves into the relevant articles to give a detailed analysis of the mentioned themes in relation to youth unemployment in the mentioned region.

4.1 Results

The result of this work captures the multidimensionality of youth unemployment within the social context of Kurdistan region of Iraq. With a focus on key causal variables such as social-economic and political factors, assessing the well-being, and assessing the policies and interventions, the literature review findings provide an understanding of unemployment obstacles that young adults are facing. The key problems are related to socio-economic and political impacts of unemployment, the influences of unemployment on the youth's well-being, and failures of prevailing interventions as it is given in the table below.

Table 1: A Summary of the Themes and the Main Findings Regarding Youth Unemployment in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Themes:	Key Results
1. Identifying key contributing of socio-economic factors in relation to unemployment	Relying too much on oil, not having a range of jobs, fast population growth, and differences between country and city living (Al-Ali, 2020). <u>Educational factors</u> : Learning in schools doesn't match job market needs, lack of job-focused training, old teaching methods (UNDP, 2021). <u>Political and structural factors</u> : Not stable politically, corruption, hiring based on who you know, and poor leadership (Al-Khafaji, 2018).
2. Assessing the impact of unemployment on social and economic well-being, including their mental health	Being out of work tied to more stress, worry, and feeling down (Hassan et al., 2020). <u>Social cohesion</u> : Being left out, not fitting in, and more likely to join radical groups (Al-Dabbagh, 2021). <u>Economic impact</u> : Less money for families, more people depending on few, and a drop in the region's work output (World Bank, 2021).
3. Assessing the current policies and interventions in public and private employment in relation to un-employment	<u>Too much dependence on government jobs</u> : not sustainable with limited money (World Bank, 2021). <u>More opportunities for improvement</u> : Concentrate on the national youth employment strategy, public-private partnerships in employment creation, and digital jobs. <u>Training and entrepreneurship</u> : need for private-sector intervention (UNDP, 2021).

The table above shows the current study's themes, and their key findings based on literature review. The first theme points out the socio-economic factors, second theme display the effect of unemployment on social and economic, and mental well-being. The third theme is related to assessing the current policies and interventions that are being implemented together with their gaps.

4.2 Discussions

As the findings of this study shows, unemployment in the Iraqi Kurdistan region is concerned with problems of multiple dimensions, such as several factors of socio-economic, political, and educational. Hence, the social and mental well-being of the youths are being impacted by these issues and by evaluation the current policies and programs, it can be noted that there are still many shortcomings in the interventions given by the government and Ngo's.

The findings of this study answer the research questions by illustrating that youth's unemployment in Kurdistan Region of Iraq is not only an economic but also a symptom of more common socio-economic, political, and educational challenges that serve to further rooted inequality and social exclusion. Kurdistan region's reliance on petroleum industry limits employment in other important sectors such as manufacturing and farming in rural areas. Furthermore, excessive population growth and economic instability caused by volatile petroleum price movements further put strain on the capacity of the public administration to increase job opportunities. Moreover, there is a gap between educated youths and labor markets within the newly formed organizations, as there are many young graduates with inappropriate skills that do not match the requirements of the labor market. Besides, this situation leads to a cultural exaggerate on academic degrees while undervaluing vocational trainings that further contribute to young Iraqi Kurds for not having the necessary skills applicable to existed job within different fields. Thus, a combination of these factors contributes to the existence of social inequalities, limiting job opportunities for youths, hence it also generates frustrations and disillusionment feelings among these jobless youths. On the other hand, political instability, corruption, and poor governance creates challenges of equal job opportunities and consequently discourages private sector growth possibilities.

From a sociological point of view, this situation establishes a dependence on unrealistic alternatives within the public sector while lacking serious attempts at addressing structural barriers to employment. Although vocational training is a possible option to solve this problem, at the same time the stigma attached to poor vocational programs, combined with poor interest by private sectors and almost no sources of fundings are decreasing the job opportunities. All these issues ask for changes within educational curricula, greater cooperation with private sectors, and active engagement of youth within digital jobs to widen job availability and reduce systematic inequalities. Needed to be mentioned, these programs can ensure that Iraqi Kurdistan youth contribute meaningfully to promoting regional economic stability within its region.

5. Conclusions, Recommendations and Further Works

5.1 Conclusions

In conclusion, the unemployment issue in the Iraqi Kurdistan has reached a critical stage. The region's young unemployment rate is influenced by a number of factors, including economic dependency, educational inequality, and regional instability. A sociological analysis of young unemployment in Iraqi

Kurdistan indicates a complex phenomenon influenced by many different theoretical perspectives. Youth unemployment in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region is a complicated socioeconomic issue that is closely related to the region's history, economy, and cultural context. Sociologically speaking, there are two ways to look at the high rates of unemployment among young people: as a symptom and as a cause of larger systemic problems. Historically, the Kurdistan Region has faced significant challenges that have had a major influence on its labour market, ranging from wars, unrest in politics, and economic issues. The high rates of youth unemployment that exist now are the result of these historical issues together with economic reliance on the oil industry, educational mismatch, a lack of diversification, and ongoing unpredictable politics.

From a sociological perspective, youth unemployment in the Iraqi Kurdistan region is a sociological reflection of greater structural and systemic problems. The mismatch between educational outputs and the labour market demands is highlighted by theories like structural functionalism, which points to a broken educational system that does not provide students with necessary skills for the labour market. The labour markets and power gaps, which particularly impact youths from marginalised backgrounds, are highlighted by conflict theory. Symbolic interactionism shows how young people's self-perception and job-seeking behaviours can be influenced by labels and expectations from society, whereas postmodernism contends that a single story cannot adequately convey the complexity of the modern employment environment.

Besides, the high rates of youth unemployment have an influence on the society as well as the individual. Individuals who experience job insecurity are more likely to experience psychological discomfort, social marginalisation, and unstable finances. The wider societal consequences include increased frustration with society, weakened unity in society, and reduced growth in the economy.

These challenges ask for comprehensive and thoughtful policy solutions that are urgently needed. In improving some aspects of unemployment among youths, the KRG together with NGOs and other sectors of civil society have done a lot. However, more forcible approaches are needed in such areas as increasing government, educational reform, and economic diversification in order to create long-term employment opportunities. The Kurdistan Region must find ways of dealing with the deep structural and systemic drivers behind its high rate of youth unemployment so that its youth can look forward with more stability and prosperity to a better future.

5.2 Recommendations

The roots of the current youth unemployment in the Kurdistan region are multidimensional and therefore need a multidimensional approach. The government may consider the following suggestions as the main solution to the issue of unemployment in Iraqi Kurdistan in addition to the educational system.

1. The government is supposed to develop a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the labour market by guiding the students in schools to acquire appropriate skills needed in well marketable areas such as technology industries, health sciences, and renewable energy areas.
2. Also, vocational and technical training programs have great potential, offering young people practical, applied experience in a very desirable manner for most employers.

3. University, technical institute, and business partnerships could further develop internship and apprenticeship opportunities for students to have work experiences before entering the job market.
4. Increasing access to quality education with a focus on attainment of skills, the region will be offering its youth the tools they need for stable employment, contributing to a reduction in overall unemployment.
5. Making the educational system more practical by offering students from the beginning of their study more practical project-based assignments, internship, and fieldwork trips. Also, by focussing on how students can develop soft-skills such as teamwork, time-management and communication.
6. Empowering entrepreneurship education at universities by learning the students how to and run a business to support self-employment or create work opportunities for others.

All these, together with infrastructure improvement, attraction of foreign investment, and economic diversification beyond oil, will create better and more sustainable long-term job opportunities. In addition to that, structural barriers in bureaucracy and corruption must be eliminated to allow a business-friendly system to be established. Thus, the precise building of a strong and youth-friendly job market is to be vitally based on collaborative efforts in the region among government, educational institutions, and businesses.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

Besides the above-mentioned recommendations, it can be suggested that studies are needed to investigate programs that support marginalized groups such as women and rural youth to allow inclusive growth to take place. Also, the impact of digitalization and technology on employment opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan must be explored in studies to ascertain areas of high potential for expansion. Long-term studies of employment programs for youth impact can allow policymakers to make their interventions more effective. Lastly, the impact of social and political stability in making employment opportunities more resilient needs to be explored in studies to allow policymakers to provide practical advice to enable a more resilient labour market to be established.

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