

Unemployment in the Najran Region (Causes and Means of Overcoming It): A Jurisprudential and Social Study Within the Framework of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030

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ABSTRACT

Unemployment in the Najran region constitutes a major issue affecting residents of this area, both Saudi nationals and individuals of other nationalities. The unemployment rate among Saudis reached 6.4%, although it decreased to 5.8% in the third quarter of 2022, according to the General Authority for Statistics. Nevertheless, the problem remains persistent. This research identifies the principal causes of unemployment in the Najran region and highlights measures for overcoming it, through a jurisprudential and social study within the framework of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Research Objectives included the following principal aims:

1. Providing Sharia-based responses to questions related to unemployment.
2. Identifying a set of causes for the problem of unemployment in the Najran region and the proposed solutions.
3. Demonstrating the capacity of Islamic Sharia to offer appropriate solutions to contemporary issues faced by people in their daily lives.

This research has concluded with a set of scientific findings detailed at its conclusion.

It has also concluded with a set of important recommendations outlined at the end, which are relevant to the subject matter of this research.

Keywords: Unemployment – Employment – Salaries – Solutions

1. INTRODUCTION

All praise shall exclusively be due to Allah alone, and may Allah's prayers and peace be upon the one after whom there is no prophet.

To begin with:

Indeed, Islamic Sharia has guaranteed individuals the right to a suitable standard of living that ensures access to the necessities of life, and it has encouraged active and energetic engagement in work, while condemning laziness, unemployment, and reliance on others. This is due to the negative effects these behaviours have on both mind and body. Psychological studies have confirmed that lethargy is a principal cause of depression, which in turn leads to physical illnesses and ailments. In contrast, movement, activity, and labour are powerful factors in achieving psychological happiness and physical health. However, there remains the issue of a segment of society who are unable to find access to employment due to numerous reasons, including a lack of academic or practical qualifications that would allow them to integrate into the labour market, as well as health conditions that impact their physical wellbeing, ultimately resulting in permanent unemployment. It is customary for developed nations to pay special attention to this segment, enacting a range of laws to secure their social welfare.

Research Problems and Questions:

This research seeks to answer a central question, the essence of which is: What is meant by unemployment? This fundamental question branches into several subsidiary questions that are closely linked to identifying a number of rulings and regulations related to this matter.

Reasons for Selecting the Research Topic:

The reasons for selecting this topic can be summarized as follows:

First: The desire to identify the causes of the unemployment problem in the Najran region, propose solutions, and support the research priorities of Najran University.

Second: The existence of questions about the Sharia perspective on unemployment and its associated rulings.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research can be outlined as follows:

1. Supporting Najran University's research priorities in contemporary Sharia issues that benefit society, particularly addressing the challenges faced by the Najran region.
2. Contributing through this research to disseminating rulings and regulations related to unemployment.
3. Consolidating scattered aspects of this subject into a single comprehensive study.
4. Demonstrating Sharia's capability to address societal issues through its established principles.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

After thorough examination and investigation by the researchers within the scope of their resources, they found some scattered articles on the subject and various scattered statements. However, these do not rise to the level of this research's particular approach in defining the nature of unemployment, its rulings, conditions, and its current reality in the city of Najran.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study required adopting an inductive analytical approach focused on identifying regulations, rulings, and reasons connected to the conditions and rulings of unemployment.

Research Structure and Procedures:

The study is organized into an introductory section, six topics, a conclusion, recommendations, and a bibliography as follows:

Introduction: This section summarizes the research concept, outlines its importance, defines the problems and questions, explains the reasons for choosing the topic, states its objectives, reviews relevant literature, describes the methodology employed, and presents the research structure.

Topic One: The Meaning of Unemployment in Language and Terminology

Linguistic works describe an "unemployed" man—using the term *baṭṭāl* (with a geminated *ṭ*)—as someone idle, not engaged in any work, craft, or matter of concern. This state is referred to as *baṭāla*, which can be vocalised either with a fatha or kasra, signifying evident idleness or abstention from work. The verb *baṭala* (with an open *ṭ*) in the past tense, and *yabṭulu* in the present tense, indicates becoming idle or ceasing work or craft [1]. Linguists also mention less common terms associated with unemployment, such as *math* and *tammath*, which signify engaging in idleness and misguidance, while *tabaṭṭul* refers to the act of idleness and involves following frivolity and foolishness [10].

From the aforementioned points, several observations can be drawn:

1. Unemployment entails idleness, where an individual fails to occupy themselves with activities that fill their time.
2. Idleness leads inevitably to inactivity, which is evident in all unemployed individuals whose daily affairs cease due to a lack of gainful engagement.
3. A lack of vocational skills characterises those who remain unemployed.
4. Laziness serves as a foundational element in unemployment. Even those physically capable of working may, for various reasons, abandon their tasks, entering a state of inertia, neglect, and passivity.
5. Unemployment often results in engagement in criminal activities or behaviours contrary to morality. This outcome is a predictable consequence for anyone lacking a lawful trade, opening the door to prohibited means of income, such as theft or other activities forbidden both by Sharia and law.

From a terminological perspective, unemployment does not deviate far from these linguistic nuances. In brief, it is defined as “the cessation of work” [18]. A more comprehensive general definition would be: “The cessation of work, and the absence of a trade that helps an individual lawfully earn and make a living.” Unemployment also encompasses situations where individuals who are ready and able to work cannot find suitable employment opportunities. “Unemployment is considered one of the important economic indicators reflecting the health of an economy and impacting social stability” [14].

Indeed, this dimension in the meaning of unemployment has led some economic researchers to coin various designations for unemployment, such as:

1. Cyclical Unemployment

Occurs due to economic recession, wherein the demand for labour declines as a result of reduced production and investment.

2. Structural Unemployment

Arises from a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the needs of the market, such as when manual labour is replaced by technology.

3. Frictional Unemployment

Occurs when individuals move between jobs due to natural changes in the labour market.

4. Disguised Unemployment

Occurs when the number of employees in a given role exceeds the actual need, thereby reducing productivity [3].

There is no objection, in our view, to these designations which reflect a prevailing reality in the economic sphere. What is of greater importance in this matter is to seek effective solutions that alleviate, economically, the intensity of unemployment rates. This may be achieved in the economic domain through several means, including:

1. Encouraging investment within Najran and other cities of the Kingdom to assist in providing suitable employment opportunities.
2. Establishing projects that are compatible with the capabilities of young graduates.
3. Developing education to levels that correspond to the needs of the labour market.
4. Supporting and encouraging the private sector to contribute towards providing suitable job opportunities [5].

Topic Two: Causes of Unemployment in the Region of Najran:

Although the unemployment rate in Najran is low compared to certain other regions within the Kingdom, there are nonetheless certain factors which may contribute to elevated unemployment levels amongst specific segments of the population. Amongst the most prominent of these causes are:

1. Disability and laziness affecting many young people despite the presence of health and well-being. Disability and laziness are two negative afflictions which devastate both mental and physical health. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to seek refuge from them daily, as reported by Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him): “The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) used to say: O Allah, I seek refuge in You from disability and laziness” [7][8].

Ibn Battal al-Maliki stated: “Seeking refuge from disability and laziness is due to the fact that they prevent a servant from fulfilling the rights of Allah, and the rights of himself and his family, and from properly considering matters related to his afterlife and his worldly affairs. The believer is commanded to strive in action and to observe moderation in seeking sustenance, and that he not be a burden upon others so long as he is endowed with sound limbs and intellect” [6].

2. Failure of students to attain appropriate grades:

For numerous institutions within both the public and private sectors stipulate high grade averages as a condition for employment, since such grades serve as an indicator of academic competence. These institutions then concern themselves with the development of practical capabilities, and as theoretical and practical expertise accumulates, the employee becomes fully qualified for permanent appointment. It must also be considered that institutions and companies in Najran and elsewhere have begun to focus on employees possessing working knowledge, good comprehension, and the ability to integrate into the work system as swiftly as possible [22].

3. Lack of compatibility between specialisation and limited interest in theoretical disciplines:

This constitutes a general issue in multiple countries, particularly concerning holders of qualifications in theoretical, non-applied specialisations. This necessitates universities to provide practical, applied training to graduates so that the theoretical nature of their degree does not become an impediment to securing employment in relevant institutions. Accordingly, it is observed in practice that a number of students resort to physically demanding freelance occupations such as operating taxis,

delivering orders, or other temporary jobs that are inconsistent with the academic qualification acquired over many years of effort. Furthermore, these temporary professions entail risks such as the possibility of accidents and exposure to protracted legal proceedings.

4. Lack of alignment between educational output and the labour market:

Some graduates experience difficulty due to an absence of skills compatible with labour market needs, resulting in challenges in securing suitable employment.

5. Weakness in vocational and technical training compared to the increasing demand for technical and vocational jobs.

6. Intense competition and heightened employment acceptance standards:

Through interview procedures and written and oral examinations conducted for applicants seeking employment, priority is often given to candidates who excel both theoretically and practically.

7. Limited economic diversification:

Najran primarily relies on the governmental and commercial sectors, with limited opportunities in other sectors such as industry and technology.

8. Absence of major industries offering a large number of job opportunities, unlike the developed industrial zones in Riyadh or Jeddah.

9. Weak investment in the private sector:

The scarcity of large-scale investments in Najran, in comparison to other regions, has resulted in a weakened private sector and insufficient availability of employment opportunities.

10. Concentration of employment in the public sector:

There exists substantial reliance upon governmental employment, which results in certain youths awaiting recruitment within the public sector instead of seeking opportunities in the private sector or in entrepreneurship. The public sector is incapable of accommodating all individuals seeking employment, which leads to an increase in unemployment amongst graduates.

11. Impact of geographical and demographic factors:

Given that Najran is a border region situated relatively distant from the Kingdom's major economic centres, this renders it less attractive to substantial investment ventures.

12. Weakness in the infrastructure of sectors such as transport and communications may adversely affect the attraction of major projects.

13. Impact of expatriate labour:

The presence of expatriate workers in certain sectors results in diminished employment opportunities for citizens, particularly in positions characterised by low or moderate wages. [19]

Topic Three: The presumption in respect of employment is permissibility, save for indicia which displace such presumption

The presumption concerning the engagement of a person in work and seeking provision upon the earth, and the abandonment of unemployment, is permissibility, unless there exists an accompanying factor which removes such act from the ambit of permissibility.

Evidence of permissibility is derived from several scriptural texts, including the following:

a. The saying of Allah the Almighty: *O you who have believed, spend from the good things which you have earned and from that which We have produced for you from the earth. And do not aim toward the defective therefrom, spending [from that]* [Al-Baqarah: 267].

Ibn Mas'ūd, may Allah be pleased with him, and Mujāhid stated: ((From the lawful provisions which you acquire by way of trade and industry)) [17].

Al-Baghawī stated: ((Therein is evidence of the permissibility of earning, and that it is divisible into lawful and unlawful)) [17].

b. The ḥadīth: ((No person ever consumed food better than that which he consumes from the labour of his own hand)) [7].

Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī stated: ((Therein is an exhortation towards abstaining from begging and distancing oneself therefrom, even if the individual is required to humble himself in seeking sustenance and to bear hardship thereby)) [11].

c. Consensus (ijmāʿ): Consensus upon the permissibility of earning and seeking sustenance was recorded by more than one scholar, including Ibn Hāzim al-Zāhirī, who said: ((They are in agreement that the earning of provision through lawful means

is permissible)) [15].

e. Wisdom necessitates such permissibility, for verily man is in need of provision for himself and his dependants, and it is thus wise that the door of earning and seeking provision be made permissible for him.

In conclusion, the presumption concerning employment and the abandonment of unemployment is permissibility, save where indicia are present which displace such presumption and transfer the matter into the realm of prohibition, reprehensibility, obligation, or recommendation.

First: The Domain of Obligation

This arises in several circumstances, including the following:

1. That he be on the verge of perishing due to hunger or thirst and that he is unable to escape therefrom save by engaging in work and earning, and by abandoning unemployment; thus, in such a case, employment becomes obligatory upon him, for the saving of oneself from destruction is a religious obligation. It is established in the juristic maxims of the scholars that they have said: ((That without which an obligation cannot be fulfilled is itself obligatory)) [21].

2. That he be indebted and bankrupt, and that it is not possible for him to repay his debts except by working and refraining from unemployment and idleness. Seeking the means to repay debts is obligatory, and the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) refrained from offering the funeral prayer over one who died indebted, and said: ((Pray over your companion)) [7].

Ibn Hajar stated: ((This ḥadīth implies the severity of the matter of debt and that it should not be undertaken except out of necessity)) [11].

Second: The Domain of Recommendation

This is when the individual is in a state of sufficiency and ease, and perceives that his unemployment and refraining from work allows him beneficial time to be occupied in pursuits for his hereafter, or other worldly matters which contribute to his happiness and the beneficial use of his time. The availability of this time is a valuable opportunity for its cultivation before burdensome occupations arise. In the ḥadīth: ((Take advantage of five before five)), among which is mentioned: ((Your free time before your busyness)) [16].

Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī stated: ((Whosoever does not exert himself in seeking provision, and increases his efforts during his time of ease and the strength of youth, will be overcome by obstacles shortly thereafter, and he shall remain empty and deprived)) [4].

And what was stated by al-ʿAskarī concerning the utilisation of free time and the presence of health and well-being is a profound lesson for all who fall into the blameworthy trap of unemployment. The element of time is of utmost importance, to be filled with every possible expertise in life, and if it is joined by physical health, then it is a great blessing, the value of which the unemployed person shall come to realise in his future professional life.

Third: The Domain of Prohibition

This applies when unemployment becomes a cause for the unemployed individual to lose his religion and fall into depression. This is observed in the reality of those who remain idle, as they often face severe psychological crises due to prolonged periods of inactivity throughout their day. They may even resort to criminal activities in order to procure drugs and psychoactive substances. It is a well-established principle of the jurists that ((that which leads to the prohibited is itself prohibited)) [13].

Fourth: The Domain of Disliked Acts

This occurs when unemployment leads to actions that are discouraged, but do not reach the level of prohibition. Among the principles of the jurists is their saying: ((that which leads to the disliked is itself disliked)) [12].

These four cases illustrate how unemployment moves beyond the domain of permissibility into one of the other four rulings—prohibition, dislike, obligation, and recommendation. This reflects the breadth of the Sharīʿah, its foundational principles, and its ability to accommodate rulings for newly emerging issues.

Topic Four: The Reality of Unemployment in Najran

Field reports indicate that the Najran region has achieved the highest rate of reduction in unemployment among the Kingdom's regions, with a decrease of 2.4%, bringing the unemployment rate to 2.7% among men and 12.6% among women. The Labour Market Bulletin for the third quarter of 2022, issued by the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT), revealed a decline in the unemployment rate among Saudi nationals (men and women aged 15 and above) in the Najran region.

This comes according to the estimates of the Labour Force Survey, which is conducted on a quarterly basis, whereby the unemployment rate decreased to 5.8% in the third quarter of the year 2022, compared to the second quarter of the same year when it was 8.4%. The Director General of the Branch of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in

Najran, ‘Umar Al-Nu‘aymī, stated: These results are in line with the directives and support of the Emir of the region, Chairman of the Supreme Supervisory Committee for Localisation, and serve as a motivation to continue efforts to achieve further accomplishments in the implementation of localisation decisions in the sectors included therein. [20]

From these reports, several key indicators may be deduced as follows:

1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, may Allah safeguard it and its noble leaders, seeks to reduce the unemployment rate gradually, recognising the diversity of its individual cases among members of society, and its future plan under the ambitious Vision 2030 aims to eradicate it completely.
2. The reduction rate in unemployment encompasses both genders, thus achieving justice between the sexes, especially as women frequently experience circumstances such as divorce, bereavement, and widowhood, necessitating the provision of job opportunities suitable to the nature of women. Indeed, the State has opened the field for home-based production activities and regulated them under official health guidelines, which has contributed to providing additional income for a large number of women while residing in their homes, engaging in home production including cooked meals and traditional sweets, thereby contributing to raising awareness of the importance of clean, healthy, home-cooked food.
3. Localisation is considered a necessary step to provide job opportunities for Saudi nationals instead of non-Saudis, a measure adopted by developed nations due to the high demand for jobs, whilst affording full financial rights to those non-Saudis whose contracts have been terminated.

Topic Five: Treating Unemployment from a Fiqh and Economic Perspective

Firstly: From the Fiqh Perspective: Islamic jurisprudence contributes to reducing unemployment through the following means:

1. Imbuing work with an element of worship, thereby granting reward and spiritual merit to the worker who forsakes unemployment out of religious duty and in pursuit of provision. By intending modesty and securing sustenance for oneself and one’s family, one’s engagement in labour becomes a form of worship. Religious texts clearly indicate that rewards are attained by those who strive in this domain. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah said: “Worship is a comprehensive term for all that Allah loves and is pleased with, including words and deeds, both outward and inward.” [9] The pursuit of work with the intention of attaining modesty and provision falls under this definition of worship.
2. Zakah and charitable donations to support unemployed individuals in need until they find work that enables them to avoid begging and relying on charity. It is evident that an unemployed person who has exerted effort to secure employment without success, and thus lacks income, is among those eligible for zakah and charity—particularly if they are preparing for marriage and starting a family. They are considered part of the poor, and they may also be burdened by debts. As such, they qualify as debtors who can receive zakah, according to the consensus of scholars. [2]
3. The Shari‘ah’s efforts to achieve people’s welfare and ward off harm.

Unemployment leads to psychological and physical illnesses. Anything that brings benefit is encouraged by the Shari‘ah, and anything that leads to harm and corruption is repelled. Islamic law is fundamentally established to secure benefits and prevent harms. [13]

Secondly: Treating Unemployment from an Economic Perspective: The issue of unemployment can be addressed by economists through the following means:

1. Stimulating the economy: by increasing governmental expenditure and investments to create new job opportunities.
2. Education and vocational training: to ensure that skills align with the needs of the market.
3. Encouraging entrepreneurship: and supporting small and medium enterprises to increase employment opportunities.
4. Legislative reforms: to regulate the labour market and encourage the private sector to employ. [5]

Topic Six: Important Regulations Related to the Issue of Unemployment

There is a set of regulations—diligently compiled—that provide deeper dimensions to the subject of this research, which we shall summarise as follows:

1. Every act connected to unemployment does not fall outside the fivefold categories of legal rulings.
2. There is no unemployment for one possessing an academic qualification coupled with distinguished practical experience.
3. Whoever does not utilise his free time in developing his skills becomes prone to unemployment.
4. Whoever is conscious of the value of time in life shall not be affected by the affliction of unemployment.
5. Every nation with a strong economy and keen interest in education experiences lower unemployment rates;

conversely, nations with weak economies and poor focus on education witness higher unemployment rates.

6. Any certificate forged by a job applicant warrants a discretionary punishment (ta'zīr) as deemed appropriate by the judge. Forgery brings ill fate to its perpetrator, obliterates blessings, and results in imprisonment and punishment.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research yielded several findings, the most important of which are as follows:

1. Unemployment is a global problem, and the Najran Region, like all cities of the world, seeks to reduce the unemployment rate through the combined efforts of the State and the private sector.
2. Unemployment is the failure of an individual to secure employment due to the lack of theoretical knowledge and practical experience.
3. Unemployment has several causes, including the laziness of youth, the lack of desire to work, the absence of suitable graduation grades, the excess of graduates, and the lack of professional experience.
4. There are numerous solutions to unemployment, the most significant of which include: encouraging investment within Najran and other cities of the Kingdom to help create suitable job opportunities, and initiating projects that align with the capacities of young graduates.
5. The default ruling concerning employment is permissibility, except where it is accompanied by circumstances that remove it from this default and place it within the sphere of obligation, recommendation, prohibition, or dislike.
6. A decrease in the unemployment rate has been observed in the Najran Region, which is promising; however, there remains an urgent need for intensified efforts between the public and private sectors to realise the ambitious Vision 2030, which aims to nationalise professions and eliminate unemployment entirely.
7. The Shari'ah has contributed to limiting the problem of unemployment through several means detailed in the relevant section of the research.
8. There are important axiomatic regulations related to the issue of unemployment, which have been explained in the main body of the research.

6. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

The research produced important recommendations worthy of further writing and exploration, including:

- a. The impact of joint efforts between the public and private sectors in raising the level of the economy: a legal and economic perspective.
- b. Early professional training and its effect on eliminating the problem of unemployment.

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