

What happens to the young and educated without a job?

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One route for the educated, jobless young was to join a protest group like The People's Movement of Nepal.

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study led by the University of Oxford is looking at how young educated people who are unemployed become politicized in different ways - either through violent struggle or as reformers working for a more equal society. The project is one of the first to compare in depth the experiences across different countries of the young who are educated and yet unemployed.

The project focuses on three countries particularly affected by youth unemployment: northern India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, but the findings will have wider global relevance. Youth unemployment is now a critical problem across the world. It recently propelled uprisings in the Arab world, contributed to sectarian violence in India, and has now reached record highs in the UK.

Dr. Craig Jeffrey is leading the extensive research project into the unemployed youth in a collaboration between Oxford and Edinburgh University, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The study involves experts on each country: Dr. Jeffrey on northern India, Professor David Gellner of Oxford on Nepal, and Professor Jonathan Spencer of Edinburgh on Sri Lanka. The team of six academics will compare differences and similarities in the responses to youth unemployment in each of the three countries.

The researchers will use face-to-face interviews, focus groups, observation, and the gathering of life histories involving 80 youths in each location to gather data. Youths aged between 18 and 30 years old who are engaged in some form of political activity and have completed at least a secondary school education will be included in each sample. The sample will be representative, including men, women and young people from different class, caste, ethnic and religious groups. The research will also explore experiences affecting both rich and poor alike where they feel they share something in common as a 'generation'.

Dr. Jeffrey, a University Lecturer in Human Geography and author of the book *Timepass* (published in 2011), explains: "Young people have invested time and money in their education and yet find there are very few salaried jobs for them. This has left them feeling short-changed and frustrated and this is a big problem across the world. Educational levels have risen rapidly but there is a big gap between their aspirations and the reality of the current jobs market.

"Scholars know surprisingly little about the resulting political actions taken by the educated young who have not had their aspirations met. These questions have been largely the subject of journalistic conjecture. We want to find out from our survey whether they feel globalisation is changing their lives for the better; find out whether their political views change when they leave school; and ask them why their protest groups

are not longer lasting. We will move beyond media stereotypes of youth—for example, as "heroes" or "villains"—and publicise the varied and changing roles played by educated unemployed young people."

Northern India, Nepal and Sri Lanka were chosen for the study because they each have major problems in providing work that suits the skills and qualifications of their unemployed. They also have a 'youth bulge' in their population of mainly young men. While the jobs market in the public sector has shrunk in these countries, the private sector has not filled the gap in providing secure, salaried job opportunities. There are political differences too between the three countries: India is a democracy where people are free to protest; Sri Lanka has a history of more authoritarian forms of government; while Nepal only broke from monarchic rule recently, in 2006.

Youth responses to unemployment have varied across south Asia. According to previous research conducted by Dr. Jeffrey, richer, higher caste young men have tended to do better than low castes and women in the jobs market. This has resulted in powerful divides in the population of disenfranchised poorer youth in northern parts of India. Higher caste youths have tended to use their social connections to become brokers, receiving patronage from client networks. Meanwhile, poorer, lower caste men and women have sometimes taken on the role of 'reformer', helping the poor in negotiations with the government or many of them have set up NGOs.

In Nepal, previous research by another member of the research team, Dr. Amanda Snellinger of Oxford, shows that the better-off young men who are unemployed often enter politics or become brokers or 'fixers' in business or politics. The prospects for those of lower caste or of ethnic backgrounds are not as good: they have been forced into poorly paid jobs at home or abroad, such as domestic work. However, both the relatively well-off and poor youth tend to unite to engage in violent or

peaceful protests, for example, through the 2006 People's Movement which ended monarchic rule.

In Sri Lanka, [young](#) people are even more divided than in Nepal and North India, suggests another researcher involved. Dr. Dhana Hughes of Oxford says that in Sri Lanka the jobless youth have often become involved in violent conflicts organised along ethnic lines, with devastating social and political consequences.

As part of the project, the researchers will set up a website, blog, Facebook page, and Twitter account through which they will report on the project and invite comment. The project has been awarded £1.16 million from the Economic and Social Research Council for the three-year project.

Provided by Oxford University

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