Factors affecting the unemployment (rate) of female art graduates in Iran

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The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the opportunities of female artist graduates in Tehran Province and the current employment market. Mixed method was employed in this study. The population of the current study consisted of 240 female artist graduates selected using a systematic random sampling method from both public and private universities. Descriptive findings indicate that 186 (77.5%) of the respondents were unemployed. Analytical results show that in unemployment, there was an association among age, supply and demand, gender, education and skills mismatch as well as field of study. The chi-square test showed significant differences among the factors ($\chi^2 = 43.29$, $p = 0.000$); age was the most important factor (64.2%).

Key words: Unemployment, graduates, artist, female, Iran.

INTRODUCTION

After the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the number of female students increased greatly in colleges and universities. Due to this increase, the number of female teachers and faculty positions in different fields has grown strikingly (Ali, 2010). Rezai-Rashti (2012) indicates in her study that the percentage of female students at all levels increased significantly over a 15 year period from 1995-2010. Furthermore, there seems to be a significant decline in the percentage of women in private universities (for example, Islamic Azad University) while the percentage of those in public universities increased. In addition, in 2008-2009, 68% of the Payam Noor Distance Learning University were females (Aryan, 2012). Ali (2010) stated that this figure evinces that Iranian women are highly educated across the board, especially in medicine, human sciences and art. Women with academic backgrounds have a better chance of finding well-paid jobs (Iravani and Arvaneh, 2012). The employment of educated women with special training would help the national economy as well as family income. These are changes that facilitate women’s increased entry into the labour market. One particularly important issue is that of encouraging women to get a job immediately after completing their professional education (Iravani and Arvaneh, 2012).

Krempkow and Wilke (2009) found that two of the payoffs of higher education were employability and job success. Ultimately, the only ones who can sufficiently evaluate the quality of academics are graduates, in as much as they are the true people who experience academic programs.

Iran is currently encountering three important phenomena in employment, which include: extreme increase in the population of the active age group (15-64 years), the increase in the literacy rate and number of university graduates and the increase in the demand for women...
employees by the workforce as a result of more favourable women’s rights (Massroor, 2012).

**Background of study**

**Overview of labour market**

By the twentieth century Iran’s labour force had grown quickly. In the 1990s, the economic conditions changed. Although the number of universities increased after the revolution, there was not only a lack of demand for graduates in the society, but also a lack of opportunities for employees with skills and academic qualifications. In 1956 to 2006 in Iran, the labour force age was 20 years and above; and grew 4.2 times from about 5 million to more than 21 million. As in many other countries, the growth rate was much faster for women as compared to men (Salehi-Esfahani and Shajari, 2010).

Davood (2011) indicated that the annual returns of higher education in recent decades, on average, was roughly 3.8 times higher than it was two decades ago. Judging from the education-based groups, it seems that an increase in the relative supply of college graduates into the labour market has not been matched by the increase in the number of jobs available in recent years. After an increase in demand for college graduates throughout most of the 1990s, graduates have been facing a more competitive market since the mid-1990s (Abbasi and Dadpay, 2008).

The higher number of graduates seeking work due to lack of job opportunities or non-compliance with existing opportunities which match their educational skills, access to jobs remain unemployed (Davood, 2011). The realities of the labour market might influence college students’ incentives to complete their studies. It is also noticeable that the job market situation is not in favour of younger workers. This inexperienced group, aged 16-25, has suffered continuously from loss of factor demand (Abbasi and Dadpay, 2008).

The job market for artists in other countries also has same experiences. Alper and Wassall (2006) projected that, on average, artists in the United States earn approximately 10% more than other professional and technical workers do. This result is in agreement with the findings of Robinson and Montgomery (2000), who also argued that artists accrue higher utility function from artistic employment and that they tend to subconsciously derive high utility from artistic work; However, they are relatively indifferent to the financial implications.

In Germany, unemployment among artists is high, amounting to about one and 1.5 times higher than that of the overall population (IAB, 2011). While the artistic students comprise 3.6% of the total students population in the country, employment of artists comprises only 1% of the entire workforce (Teichgraber, 2012).

In 2009, the unemployment rate rose to the average unemployment rate for all artists- 9.5 percent. Twenty-nine thousand artists exited the work force between 2008 and 2009, many of whom were daunted by the task of finding job in art related fields (Marlowe, 2010). However, non-standard forms of employment such as fixed and part-time contracts, employment engagements etc. are more common in artistic jobs than in other forms of employment engagements (Benhamou, 2000). In addition, 32,000 employees in the arts, entertainment and recreation industry lost their jobs; this accounted for 13% of the overall jobs lost in the area in 2008 (Campos et al., 2011).

**Factors influencing unemployment**

Several factors related to unemployment (of artists) are discussed in this part.

**Age and employment**

The youthful population in Iran today is at its highest peak in history. The total number of people in 20-24 age group was 5.6 million in 1995. A decade later, this number increased to 9.1 million, representing a 62 percent increase in population. This increase propelled the youth population (15-29 years) to represent 35 percent of the overall population in Iran, making it the country with the highest percentage of youth population (Salehi-Isfahani and Egel, 2009).

In the 2006 census in Iran, it was found that the working-age population (15-64 years) had increased at 3.9% per annum for the past decade, a number which doubles the overall population growth rate. Within the same period, the labour force also rose steadily but at a slower pace (3.7% per annum). This phenomenon is mainly due to the fact that more and more young people prefer to complete their academic career before entering the job market, which by default delays their entry into the labour force (Salehi-Isfahani, 2010).

As the workforce increased, a similar increase was registered in economic growth. However, the country experienced rising unemployment rates from 9.8 to 12.7%; of these, more than two thirds were young people. The worst case scenario occurring among young women was unemployment rates of up to 50%. This phenomenon is attributed to the high supply of labour, which failed to be at par with demand on one side, and the rigidity of the country’s labour market, on the other hand (Egel and Salehi-Isfahani, 2010). Salehi-Isfahani and Egel (2009) stated that this waiting period is reported to be 3 years on average for those who were unable to secure a job immediately after graduation.

Another response strategy to the unemployment of youths is to open more tertiary institutions to absorb the unemployed; a strategy well in place in Iran. Over the last
decade, the number of enrollments in undergraduate programs has increased by more than twice. In the same way, the demand for graduate level education increased significantly among youths with undergraduate level education. In 2010 alone, an astonishing 830,000 students sat for post graduate entrance exams, of which only 6% were admitted (Mehr News, 2010).

On the other hand, Adam Smith and other advocates such as Towse (2006) argued that the large influx of young people in the artistic labour market is due to the fact that they overestimate their artistic talents and the career prospects in the industry.

Supply and demand and employment

The absorption of growing numbers of graduates depends not only on the subjects studied or the skills possessed and academic qualifications, but also on the ability of the public and private sectors to create jobs. This necessitates intensive public and private investment at a rate parallel to growth in the work force, particularly in fields that require graduates. The threat to more efficient higher education output lies essentially in the lack of job opportunities, particularly for graduates with professional specialisations that are in demand in other labour markets (El-Jafari and Lafi, 2004).

In the late 1980s, there was a huge gap between job creation and supply of workers. The situation improved in the early mid-1990s, yet the demand for workers was not growing fast enough to compensate for the extra supply. The second half of the 1990s was the period when demand increased faster than supply, thus elevating earnings despite the increase in supply. The increase in real and relative earnings during the second half of the 1990s was mainly driven by the increase in demand for workers. However, the pace of job creation was slowed down in the early 2000s. Still, it was large enough to meet the growth in the labour supply. Thus, earning levels continued to rise ( Abbasi and Dadpay, 2008).

Recent statistics indicated that over 58% of graduates less than 25 years are unemployed, while a 35% unemployment rate exists for graduates between the ages of 25 and 30 (Weligamage and Siengthai, 2003). This large scale unemployment affecting young graduates may be attributed to the underlying mismatch between the prevalent educational system and the demand for skilled labour in the job market. As such, efforts towards minimising unemployment in the long run must endeavour to address both demand and supply side constraints (Weligamage and Siengthai, 2003).

Gender and employment

For many years, women’s employment has been an issue of debate among sociologists interested in gender equality, in as much as employment is one of the main facets of society in which gender discrimination is rampant. One such society where this phenomenon is evident is Iran. To be specific, despite the various clauses in Iranian labour regulation emphasising equality for both men and women in job opportunities, wage, salary and other privileges in the workplace, adherence to these clauses by employers is yet to be realized (Alavion, 2002).

According to Iravani (2011), statistics show that in the educational year of 2001, universities with a 60% rate of female applicants acceptance indicates their mental and social growth and high potential. Unemployment rates for college graduates was at its worst during the period, 1997 and 2007. During the same period, the increase in unemployment among young males was 4.2%, while that of their female counterparts was 34.1% (Salehi-Isfahani, 2010).

Ravrad (2004) conducted a study on the performance of female experts compared to their male counterparts in Iran, and found that for women, there existed a gap between the type of job of interest and the type of jobs accessible to them, which according to the author, emanates from the existing gender discrimination that leaves women at a disadvantage. Despite the narrowing of this gap with time, the phenomenon of women lagging behind men in literacy has always been evident since the middle of the 20th century. However, even with this rise in literacy among women, it still falls short of the level required to maintain equilibrium between the two genders.

Previous study by Green (2003) showed that individual agents have an effect on the employment rate. They concluded that there is a significant relationship between gender and age of employment. On the other hand, Merz (2006), in his study conducted in Germany, points out that during the past two decades, the nature of women's labour force supply has been transformed in such a way that women’s employment rate is steadily increasing. In his view, such transformation in women’s employment status is influenced by characteristics such as women’s education, their partner’s (spouse’s) working hours, and the number of small children in the family.

Education and skills mismatch and employment

After the Islamic Revolution, more attention was focused on completion of education. Employees with different educational backgrounds, in terms of field of study have experienced a great degree of heterogeneities in their education match. In fact, in terms of awareness of the capabilities of training provided, skills needed for employment and educational and research programs, universities need an assessment on the situation of graduates and their employment in the labour market (Mehralizadeh and Armen 2007).

Studies such as those of Allen and vander (2001), DiPietro and Urwin (2006) and Bender and Heywood...
(2009) investigated the effects of educational and skill mismatch on productivity, earnings and job satisfaction, but they did not evaluate the relationship between the mismatch and unemployment; That of Thisse and Zenou (2000) and Jellal et al., (2005) were exceptions. In another study, Salehi-Omran (2006) showed that factors such as knowledge and acquired information in university, academic skills and courses are effective in employment. Results also show that age, gender and educational average also play a part in employment.

Smith (2004) concluded that different levels and types of education and training affect the income of jazz and non-jazz artists differently. For non-jazz earnings, having a Bachelor's degree of Fine Arts (BFA) or a Master's degree of Fine Arts (MFA) results in a positive earnings advantage. For jazz players, there is a negative relationship between earnings and having a BFA or a MFA.

Field of study and employment

In a previous study done by Horn and Zahn (2001) in England, the results showed that among the graduates in 1992 (entry), only 20% were unemployed. However, the percentage of employment in the human sciences and art courses was lower. It is significant to mention that the increased educational gain of women does not necessarily increase their relative situation in the labour market. Whereas women with higher education have higher expected returns and tend to take part more in the labour market, the gender gap in wages and unemployment sometimes increases with education (Bertrand et al., 2009; Evertsson et al., 2009).

In a previous study, the comparative expectations of students and employers in relation to tertiary education were investigated. The study further argued that young people prefer colourful positions in society; to them, acquiring university education is one of the surest ways of attaining such positions. This feeling among young people sometimes leads them to specialise in various modern fields of study without critically analysing job prospects. For this reason, the university has a big role in ensuring that the institution's mission and vision are at par with the current requirements of the labour market, so as to afford optimal employability of its graduates (Weligamage and Siengthai, 2003).

Besides education, marriage, fertility, household size, the presence of children and elderly in the household are frequently considered as the main factors that shape female opportunities in seeking employment. For women in traditional societies, these factors are often found to act as barriers (Majbouri, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Two-hundred and sixty subjects from 7 universities in the Tehran Province were randomly chosen. Twenty subjects were excluded from this study because they did not answer the questions given to them completely. Moreover, inclusion criteria for sampling included age, field of study and gender. Subjects included 240 female art graduates (all of whom were painters) who had studied at public and private universities between 2001 and 2011 in the Tehran Province. The objective of the research is to explore the relationship between the opportunities of female artist graduates in Tehran Province and the current employment market.

The literature review of secondary data and the standard questionnaire were designed by the university educational department's internal evaluation (Form No. 6). The Graduates Questionnaire of 2007 was used after having been modified. Moreover, the questionnaire was judged by 15 experts to ensure validity. The questionnaire included 20 questions which consisted of two parts, namely personal information (part one, 7 questions) and employment status (part two, 13 questions).

Subjects were divided into four groups according to age: from 21 to 25; 26 to 30; 31 to 35 and 36 to 40. This was done to compare the different rates of unemployment in different age ranges between the four groups. A possible limitation in this study was the limitation of the questionnaire. To account for this issue we collect questionnaire by interview.

Procedure

First of all, the researchers checked most published papers. The review was based on articles identified by computerised searches. After the related literature was reviewed, the standard questionnaire was filled out by female art graduates and volunteering employers, with the aim to obtain direct feedback. A descriptive analysis was subsequently done.

Data analysis

All statistical and chi-square analyses were performed using SPSS 18.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). A probability of 0.05 or less was considered significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age

In the four different age groups of the respondents in this study, the group between 26 to 30 years old had the highest rate of employees (48.8%), followed by age groups between 31 to 35 (30.4%), 21 to 25 (13.8%) and 36 to 40 (7.1%). The results showed that the 21-25 years old group had a higher rate of unemployment as compared to the 26-30 years old group. Also Salehi-Isfahani (2010) stated that the current group of Iranian youths is the largest in the country's history. In 2005, the age group between 20-24 was 62 percent larger than it was 10 years earlier. In addition, as the youth population increases in Iran, competition makes finding a job even more difficult. This inexperienced group has suffered continuously from loss of factor demand (Abbasi, and Dadpay, 2008). Furthermore, a study by Roudi (2011) confirmed that the youth population in Iran that entered the labour force in the past few decades has mostly faced tough job markets.
However, the results showed a relationship between age and unemployment of graduates. One hundred and fifty-four (64.2%) of the respondents mentioned age as an important factor which affects the issue of unemployment for art graduates. The chi-square test showed significant differences among the factors ($\chi^2=43.29, p=0.000$), while age was the most important factor. This finding confirms the earlier finding which was published by Salehi-Isfahani and Egel (2007). They stated that youth cohorts were indicated to be rising four times more than the population growth rate, with almost one million workers annually being added to the labour market in Iran; this lends itself to a high unemployment rate among young people.

On the other hand, more than half (51.3%) of the respondents in the current study graduated between 6 to 10 years while 36.7 and 12.1% of the respondents graduated between 11 to 15 and 1 to 5 years, respectively. The unemployment rates for these three groups are as follows: 1 to 5 years, 96.6%; 11 to 15 years, 84.1%; and 6 to 10 years, 68.3%. The results showed that fresh art graduates (1 to 5 years) in Iran had difficulty in finding a job.

### Supply and demand

According to the results of the current study, 147 (61.3%) of subjects confirm supply and demand as an important factor affecting unemployment in art (second important factor), although the literature confirms that there is an oversupply of artists. Researchers of current studies believe that in Iran, the demand for painters has not changed, but that the jobs have been in the hands of fewer painters. Judging from education based groups it seems that an increase in the relative supply of university graduates in the labour market has not been matched by an increase in the number of jobs available in recent years.

A number of features are also peculiar to the art industry. Firstly, apart from their relatively low income level as compared to their counterparts in other occupational fields, artists are exposed to considerably high earning penalties. Secondly, there exists large variations in the earning capacities of artists. Thirdly, due to limited job opportunities, there is always the problem of excess supply of labour in the field of art, hence the tendency for artists to hold multiple jobs is relatively higher (Alper and Wassall, 2006). The European Union has also concentrated on considering that the reconnaissance of mismatches between labour, supply and demand is significant, as they can potentially be very costly to the economy by limiting productivity growth (European Commission, 2008).

### Gender

One hundred and eighteen (49.2%) respondents indicated that gender was one of the factor for the unemployment of artists. The situation of employment for female graduates and the earnings resulting from it are frequently not commensurate with the level of education that they have attained. According to the Mehr News (2010), 39.5% of educated females were unemployed while the rate of unemployment for males was at 25.8% in Iran. Rezvani et al. (2010) indicated that factors such as gender and academic discipline have had considerable effect on the employment rate of individuals. Rengers and Plug (2001) showed a relationship between gender and income. In contrast, Brynin (2002) showed that the rate of employment of female graduates is more than that of males due to the promotional aspects and higher responsibility of women in England’s work environment.

### Education and skills mismatch

Education and skills mismatch is the other variable in this study. Education and skills mismatch was considered as one of the causes of unemployment of artists by 89 (37.1%) respondents. Previous study showed a relationship between education and skills mismatch and the unemployment of graduates. According to Elliot et al. (2004), there is a meaningful relationship between the level of employment and educational courses for graduates. Factors such as knowledge and acquired information in university, academic skills and courses were shown to be effective in employment (Salehi-Omran, 2006).

The result of the studies by Smith (1998, 2004) showed that education and specific training in art affected the earning of artists. In contrast, Throsby (1996) and Rengers and Plug (2001) found that education and training are not considered in the artistic earnings of various artists. On the other hand, in this study, 72.1% of employee respondents were graduates from public universities, while 27.9% were from private universities. The results indicated that employers prefer artists who graduate from public universities. Discrimination between graduates from public and private universities usually leads them to work as freelancers or to go in search of unrelated jobs.

### Field of study

Another factor examined in this study was the field of study of graduates. The result of this study showed that field of study was 30% related to a factor in the unemployment amongart graduates, according to the respondents’ opinions. The results from the literature showed a relationship between the educational field of graduates and their employment, a finding which conflicts with the results published by Rezvani et al. (2010). Opportunities also act as encouragement to would be...
artists, for they serve as an indication that there are available jobs in the waiting. As indicated in the literature, the beauty of being an artist is the availability of training opportunities at minimal cost (Karhunen, 1996). Despite the fact that the number of people aspiring to be artists is quite overwhelming, the prestige associated with the profession is relatively low.

Artists contemplate that if they have a formal education with a degree, they have more opportunities to find a job, especially as a teacher. On the other hand, they may overestimate the impact of education. Researchers believe that in Iran, most of the art teachers at the university level are males; thus, females have fewer opportunities to become lecturers at the university level. According to the Mehr News (2012), the statistical table of employment and unemployment of 23 academic majors showed that 87,802 artists graduated in 2011; from this figure, 23,220 (26.4%) were unemployed, even though they were between 20 to 30 years of age.

Conclusion

Towse (1992) highlighted the illogical nature of artists in choosing such a risky job, a behavior which may be explained by two main reasons. Firstly, artists accrue numerous non-monetary benefits associated with their profession, namely, fame, conferment of awards, publicity etc., which tend to compensate to a great extent for the low monetary gains they derive. Secondly, artists are generally hopeful of a brighter future with higher earnings, which may never materialise. In fact, the majority of those who desire to become artists probably never thought about the economic benefits of the profession until they had already spent a number of years in the job.

In this study, age was an important factor of unemployment for artists according to the respondents' opinions, followed by supply and demand, gender, education and skills mismatch and field of study. Furthermore, researchers believe that most of the art students in Iran are females, while in the current study, about three-quarters of them were unemployed. The number of students who wish to become artists is increasing, an issue which government and university administrators should pay more attention to. Moreover, students should strive to gain greater awareness of the job market of their field of study before proceeding with it.

The authors suggest that the government upgrade and improve the current state of facilities in higher education institutions. This will not only enable students to be conversant with state of the art technologies, but will also avail academic staff the opportunity to be at par with the latest technological changes. In addition, government could create opportunities for further training for graduates and establish effective information channels for the dissemination of such information. Moreover, university lecturers and tutors could also be availed with such opportunities as exchange programs and more training workshops in collaboration with industry for knowledge improvement. This will give the instructors more knowledge about what skills the labour market wants graduates to acquire.

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