

## HOPING FOR A FULL STATE OF ADULTHOOD BUT WEDGED IN A STATE OF WAITHOOD

Ikhlas Abdalla, Kuwait University

[dx.doi.org/10.18374/EJM-14-1.11](http://dx.doi.org/10.18374/EJM-14-1.11)**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the nature of school-to-work transition of 435 young Sudanese college graduates, identifies the explanatory factors (career barriers and strategies) behind “easy” or “difficult” transitions to “decent jobs”, and conducts between-gender comparisons. All respondents have urban middle-class Arab Muslim background. The findings revealed difficult and long transitions which often exceeded 4 years, and only 6% of the respondents transitioned to decent jobs as defined by the ILO. Others who confirmed the completion of their transition were in fact working in jobs that did not completely fulfill the decent work criteria, suggesting that Sudanese youth may have lowered their expectations regarding what decent work entails. There are signs of low job involvement and organization commitment even among “transitioned” youth as they expressed willingness to jump ship for better career jobs. For men more than women, money is a major attraction for jumping ship. The transition often included long unemployment periods with spells of temporary employment in the formal and informal economies. Most of “in-transition” youth were in a state of “waithood” as their transition is likely to roll to their 30s and hence limiting their chances of enjoying a full state of adulthood (getting married, having a home etc.). Main perceived career barriers were poor job supply, lack of experience, recruitment prejudice (nepotism). Women also suffered from gender discrimination. Those who had experiences in the informal economy got there because of their limited work experiences, job opportunities, capital, market information and social connections. The main life goal of half of the respondents was career success. A common dream of most males is to be entrepreneurs or emigrate; women aspire for a decent job. Males tended to opt for temporary but “suitable”/higher salary jobs rather than “unsuitable” fixed ones. Females who sought “decent employment” remained in transition longer than males; married women suffered most. Generally females had poorer employment deals than males (job/contract contents). Generally, the females did “all the right things” to enhance their careers. They sought and achieved better education, based their career strategies on pragmatism, self-efficacy and persistence to continue working even if it required relegation to lower level jobs, being determined to improve their job status by proving themselves. Also, they created their own jobs as “self-employed” in the informal economy and/or revolted against tradition by working in selected “masculine” jobs. While 75% of the “transitioned” youth felt that their college education helped their career only half of the “in-transition” youth agreed, signaling low economic returns of education. Main job search methods were informal social networks, and the “transitioned” youth also responded more than “in-transition” to job advertisements. Effects of formal employment mechanisms and Active Labor Market Programs on enhancing youth transition were minimal.

Keywords: *Sudanese, Arab, Youth, Waithood, School-to-work transition, Unemployment, Employment barriers.*