

Getting a Job in Ghana: The Role of Social Networks in Graduates' Job Attainment in the Ghanaian Labour Market

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Introduction

Social networks, as envisaged by the classical works of Albert Rees (1966) and Mark Granovetter (1973; 1974), were meant to alleviate informational frictions that are present in the job market. This is because both prospective job seekers and job vacancies are highly heterogeneous due to job seekers' skills, specialisations and personalities as well as jobs' characteristics, locations, workplace cultures, and so on. Consequently, employers may have to incur large costs to find a good match, including the cost of assessing applications, interviews, and internships. In such circumstances, prospective workers' social networks (employee referrals) provide firms with an alternative means to resolve uncertainty about the quality of a potential worker. That is, an employee occasionally acts as a "matchmaker" and produces a referral. Because the referrer (already employed) personally knows the qualities of a prospective applicant, and because he is an insider of the company, the referrer can tell if the candidate is suitable for the job. This way, referrers act as an alternative to public and private placement agencies. Essentially, the social networks foreseen and documented in the literature are employee referrals.

However, according to Agyemang (2024), in the context of Ghana, the kind of social networks practised are more of nepotism, corruption, and patronage. Recruitment and selection in the public sector and major private entities are based on linking referrals, family and friends locally known as "whom you know". The labour market is often hijacked by the ruling coalition with the distribution of handouts based on being affiliated with them. Recruitment is often not transparent, without explicit procedures and subject to "whom you know", which promotes favouritism and discrimination.

Even though many graduates possess employable skills, they still face personal and structural impediments in the Ghanaian labour market. Due to social networks surrounding recruitment and employment, graduates with higher levels of human capital (degree holders) cannot straightforwardly choose market-oriented methods for attaining a job (Agyemang, 2024). In the Ghanaian labour market social networks act as a resource-opportunity structure in obtaining or depriving employment opportunities, and thus several graduates face higher barriers in gaining access to and progressing in, Ghana's labour market, than others. This chapter, therefore, explores graduate employability in Ghana in relation to social networks and job attainment. It focuses on the job search experiences of employed graduates, and includes the roles of weak and strong ties in the labour market.

This chapter is structured into nine sections. This introduction is the first section. The next section presents an overview of the graduate turnout with an emphasis on percentage of job acquisition in Ghana. Section three discusses the social network model utilised, after which related literature

is discussed (section four). Section five explains the method followed. The empirical results are presented in section six, and discussed in section seven. The final two sections discuss theoretical implications (section eight), summarise the findings and conclude.

Brief overview of graduate turnout in Ghana

Ghana has accredited 16 public traditional universities, 10 public technical universities, 24 private universities, and a further 95 private degree-offering tertiary institutions (GTEC, 2025). Although smaller in number, the public universities produce more graduates yearly than the others. It is estimated that the tertiary institutions in Ghana produce an annual graduate turnout of 300,000 students (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018), thousands of which are unable to find job placements. According to data from the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), only 10% of graduates are able to secure formal jobs after completing their mandatory national service, and sometimes it can take up to 10 years for a considerable majority to find jobs (cf. Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018). Similar studies find that as many as 50% of graduates are unable to find employment two years after their national service; 20% of them usually do not find jobs three years after completing their mandatory national service (Aryeetey, 2011; Owusu-Ansah & Kofi, 2012).

Social Network Theory

There is a consensus in research on social capital that the social network is one of the important determinants of securing job information and employment. In everyday interactions and in the media the terms “social networks” and “referrals” are often used in this context. The same terms are also used in academic research, albeit somewhat loosely. Formally, a network is defined as a set of nodes and a set of links connecting those nodes. Hence, networks can be used to describe relationships between people, firms, computer servers, telephone lines and switches, and so on (De Martí & Zenou, 2009). In his study of the labour market and referrals, Topa (2011) used the term “social networks” to indicate the set of social connections linking individuals. Similarly, DiMaggio and Garip (2012) defined social networks as a set of actors connected by a set of relations or ties. Calvó-Armengol and Zenou (2001) defined social networks as links and associations between people of a common ilk and these can be family, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. Accordingly, any form of links and connections can qualify as a social network.

In this chapter, social networks generally encompass a person’s relatives, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, colleagues, and peers, and do not refer to a social media platform. The term “social networks” therefore includes ethnic associations, political affiliations, alumni networks and religious affiliations.

For some, social networks rank amongst the most important explanatory factors in deciding to migrate to urban areas (Arango, 2004). They serve as the basis for diffusion of knowledge as well as support in locating available opportunities (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Interactions within social networks of people provide information, shelter, and introduce newcomers to the labour market and available opportunities. These networks play a vital role in the absorption of newcomers in the labour market.

Granovetter (1973; 1974) distinguished between strong and weak ties in social networks. Strong ties are relationships that need large amounts of time, effort and emotional involvement to maintain, such as bonds with spouses or relationships between parents and children. As a result, individuals can expect financial and emotional support from these stable, secure relationships. On the contrary, weak ties are connections to acquaintances or distant relatives which often tend to occupy a less significant place in one's social life. However, Granovetter (1973) emphasised that weak ties are more likely to be the source of fresh information than strong ties. This is due to the fact that close friends tend to move in the same circles and, as result, acquire information that frequently overlaps with what members already know. By contrast, acquaintances know different people and thus are likely to receive novel information. This is important for graduates searching for jobs and opportunities in a new society.

Social networks can be considered a form of social capital that is stretched across space and facilitates the likelihood of finding job opportunities. This is achieved through obligations, reciprocity and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and society's institutional arrangements, which enables its members to achieve their goals (Narayan & Pritchett, 1997). University graduates draw upon this capital to gain access to employment and other resources. The capital is derived from the networks and associations that people participate in, and from which they can derive support that contributes to their livelihoods. For a social relationship to be termed "capital" it must be persistent, giving rise to stocks (for example, of trust and knowledge) on which people can draw, even if the social interaction itself is not permanent (Rakodi, 2002).

Despite the appealing nature of this theory, social networks, while valuable in facilitating certain actions, may be harmful to others (Coleman, 1998). Social networks may be formed and segmented along ethnic, socio-economic and racial lines. This brings into question the effect social, or referral networks may have on inequality between and within different groups of job seekers (Schmutte, 2016). That is, social networks have the tendency to keep some groups off the labour market thereby contributing to inequality and immobility. Similarly, it has the possibility of creating or reinforcing patronage or ethnic relations.

By using socio-economic status, we grouped a person's social networks into three categories: formal social networks (employee referrals), informal social networks (family, friends) and linking referrals (third party or intermediary). Formal social network (employee referral/professional contacts) is where a person is recommended for a job or position in the same institution as the referee. Here, the contact acts as a matchmaker between the potential applicant and potential employer by bridging informational asymmetry. However, the contact only refers the jobseeker to the potential employer(s). For the job seeker to be employed, he/she needs to present his/her credentials to meet the requirement hence professional contact. This was found to be the case in a few of the private companies in Ghana.

Informal social network (family and friends contacts) is where a jobseeker is not only referred but also helped to secure a job or position by his/her relatives and friends. The jobseeker's contacts go to the extent of influencing the appointment in favour of the job seeker. Here, the assessment of credentials is "not really important" as the job seeker may not meet the professional requirement. This makes job interviews, examinations or any aptitude test just a formality. The contact does not act as a matchmaker but rather acts as an influencer. This was very widespread in the public sector, and small and medium enterprises.

Linking referrals is where a third-party or intermediaries secure jobs for jobseekers by virtue of the intermediaries' position or influence. They may or may not know the jobseeker very well and the relationship may be strong or just an ordinary acquaintanceship. We refer to the intermediaries as "patrons" and the jobseekers as "clients". Like the informal social network, the clients may not meet the professional requirements of the job or vacancy announced. The patrons were found to be mostly politicians, chiefs, and individuals who command influence in society. Many a time, the patrons have links with the top hierarchy of the company or institution, but they do not work in the said companies and institutions. This was very widespread in the public sector.

Related literature

Prior research has established and differentiated between two main job search methods: formal and informal. With formal methods, a jobseeker mostly relies on public or market intermediaries such as employment agencies, newspaper adverts, and subscribing to job alerts (Drentea, 1998). Formal job search strategies are not tightly linked to informal employment middlemen (Huffman & Torres, 2001). On the other hand, informal sources entail using closely knit and private mediators such as friends, relatives, teachers, and acquaintances to seek employment opportunities (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). For Ghana, empirical literature has shown that workers usage of social ties does help to generate job offers faster. Social ties were instrumental in the acquisition of workers' previous and current jobs as a majority of the respondents secured their jobs through a relative or friend (Baah-Boateng et al., 2019; Affum-Osei et al., 2019; Nyarko et al., 2014). Of importance, the direct approach was found to be the second most important method through which the respondents secured jobs. Formal channels such as responding to advertisements in newspapers, radio or the internet were the least often mentioned method of securing jobs. Besides informal methods found to be relevant in enhancing employability, Adraki et al. (2018) also revealed that jobseekers who were related to an organisational member faced little or no problem in securing jobs.

Many empirical studies that look beyond the case of Ghana have documented the usage of social networks in the labour market. The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) study on social relations and support systems in 28 countries emphasised the essence of social contacts in job search. The results showed that most of the respondents in these countries first learned about their jobs through informal networks (Franzen & Hangartner, 2006). Pellizzari (2010) equally showed the widespread reliance on social ties across countries and industries. The problems attributed to this phenomenon include the possibility that individuals who secured employment through personal connections may not meet the qualifications for higher-paying positions available through formal avenues. Additionally, these individuals are often less likely to engage in thorough job searches.

Evidently, the influence of social networks on the labour market is significant, but little evidence exists about the correlation between the utilisation of informal networks and qualifications. Also, many uncertainties still surround the type of network ties essential in the labour market. This study connects to the literature in a variety of ways. It contributes to the current, limited knowledge on informal networks and graduate job qualifications.

Method

The data for this study was collected through qualitative fieldwork in Ghana between 2021 and 2022. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Accra and Kumasi with the help of an interview guide. All participants were university graduates with bachelor degrees. A total of 60 employed graduates were interviewed from both public and private sectors under the following categorisation: Health services; Public Policy, Planning, Services, Administrative and related services; Education (Tertiary), Scientific and Research; Revenue and Accounting; Security Services; Legal and Judicial Services; Regulatory; Non-tertiary Education; Manufacturing; Banking and finance; Media and Telecommunication. All the participants gave their consent to use the data for the purpose of this research with their responses remaining anonymous and confidential. Demographic and educational background information on the respondents is presented in Table 15.1.

The respondents were asked to indicate the various channels they used to secure their current jobs. The respondents were not limited to any list to choose from as it was an open interview. The type of search methods used by the participants was profiled based on sector of employment, and type of ties.

Table 15.1. Background information of employed graduates

Demographics	Frequency (N=60)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	40	66.67
Female	20	33.33
Age category		
20-29	30	50.0
30-39	23	38.3
40-49	6	10.0
50-59	1	1.7
University Attended		
University of Ghana	17	28.3
KNUST	19	31.7
University of Cape Coast	4	6.7
University of Education	7	11.7
University for Development Studies	2	3.3
Others	11	18.3
Type of University		
Public	49	81.7
Private	4	6.7
Technical Universities	7	11.7
Year of Completion		
2000-2009	3	5.0
2010-2019	48	80.0
Since 2019	9	15.0

Demographics	Frequency (N=60)	Percentage
Programme of Study		
<i>Humanities & Social Sciences</i>	14	23.3
<i>Engineering & Construction</i>	12	20.0
<i>Education</i>	6	10.0
<i>Business Related</i>	10	16.7
<i>Sciences</i>	9	15.0
<i>Other programmes</i>	9	15.0
Ethnicity		
<i>Akan</i>	28	46.7
<i>Ga</i>	7	11.7
<i>Ewe</i>	8	13.3
<i>Other groups</i>	17	28.3
Marital Status		
<i>Married</i>	15	25.0
<i>single</i>	45	75.0
Region of Residence		
<i>Greater Accra</i>	31	51.7
<i>Greater Kumasi</i>	29	48.3

Source: Fieldwork, Emmanuel Agyemang, 2021/2022.

Empirical findings

Successful job search method by employed/working graduates

Table 15.2. Job search method and outcomes by employed graduates

Job search method	Frequency (N=60)	Success from search method
Informal methods (n=46)		
<i>Family/friends</i>	30	50%
<i>Friends of friends</i>	7	11.6%
<i>Ex-workers/Bosses</i>	9	15%
Formal methods (n=13)		
<i>Newspaper advertisement</i>	1	1.7%
<i>Radio advertisement</i>	1	1.7%
<i>Social media platforms</i>	4	6.7%
<i>Professional Recruiting websites</i>	5	8.3%
<i>National service</i>	2	3.3%
Direct approach (n=1)		
<i>Send CVs to organisations</i>	1	1.7%
Total	60	100%

Source: Fieldwork, Emmanuel Agyemang, 2021/22.

This part examines the search method that yielded the job offers for the employed graduates. The search method that generated the highest success rate was “family and friends” (50%). “Ex-workers

and Bosses" were the second, yielding 15% success. Another informal method, "friends of friends" had almost 12%, being the third most successful method. This is followed by searching professional recruiting websites with over 8% success rate. Next was searching through social media platforms with almost 7% and been retained in the same enterprise after national service yielding little over 3%. The following search methods: newspaper advertisements, radio advertisements and direct sending of CVs to organisations were the least successful methods according to the respondents with each recording less than a 2% success rate. Essentially, the data shows that the most successful job search methods are the informal channels with a combined rate of almost 77%. The distribution of the results can be found in Table 15.2.

Sector of employment by the employed graduates

Respondents were also asked in which sector (public or private) they had found employment and their replies have been related to their job search methods. More than three-quarters (25) of the "family and friends" (including linking referrals) search method secured jobs in the public sector. The informal methods: "friends of friends", and "ex-workers" (mostly professional contacts or employee referrals) were more used to secure jobs in the private sector than the public sector. The formal search methods: "professional recruiting websites" and "social media platforms" were also more important in the private sector than the public sector. However, the two respondents who were maintained after national service were both in the public sector. Both newspaper and radio ads were also utilised in the private sector. Table 15.3 shows the distribution in relation to the sectors.

Table 15.3. Sector of employment of employed graduates

Job search method	Frequency (N=60)	Public sector	Private sector
Informal methods (n=46)			
<i>Family/friends</i>	30	25	5
<i>Friends of friends</i>	7	2	5
<i>Ex-workers/Bosses</i>	9	3	6
Formal methods (n=13)			
<i>Newspaper advertisement</i>	1	-	1
<i>Radio advertisement</i>	1	-	1
<i>Social media platforms</i>	4	-	4
<i>Professional Recruiting websites</i>	5	1	4
<i>National service</i>	2	2	-
Direct approach (n=1)			
<i>Send CVs to organisations</i>	1	-	1
Total	60	33	27

Source: Fieldwork, Emmanuel Agyemang, 2021/22.

Employed graduates' network ties

From the previous analysis, it was revealed that 46 out of the 60 employed graduates secured their jobs through social networks. Table 15.4 shows the tie strength of the employed graduates' contacts.

Table 15.4. *Weak and Strong ties dichotomy among the employed graduates*

Informal search method	Frequency (N=46)	Weak ties	Strong ties
Family/friends	30	0	30
Friends of friends	7	7	0
Ex-workers/Bosses	9	9	0
Total	46	16	30

Source: Fieldwork, Emmanuel Agyemang, 2021/22.

All the 30 respondents of “family/friends” indicated that they have a strong bonding with their contacts. This shows frequent interaction and intensity between the respondents and their contacts. On the other hand, all the 16 respondents of “friends of friends and ex-workers”, indicated that they have weak ties with their contacts. Their relationship was of more occasional and less intense interaction.

Analysis and discussion of job search methods

Having considered the theoretical and the empirical evidence relating to the job search methods, it is useful to provide a critical discussion of these findings and their relationships. The aim is to determine the significant patterns through which graduates obtain jobs in the Ghanaian labour market.

Productivity of formal vs informal job search methods

With regard to the job search methods, the findings show that informal channels are very useful for not only job information but also for securing jobs. Theoretically, the findings confirm the results of previous studies on social networks and job attainment (Rees, 1966; Saks, 2005; Granovetter, 1995; Montgomery, 1991; Mouw, 2003; Jackson, 2011). Empirically, the findings are also “generally” consistent with the two previous studies on social networks surrounding the Ghanaian labour market (Affum-Osei et al., 2019; Baah-Boateng et al., 2019).

However, what this study measures differs from these two previous studies. In both studies, the researchers looked at the frequently used job search method to arrive at their conclusions. However, in addition to the frequently used methods, the current study measured the success rate of all the job search methods listed by the employed graduates. This was done by asking the respondents to indicate the particular method that helped them to secure their current jobs. Their responses suggest that

informal job search methods are more useful than formal methods in securing jobs in the Ghanaian labour market.

Among the informal methods, using family and friends was found to be the most frequent and successful search method in the Ghanaian job market. From all the tables presented, family and friends as a search method cut across all demographics. It has the highest success rate compared to friends of friends and ex-workers/bosses.

The findings confirm the long-held perception of the “whom you know” syndrome that characterises the Ghanaian labour market. One of the respondents in the public sector posited when asked how she secured her job:

Well in Ghana, when it comes to searching for jobs, you need the help of loved ones, friends and even enemies because you can't search for a job by yourself. So when there is any vacancy anywhere, you get the alerts from these people. That is how it works here (personal interview, 6/10/2021 in Kumasi).

Another respondent explained how he secured his job after national service:

So, during the service, I made friends around and through the friends, actually, it was through the person I knew then that secured me the job. I can't mention his name but he was a public figure then and it was through him that I got employed here. He asked me to bring my application in. In fact, he directed me to the place that I am supposed to direct my application letter to, the CEO so I had no option. So, I did that and forwarded it to him and after some time, I got a response, and I was given the appointment (personal interview, 10/10/2021 in Kumasi).

Another respondent at a public utility company gave an account of the “whom you know” situation:

The truth is, I got this job through a friend. I initially applied through the normal process, but I never received a response. My colleague who had a link in there was however employed. I made enquiries via online after my first application failed. The recruitment process is not known. They keep on bringing in new people, yet we are not aware of when applications were opened for recruitment. These new people usually come from the government in power and relatives of superiors. That is the current trend in Ghana. It is not time-consuming. Without links, getting a job is very difficult (personal interview, 5/11/2021 in Accra).

On the formal and informal methods, this study theorised that the informal sources have valuable gains to job seekers in the Ghanaian labour market. That is, quality of information is more essential than quantity. A job seeker is interested in identifying only those positions for which he or she would be considered actually and would consider accepting. Long lists of objectionable or inaccessible positions are of little interest. As such, gathering information from friends and relatives may be more important than from an advertisement in the newspaper, internet or at an employment agency. Therefore, relying on particularistic means is rational behaviour for graduates hunting for jobs in Ghana.

Variation in formal and informal in the Ghanaian context

On regional employment patterns, empirical research suggests that social networks are essential in urban labour markets (Matthews et al., 2009). This study focuses on Ghana's two main urban regions: Accra and Kumasi. The findings confirm that those in the urban regions are more likely to use informal methods than formal methods. However, the study found that the use of weak ties may not be effective in shrinking labour markets. Although weak ties (friends of friends) play a major role in job search in urban areas, they are much less effective in difficult labour markets such as Ghana's public sector. The study found that strong ties (family and friends) are more important paths to a good job fit.

Additionally, formal job search methods such as newspaper advertisements, professional recruiting websites and national services are beneficial to all job seekers. As Drentea (1998) noted, the use of formal methods reduces segregation premised on gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and educational levels. Though the formal application system has many advantages, the Ghanaian job search process to a very large extent, revolved around the popular concept of "whom you know". Even when jobs are advertised by state agencies and private employers in anticipation of formal responses, the selection processes are usually informal.

An analysis of all job vacancies in the main newspaper in Ghana, the *Daily Graphic*, from September 2022 to February 2023 found that none of the advertisements indicated the salary of the position to be filled. Advertisements utilized euphemisms like "attractive", "competitive", "excellent", "substantial", "outstanding", and "significant" pay. They thus kept potential employees in the dark about how much they might reasonably expect to be paid. The analysis also observed a concerning trend: multinational corporations and foreign-affiliated organisations, which previously disclosed salary structures in job adverts, have now adopted the same practice. According to Drentea (1998), this breeds biases and perpetuates segregation in the employment process.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that the use of formal job search methods may be less effective across biographic characteristics in Ghana. This study attributes this to the shrinking nature of the Ghana's economy coupled with the high unemployment rate. In fact, studies show that formal job search methods have little impact on the job search in dwindling or constrained economies (Nyarko et al., 2014). For instance, when unemployment is high, competition for every vacancy is tougher and personal networks become more important for job seekers (Håkansson & Tovatt, 2017). Hence, the higher reliance of jobseekers on relatives and friends for alerts of job openings as well as using them as intermediaries for successful employment, especially in the public sector.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is clear that graduates obtained useful information through their social networks regarding the Ghanaian labour market. As such, the majority of the graduates search for jobs through informal channels compared to the formal channels, making it the major job search channel for graduates in Ghana.

The dichotomy of weak and strong ties in Ghanaian labour market

The study also finds that the prevalence of strong ties coincides with the “meaningful” and “any” argument by Patulny et al., (2019). The analysis discovers that the majority of the respondents with strong ties are working or employed in reputable organisations and companies in the public or private sector. As such, they are working in their preferred institutions such as Ghana Cocoa Board, Electricity Company of Ghana, Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT), Ghana Revenue Authority, National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO), Customs Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS), Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC), Volta River Authority (VRA), Ghana Airports Company Limited, Newmont Ghana, AngloGold Ashanti, construction firms, banking and finance. On the other hand, those who secure their jobs through weak ties are using these jobs as a stepping-stone for better options in future. At best, they fit the classification of the “any” jobs category. Though these jobs are not precarious, they are not the dream jobs of the respondents. In short, weak ties can transmit job information, but to have a meaningful job in the above institutions in Ghana, one must develop a strong tie with his or her contacts for novel information.

Another reason for strong ties is the instrumental support. This study defines instrumental support as assistance that goes beyond just providing job information. Such support are extended to ensure that the person is offered the position or job. While weak ties offer job information to job seekers, strong ties offer instrumental support in addition to informational support. Also, in a shrinking or small formal sector of an economy with high graduate unemployment such as Ghana, instrumental support is key as highlighted by the respondents. Again, the respondents argued that a contact would spread job vacancy information to weak ties only if their strong ties are already employed. Therefore, if the probability of joblessness is high, it is optimal to have all strong ties seeking for jobs, which in turn will block the chances of weak ties. This matches Boorman's (1975) assertion of the importance of strong ties based on the quality of the network.

Theoretical implications

The study findings have implications for a theoretical understanding of job search methods, especially social networks. Particularly, an individual's family and friends' networks are an important source of job information based on the findings. Second, the weak ties hypothesis (cf. Granovetter 1973; 1995) is “irrational” in the context of the study. The findings do not support the weak ties explanations as more important in securing jobs in the labour market. Rather, the study finds that the majority of the respondents rely on their strong ties for jobs. That is, strong ties are more important in securing jobs in the Ghanaian labour market. Therefore, the social networks found or existing in Ghana are not based on employee referrals, but rather linking referrals and informal social networks. The labour market is such that “an individual must know someone” or “someone must know an individual” through family, “friendship”, religious, tribal, or political ties. Without such connections, a graduate is unlikely to secure a job, irrespective of competence or qualification. The study does not support the assertion that most people who rely on informal networks do not have the necessary qualifications.

Both formal and informal job search strategies contribute to the process of obtaining employment, but informal job search approaches are the most effective. According to Burt (1992), under conditions of perfect competition, social capital is constant. However, because the perfect competition does not exist in such arenas as the marketplace, social capital makes the difference. Burt put it as follows:

Within an acceptable range of needed abilities, there are many people with financial and human capital comparable to your own. Whatever you bring to the production task, there are other people who could do the same job-perhaps not as well in every detail, but probably as well within the tolerances of the people for whom the job is done. Criteria other than financial and human capital are used to narrow the pool down to the individual who gets the opportunity. Those other criteria are social capital. New life is given to the proverb that says success is determined less by what you know than by whom you know (Burt 1992, p.10).

Or, in other words: in a labour market where individuals with similar financial and human capital endowments compete for limited opportunities, those who can mobilise contacts with the proper resources get an advantage.

Limitations and conclusion

There is a wealth of empirical literature in economics and sociology on the function of social networks in the labour market. Although many studies that have estimated the effect of informal contact usage in the job search process focus on the Global North, this study adds to the less extensive literature on labour market outcomes in Africa in both theoretical and empirical ways. The high unemployment rate, along with the current economic downturn, necessitates the use of informal means in job search. The findings provide vital insight into the importance of social networks in the job hunt. The study finds that job applicants with wide and strong social relationships and social connections are more likely to receive a higher number of job offers. Soliciting information from friends, relatives, and coworkers broadens job seekers' knowledge of potential vacancies and expands their social network, which leads to more job opportunities.

Relying on empirical data based on interviews with university graduates, it can be said, in the cases of Accra and Kumasi (with a 60-respondent sample), the majority of working graduates had their first jobs through social networks (friends and relatives). It is also observed that relying on strong ties (relatives and friends) is very effective in the public sector while weak ties (friends of friends) are effective in the private sector. This is due to the high unemployment and the limited job vacancies in the labour market. Thus personal networks become more important for job seekers.

This notwithstanding, the results should be interpreted with caution as the sample size is quite small. A much larger study covering other regions in Ghana is therefore needed especially on the recruitment process in the Ghanaian public sector.

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