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## Exploring the Psychological impact of Unemployment Among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

This study employed a qualitative method to explore the psychological impact of unemployment among young adults in District Abbottabad. It focused on understanding the emotional challenges faced by unemployed youth, including anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and social isolation. The research highlighted how prolonged joblessness disrupts not only financial stability but also mental health, identity formation, and interpersonal relationships. Cultural expectations and family pressures were found to intensify these psychological burdens, often leaving individuals feeling inadequate and hopeless. Through in-depth interviews, the study also examined coping mechanisms adopted by youth, such as skill-building, emotional withdrawal, and reliance on family or peer support. Findings emphasize the need for integrated support systems that address both the economic and emotional well-being of unemployed youth. By shedding light on their lived experiences, the research advocates for mental health interventions, awareness programs, and policy reforms that respond to the complex realities of youth unemployment in culturally specific contexts like Abbottabad.

## Introduction

Many nations are now worried about young adult unemployment which has impacts on their finances and on their emotional and mental state as well. Building a career, becoming financially independent and forming their place in society are main goals of young adulthood. If your job ambitions are not met, you may feel stressed, anxious, depressed, unsure of yourself and hopeless. There are more emotional problems from unemployment than just poverty. Unemployed people may feel like they haven't succeeded, are looked down upon for being poor and can't provide what they want for their own families (Wani et al., 2024). They can have a damaging impact on a person's mindset, connections with people and ability to stay driven long term. In addition, unemployed people are more likely to become isolated, rely on their family and become involved in dangerous activities (Allatt & Yeandle, 2025). Economic causes of youth unemployment have received a lot of attention, but its mental effects have been studied much less, especially from the youths' own point of view. Understanding them enables us to make focused mental health policies and help programs. Besides other problems, young people often see their sense of self and what they stand for be harmed by ongoing unemployment, since society may value them by the success of their work. When you face rejection several times or go weeks without an offer, your expectations can drop and you may start believing there's nothing you can do to fix your situation. Unemployment at the start of a person's career may affect them and last even as they get older. It can make adults wait longer for marriage, owning a home and starting a family, things closely linked to stability and growing up (Freund et al., 2025). Because time is lost, students might feel they are not keeping up with others and are losing their self-esteem. Adolescents who don't work regularly tend to have sleep and eating issues which can add to their physical and mental problems. Some people seeing no job may find that their mental health suffers (Kelly et al., 2025). People lacking support or coping skills may choose to abuse drugs or show other harmful behavior just to cope with their problems. The problem is made more confusing by how people feel and believe about it. All over, jobless youth are frequently looked down on, even when it is hard to find jobs and pay inequality is the root problem (Mathieu et al., 2022). The judgments society makes can make young people less willing to ask for support and gradually prevent them from being part of their community which leads to greater loneliness (Cuervo et al., 2022). A full range of solutions is needed, ranging from available mental health services and community-based programs to providing young people with customized career advice. Training youth in new skills, giving them wise mentors and making social activities accessible can restore their self-esteem and help them decide on their future (Ralph & Arora, 2023).

## Problem of Statement

Even though many young adults in District Abbottabad have education and want to work, they stay unemployed. We often think of unemployment as an economic problem, but the region often neglects the mental health issues it causes. Among youth in Abbottabad, many who are unemployed have mental health problems and do not get the help they require. Feeling pressure from culture and families can force one to feel they aren't enough and can lead to loneliness. Because we don't focus enough on the emotional effects of unemployment, individuals' welfare decreases and it becomes more challenging for them to get back into work. A need exists to study and document these psychological effects to shape the right interventions for unemployed young adults in District Abbottabad.

## Research Objectives

1. To assess the psychological impact of unemployment on young adults.
2. To explore the coping mechanisms adopted by unemployed youth.
3. To examine the role of family and social support in managing psychological distress.

## Literature Review

Most of the literature examines youth unemployment primarily in terms of financial factors such as unemployed youth not having income, ending up poor or not participating actively in the labor market. This problem has attracted more research lately, specifically on young adults experiencing unemployment during an important time in their lives (Berhe, 2021). Experts say that individuals who are unemployed often feel stressed, have problems with mental health and struggle with who they are. Although the research suggests these issues, in many developing regions, including parts of Pakistan, psychology and unemployment are not yet thoroughly studied together. The coping tactics of young job seekers and support from their families and communities are less well known, suggesting an important gap in research and government planning. Knowing these aspects helps guide interventions that support the economy as well as improve emotions and social well-being (Umoh, 2025).

## 1. Psychological Impact of Unemployment on Young Adults

Not having a job during young adulthood can strongly affect a person's mental health. In this part of life, many people work on being independent, creating their identity and advancing in a career. If there are no jobs available, it can cut short the development process and cause a lot of stress in people. Many people start to feel alike because their goals are hard to reach and their schedules no longer have order. Unable to find work, youth begin to worry about the upcoming difficulties and feel completely helpless (O'higgins, 1997).

Although the emotional upset starts with sadness or discontent, it can worsen into chronic stress, anxiety and sometimes clinical depression. Being unsure about their self-worth, intelligence and capabilities can lower young adults' interest in going after new opportunities. Persons may develop trouble falling asleep, feel less motivated, become irritable and avoid society. At times, emotional chaos can result in someone using harmful habits or drugs to get away. What's more, people who do not have a job may feel even more ashamed and cut off from their community when productivity and financial success matter widely (Mayer & Holleder, 2022).

The more time spent without a job, the harder it is on someone mentally. After a while, people may take on failure and begin to think they are causing stress or problems for their families or society. Stress from their emotions can keep people from making improvements, leading to a constant feeling of helplessness. If we understand how unemployment harms people mentally, we can better address all the ways it influences unemployed youth (Vancea & Utzet, 2017).

## 2. Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Unemployed Youth

During periods of unemployment, young people cope with the stress in different ways, some healthy and some not so healthy. A number of people develop new skills, work as freelancers, volunteer or pursue more learning to become more employable. Taking active steps improves their abilities and brings back their confidence. Attending short courses, gaining work experience through internships or pursuing online certifications gives them discipline and helps them see what's possible for their future (Paul & Moser, 2009).

Many people rely on friends, family members and local groups to handle the emotional effects they experience when they lose their jobs. Connecting with others going through the same thing makes you realize you are not alone. For some, religious or spiritual ways of thinking ease their mind and give a way to make sense of trials. As a result, believers learn to stay calm, strong and look forward to improvements (Turner et al., 1991). However, some coping strategies aren't good for us. A number of young people react by spending a lot of time on screens, playing games, using drugs or withdrawing from their friends. These actions may certainly ease the person's emotions in the short run, but ultimately increase their stress and reduce their interest in working. For some, overly relying on their family can hurt relationships and pack more guilt and dependency. Knowing about different coping techniques helps develop the right support for students. By supporting good coping methods and working on bad ones, young adults may reduce the emotional stress of unemployment and become stronger emotionally (Paul & Moser, 2009).

### 3. Role of Family and Social Support in Managing Psychological Distress

The effects of unemployment on someone's mental health can be reduced by supportive family and friends. Because family plays a major role in Pakistan, financial and emotional help from them can protect unemployed youth from mental issues. A family that supports its members helps them feel less ashamed, encourages strength and motivates them to keep striving toward their goals. Parents and brothers and sisters inspiring young adults works well to keep them positive and successful. Healing emotional support from family members that job loss is acceptable at some life points helps lessen how shameful people feel. Although help for finances is not always plentiful, it can reduce the pressure of unemployment by letting people concentrate on their job or skill improvement (Gore, 1978).

There are situations when family does not help us. In a number of situations, pressure from family and society makes the emotions of unemployed youth more intense. Hearing regularly about what other adults do, worries about money or being judged on school marks may damage the atmosphere at home. The feeling of being insufficient or too much can worsen young adults' psychologically. It's also important to have support from people in the local community or mentors. Expressing feelings, getting advice and finding more resources are made easier by youth groups, online communities and mental health forums. Services provided by professional counselors can improve a person's view of problems and how to overcome them. If people within these social networks become stronger, it limits the ways youths deal with unemployment alone (Rodriguez et al., 1997).

### 4. The importance of having integration between services and mental health programs

Helping young people who cannot find work needs services that tackle their financial and emotional problems together. Helping people deal with mental health problems should be at the heart of any effort to fight unemployment. Because of limited mental health resources in District Abbottabad, youth in the area require special, affordable counseling programs to meet their needs. Mobile health teams, online therapy and community mental health professionals may help connect with people who are unemployed and not getting mental health care. Mental health awareness should be incorporated into the services provided by schools and centers for work. Sessions on stress, toughness and occupation advice give young adults methods to handle challenges and keep working. Both peer groups and mentor programs may guide you and encourage you when things seem unclear to you (Atkinson et al., 1986).

Sharing ideas and assisting one another between these organizations and government agencies can build support systems with many dimensions. Combining learning new skills with mental health support helps bridge skills gaps and ensure better well-being. By participating in internships, apprenticeships and community projects, young people find meaningful things to do as they continue searching for work. All in all, facing the effects of youth unemployment on young people must include minding their feelings, their social life and their cultural environment. Communities that side with job creation also help youth grow emotionally to handle the challenges of their futures. Looking after mental health is a kind thing to do, but it has other benefits as well (Paul & Moser, 2009).

### Research Methodology

This research used qualitative methods to understand how unemployment affects the way young adults feel in District Abbottabad. To explore what participants, go through during long-term unemployment, a phenomenological design was adopted. The age range of the target population was 20–30 and all individuals had an educational level of at least Intermediate. Purposive sampling was used to include 15 participants who had varied and valuable experiences due to gender, education and the length of unemployment. The process of data collection continued until there was no new information being added to the themes. in-depth interviews lasting 45–60 minutes were conducted in private settings to ensure confidentiality. An interview guide with

open-ended questions explored emotional responses, social expectations, coping strategies, and perceived support systems. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and field notes captured contextual and non-verbal cues. To analyze the data, thematic analysis was carried out, based on the six-step model developed by Braun and Clarke this involves becoming familiar with the data, assigning codes and making themes. Prior to participation, all participants provided their consent after being informed of the study's objectives. Throughout the whole research process, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by strict adherence to ethical standards.

## Results and Discussion

This section outlines the four major themes that were discovered during the study of participants' narratives. The research discovered these themes by studying the data and they highlight what unemployed young individuals in District Abbottabad usually go through. Every theme highlights a specific way that prolonged unemployment impacts a person's mental state

### Theme 1: Emotional Distress and Psychological Breakdown

Young adults' emotional and psychological state was seriously affected by unemployment. These three challenges combined produced a major problem for people's mental health. Prolonged unemployment caused participants to feel more despair, anxiety and loneliness which could cause serious mental health issues.

Respondent Shared:

*"It was hard when my job went away, yet I didn't lose hope. When I didn't get any calls or opportunities for months, I started feeling confused. My mind would become crowded with worry each night s how can I afford to pay my bills and for how long will this go on? It was far too much to handle. I avoided meals and found myself feeling very tired all the time. Sometimes, I chose to stay in my room because it felt like admitting I wasn't enough. I was almost unrecognizable, so full of sadness and fear that getting a job seemed impossible to me."*

Another Respondent Added:

*"I attempted to stay positive at first, but soon I felt the depression hit me. I would cry only by myself, since I was ashamed for my family to see how much it was hurting me. It wasn't only about money; it was also about realizing I was stuck while others took steps forward. The peace at home was so loud. I was lonely even though I was with others. On some days, I wanted to give up, but I realized I couldn't stop. Even so, I often experienced considerable stress, ups and downs in my emotions and sadness that never went away."*

The accounts in these records highlight that unemployment strongly impacts someone's emotional life, in addition to their wallet. Citizens share that COVID-19 caused a decrease in how emotionally solid they felt and also discuss how a lack of everyday structure made all their mental health issues worse. Emotional distress appeared as anxiety, depression and pulling away from others, so mental health support designed for unemployed youth was considered necessary.

### Theme 2: Social Pressure and Family Expectations

The pressure of community and family beliefs was particularly strong on unemployed young people in District Abbottabad. It seems that many young people struggled more in therapy because of negative views from others and letdowns from their family. In poverty, suffering from unemployment is heightened by the pressures of people and family to succeed.

One Respondent narrated:

*"Our culture often assumes that after finishing your education, you'll begin to help your family right away. But most people struggle in the job market and I think most people aren't aware of this fact. The people in my family keep asking when I will start earning money and won't depend on my parents anymore. The things they say seem to crush me. From time to time, I stay away from family parties because I don't want to hear their questions or*



*judgmental words. I feel sad, since I want them to be proud, but I believe I'm letting everyone disappointed."*

Another Respondent Described:

*"My father wanted great things for me and was proud of me. The longer it took for me to find a job, the more he looked disappointed. He didn't often discuss it, but his silence had so much to say. My place didn't feel right to me; I thought I was a failure instead. Feeling that I needed to succeed too much made life difficult and it sometimes felt as if I had let down my whole family. It was worse to fear disappointing my parents than to be unemployed."*

The stories show that young people are stressed by cultural rules related to work. Since the participants felt judged by their close family and their wider community, they felt more isolated and humiliated. Because of social stigma, unemployment caused them to hide their emotions, so culturally sensitive support was very important.

### Theme 3: Loss of Self-Worth and Identity Crisis

Having a job tied closely to how the participants saw themselves and felt about themselves. Being jobless resulted in many young adults both questioning their identity and feeling less confident. The theme reveals that unemployment made many participants question both their identities and their purpose in society.

Respondent narrated:

*"I used to happily explain to people that I was a university student and had big dreams before I had a chance to graduate. There's nothing left to say about what I do now. It feels like no one can see me and I'm about to vanish. That hopeful and confident part is gone from me now. From time to time, I wonder who I would be if I didn't work or know exactly where my life is headed. My identity no longer exists."*

Another respondent added:

*"People frequently ask me for an answer to, 'What are you up to these days?' I freeze. I prefer to be vague or not answer at all because I'm embarrassed to tell people I am unemployed. I am filled with shame and know I am small whenever I hear that question. I don't trust my capabilities anymore. Feeling without a job, I don't believe I have any purpose or meaning. Everything about who I am seems to be tied to my job and I currently don't have one."*

You can see in these accounts how the unemployment affected the beliefs the participants had about themselves and their social importance. No longer having a job she was good at resulted in my mom feeling unseen and less confident which caused her an identity crisis. As a result, it is clear that for young people, whatever work they do must support their self-identity in addition to meeting their financial needs.

### Theme 4: Coping Strategies and Resilience

Participants found useful ways to deal with their problems and keep hopeful, no matter how difficult the situation was for them. The theme looks at how young adults sought ways to remain mentally healthy and get back control in the face of joblessness for a long time.

One Participant Described:

*"After waiting on news for months, I knew I had to do something instead of nothing. I took advantage of free online graphic design courses and learn as I go. Being an artist made me feel there was a reason for my days and things I could anticipate. It's helpful, but I feel like it is teaching me how to grow and get ready for what's to come. Through all this pain, that hope encourages me every day."*

Another Participant Expressed:

*"I got involved in local sports and also volunteered at a community organization. Staying busy by aiding others removed some of my concerns. It let me meet people who know what it's like, helping me to overcome my loneliness. Doing these things kept me going and brightened my days through hard times. I participated in the study."*

They highlight that employed youth continue to try new things even as they tackle many obstacles. Improving my skills through learning and helping community projects both kept my mind busy and made me feel safer. According to the outcomes, giving youth who are unemployed a chance to participate in factors that support their mental health matters a lot.

## Discussion

The study points out the serious mental consequence's young adults in District Abbottabad face because of unemployment. Several participants went through strong emotional suffering which included anxiety, depression and a general hopelessness. Much of this stress came from both stress over finances and the breakdown of structure, motivation and a social identity (Paul & Moser, 2009). In Abbottabad, where achieving early career success and helping the family is very important, finding employment added to the residents' mental health pressures. Most young people said they felt distant from others and judged, making their mental burden worse. This scenario often appears in situations where both unemployment and strict traditional values are present, so it has become important to consider culture as well as the economy (Gore, 1978). Many participants mentioned feeling tremendous pressure from their families and worried again and again about displeasing them. Thanks to this fear, many were reluctant to talk about their problems which helped create a cycle of silence (Vancea & Utzet, 2017). Both mental health and motivation to get help in search of a job suffered from the resulting shame and sense of failure. As a result, mental health experts now see that involving families and local communities helps reduce misunderstanding and lowers stigma (Berhe, 2021). The research discovered that being unemployed has made it harder for young people to maintain their confidence. Their importance in society and how they saw themselves depended on having work; if they didn't work, many felt useless and unrecognized (Wani et al., 2024). Losing their identity can harm young adults' mental health and ability to integrate normally into society, as they grow and develop (Umoh, 2025). Filling this identity gap in people motivates them to act and look for work. Even with these issues, participants showed great strength by learning new things, joining their local communities and connecting with friends and family. Because of these behaviors, they coped with pressure, kept looking forward and felt more in charge of their lives. This resilience means that the right programs for youth can remove barriers, help them learn new skills and increase opportunities to meet new people. Overall, unemployment in Abbottabad has a big impact on people's mental health, aside from its financial problems. Since emotional distress, pressure from society and loss of identity affect many, a response must connect mental health with efforts to support the economy and society (Berhe, 2021). A good solution for youth unemployment is to create culturally appropriate programs that take care of their mental and social well-being, as well as helping them become employable.

## Conclusion

The psychological problems of unemployed young adults in District Abbottabad are shaped by money, relationships and culture. The results suggest that being unemployed leads to anxiety, feelings of isolation and confusing identity questions that lower mental well-being and make seeking employment more difficult. Living up to what others expect us to do usually makes it difficult to freely communicate about our mental health problems. Even so, how young people deal with problems can open the way for supporting interventions. Later policies should take care of economic matters and emotional well-being together, while adjusting for the culture of Abbottabad. When they do this, they help unemployed youth manage their mental health and find suitable work.

## Recommendations

1. It is important for organizations to develop services targeted at unemployed youth and encouraged by the government. They should make counseling, stress management tools and local community counseling

available to people facing unemployment problems.

2. Programs taught in both vocational centers and educational institutions should meet the skills companies seek in their staff.
3. Local organizations and groups for youth should establish areas where youth can connect, discuss their problems and gain help.
4. Governments and private companies should come together to create paid internships and apprenticeships designed for unemployed graduates.
5. Raising awareness on television, radio and in schools should highlight that unemployment is a result of circumstances outside of a person's control.

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