



UNEMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH STRESS IN MEGHALAYA: AN ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF JOBLESSNESS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment represents a significant socio-economic challenge with far-reaching psychological consequences, particularly in developing regions such as Meghalaya, especially the Garo Hills region. The present study seeks to examine the association between unemployment and psychological stress among young adults, with specific objectives to analyze the mental health outcomes of joblessness, identify key stress-inducing factors, and synthesize coping mechanisms documented in existing literature. The study adopts a qualitative secondary research design, drawing upon a systematic review of scholarly articles, government publications, policy reports, and relevant empirical studies on youth unemployment and mental health. A thematic analytical approach is employed to critically evaluate and integrate findings across diverse sources, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The analysis indicates that prolonged unemployment is strongly associated with increased levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, and reduced life satisfaction. Financial insecurity, societal expectations, and uncertainty regarding future employment prospects emerge as primary stressors. In the specific socio-cultural context of Meghalaya, familial obligations and community pressures further exacerbate the psychological burden experienced by unemployed youth. The review also identifies adaptive coping strategies, such as social support networks, engagement in skill development, and resilience-building practices, as important mitigating factors. The study concludes that addressing youth unemployment necessitates an integrated policy approach that combines economic interventions with accessible mental health support services. Such measures are essential to alleviate psychological distress and promote the overall well-being of young adults in Meghalaya.

Keywords: Unemployment, Youth Stress, Psychological Distress, Mental Health, Meghalaya

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment has become a major global concern, particularly in developing regions where economic growth is uneven and job opportunities are limited. Young people form a crucial part of the population, contributing to economic development, social progress, and

innovation. However, when they remain unemployed for long periods, the impact extends beyond financial hardship to affect their psychological well-being and social stability. Although the economic consequences of joblessness are widely recognized, its psychological impact, especially on the mental well-being of young individuals is equally significant. Educated youth, who have devoted considerable time, effort, and resources to acquiring qualifications and skills, often experience a distinct and more distressing form of unemployment. The gap between their aspirations and reality, combined with expectations from family and society, can profoundly affect their sense of self-worth (Kumar & Ansari, 2025).

Education is often seen as a pathway to better opportunities; many qualified young people struggle to find suitable employment across both urban and rural settings. Urban youth tend to experience longer periods of unemployment and higher levels of stress due to lifestyle expectations and social comparison, whereas rural youth face challenges such as social stigma, traditional pressures, and limited access to support services. However, family pressure remains a common issue for both the groups, often resulting in emotional strain, criticism, and reduced support (Chaudhary & Rani, 2025). In India, unemployment among youth continues to be a persistent issue, driven by factors such as skill mismatch, slow industrial expansion, and regional inequalities. In Meghalaya, especially in the Garo Hills region, the situation is further intensified by geographical isolation, limited access to higher education and skill training, and a lack of diverse employment opportunities. These challenges often result in prolonged joblessness among young individuals.

Unemployment also impacts identity, self-esteem, and social status. Studies show that unemployed youth are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and low self-worth (Paul & Moser, 2009; Fergusson et al., 2013). In the context of Meghalaya, socio-cultural factors such as strong family bonds, community expectations, and traditional values significantly influence individual experiences. While these can act as sources of

support, they may also create additional pressure on unemployed youth to meet financial and social responsibilities. As a result, unemployment becomes both an economic and psychosocial challenge in this setting.

Given the growing concern about mental health among young people, it is important to understand the psychological effects of unemployment within specific regional contexts. This study aims to examine the relationship between unemployment and psychological stress among youth in Meghalaya through a review of existing literature, with a focus on key stressors, mental health outcomes, and coping strategies.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the relationship between unemployment and psychological stress among youth in Meghalaya.
2. To assess the impact of unemployment on mental health, including anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.
3. To examine the role of family expectations and socio-cultural influences on the mental well-being of unemployed youth.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design based on a secondary data approach, focusing on reviewing and analyzing existing literature related to youth unemployment and psychological stress.

Data source

Data were collected from secondary sources, including published research articles, journals, books, government reports, and credible online databases. Key studies on unemployment, mental health (anxiety, depression, self-esteem), and family and socio-cultural influences, Indian context, with emphasis on Meghalaya and similar regions were systematically reviewed.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The study uses a thematic analysis approach, where data from various sources were carefully

examined, compared, and organized into major themes aligned with the objectives:

1. Unemployment and psychological stress
2. Impact on mental health
3. Role of family and socio-cultural factors

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Unemployment and Psychological Stress

Unemployment among youth in Meghalaya has been identified as a significant contributor to psychological stress, particularly within contexts of socio-economic hardship and limited livelihood opportunities. Secondary studies conducted in regions such as Byrn hat highlight that financial instability, lack of employment prospects, and weak institutional support systems create considerable emotional strain among young people, often leading to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and uncertainty about the future (Das, 2020). These stressors are further intensified by socio-cultural expectations and family pressure to contribute economically, which heighten anxiety and reduce overall well-being. Additionally, research conducted in districts like Ri-Bhoi and East Khasi Hills indicates that a substantial proportion of youth exhibit emotional and behavioral difficulties, reflecting underlying psychological vulnerability linked to unstable socio-economic conditions (Dkhar & Nongkynrih, 2021). The mismatch between rising educational aspirations and limited employment opportunities in the state further exacerbates stress, as many young individuals struggle with career uncertainty and perceived inadequacy. Supporting evidence from broader Indian studies also suggests that unemployed youth are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Paul & Moser, 2009). Overall, these findings indicate that unemployment in Meghalaya is not merely an economic concern but a critical psychosocial issue that significantly impacts the mental health and well-being of youth.

The most prominent findings in Paul and Moser, (2009) study is that the length of unemployment

greatly influences stress levels, with prolonged joblessness leading to increased emotional strain and long-term psychological distress. As unemployment continues, stress often shifts from temporary concern to a more chronic condition.

Jahoda (1982) identified loss of daily structure and purpose, where employment provides a sense of direction and daily routine without its youths may feel unproductive, disconnected and leads to heightened amount of stress. This absence of meaningful engagement can negatively affect overall well-being.

Fryer (1995) identified financial insecurity as another major stressor. Even though basic necessities are met with family support but not being able to provide and earn independently leads to feelings of dependence and low self-worth which is more prominent among educated youth have higher expectations in their career success.

Blustein (2008), added that uncertainty about the future aspects also plays a major stressor in increasing the stress levels. The young individuals entering a competitive job market that are uncertain about job opportunities and career prospects often faces fear and anxiety.

Another major finding is social comparison and perceived failure among unemployed youth in highly competitive and urban environments, where they frequently compare themselves with the employed peers, which may lead to feelings of lowered self-confidence and inadequacy (Creed & Bartrum, 2008).

Another important finding is the effect of repeated job rejection, which can gradually reduce motivation and increase frustration. Continuous unsuccessful attempts to secure employment may lead to withdrawal and decreased engagement in job-seeking activities (Wanberg, 2012).

Finally, in contexts like India, social stigma and societal expectations surrounding employment significantly add to psychological stress. Cultural emphasis on work as a marker of success can lead to feelings of shame and pressure among unemployed youth (Kumar & Ansari, 2025).

Overall, research suggests that the stress associated with unemployment is multidimensional, shaped by economic challenges, psychological responses, and socio-cultural influences.

Impact on Mental Health

Studies conducted in Meghalaya indicate that unemployment and related socio-economic stressors have a significant impact on the mental health of youth, particularly in terms of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. A cross-sectional study among college-going youth in Shillong found that a considerable proportion of students experienced varying levels of depression, with many reporting mild to moderate depressive symptoms, highlighting the growing mental health burden among young individuals (Diengdoh & Ali, 2023).

The same study also identified anxiety and substance use as important contributing factors, suggesting that emotional distress among youth is often multifaceted and influenced by lifestyle and environmental conditions. Furthermore, research on adolescents in Meghalaya revealed that poor family management, community disorganization, and low school engagement are strongly associated with emotional and behavioral problems, indicating heightened levels of anxiety and psychological distress among youth (Suting & Ali, 2024).

In addition, a study on young adults in Meghalaya reported notable levels of suicidal ideation, which were closely linked to stress, poor family relationships, and experiences of loss or conflict, reflecting severe consequences of unmanaged anxiety and depression (Lyngdoh et al., 2023). These findings suggest that persistent socio-economic challenges, including unemployment and uncertainty about the future, negatively affect self-esteem, leading to feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and low self-worth among youth. Overall, secondary evidence from Meghalaya demonstrates that mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem are prevalent among young people and are closely associated with broader structural and psychosocial stressors.

Blustein (2008), found that mental health has a strong negative effect among young individuals due to unemployment, where the most common problems is increased anxiety where they constantly worry about their future, career prospects and independent financial stability.

Another study by Paul and Moser (2009), found that prolonged unemployment can lead to depression experiencing hopelessness, lack of motivation and sadness, and compare themselves to their peers, leading to severe emotional distress.

Prolonged unemployment also impacts on the self-esteem, who may feel that their achievements and efforts have not translated into success leading to feelings of inadequacy and reduced confidence often questioning their self-worth, self-doubt and identity in the society (Fergusson et al., 2013).

Creed and Bartrum (2008), found that in shaping the mental health outcomes the gap between expectations and reality plays a very important role. When career aspirations remain unfulfilled, it can lead to frustration and self-doubt, negatively affecting overall psychological well-being

In addition, social isolation and withdrawal are frequently observed among unemployed youth. Feelings of embarrassment or failure may lead individuals to avoid social interactions, which further worsens their mental health (Wanberg, 2012).

Overall, existing studies highlight that unemployment contributes significantly to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, making it a serious mental health concern among youth.

Role of Family and Socio-cultural Influences

Family environment and socio-cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping youth behavior, attitudes, and psychological well-being. Research conducted in Byrnihat, Meghalaya, indicates that lack of parental support, family conflict, and weak family engagement significantly contribute to stress, school dropout, and maladaptive outcomes among youth (Adhikary & Anil, 2025). The study emphasizes that

family-related issues, combined with socio-economic hardship, create a stressful environment that negatively affects young individuals' development and decision-making. Similarly, studies on adolescents in Tura reveal that the quality of family environment (supportive vs. non-supportive) influences emotional stability and overall adjustment, suggesting that a congenial family atmosphere promotes better psychological outcomes among youth.

In addition to family influences, the unique socio-cultural structure of Meghalaya, particularly its matrilineal system and community-based governance, significantly shapes youth experiences and expectations. Research shows that these cultural systems foster social cohesion and inclusiveness but can also create role expectations and pressures that influence youth aspirations and behavior (Safi & Safi, 2025). Furthermore, socio-cultural norms such as community perceptions, early marriage practices, and attitudes toward education affect youth choices and opportunities, often contributing to stress and limiting personal development (Adhikary & Anil, 2025). Studies among Khasi youth also reveal that cultural norms around communication (e.g., silence on sensitive issues) restrict open discussion and emotional expression, which may further impact mental well-being (War & Albert, 2013).

Literature highlights that family and socio-cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the experiences of unemployed youth. In many collectivist societies, family expectations are a major source of pressure, as young individuals are often expected to contribute financially and uphold family reputation (Kumar & Ansari, 2025). When these expectations are not met, it can lead to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and emotional stress.

At the same time, families can act as sources of support, providing financial assistance and emotional encouragement during periods of unemployment. However, this support is often accompanied by implicit or explicit pressure, which may intensify psychological strain over time (Chaudhary & Rani, 2025).

Another important factor is the influence of societal norms and cultural values. In many communities, employment is closely associated with social status and success. As a result, unemployed youth may experience stigma, social judgment, and a sense of failure, which negatively impacts their mental well-being (Paul & Moser, 2009).

The literature also points to the role of community expectations in close-knit societies, such as those found in parts of Meghalaya. Strong social networks can increase visibility and scrutiny, making unemployment more emotionally challenging. Young individuals may feel constantly evaluated by others, leading to stress and social withdrawal.

Additionally, traditional roles and norms can shape the experiences of unemployment differently. For instance, expectations related to gender roles or family responsibilities may limit opportunities or increase pressure to secure employment quickly (Fergusson et al., 2013).

Overall, research suggests that while family and socio-cultural systems can provide support, they can also act as significant stressors, making unemployment a deeply social as well as psychological issue for youth.

Overall Findings

The overall findings of the study reveal that youth unemployment in Meghalaya is a multidimensional issue with significant psychological implications. The synthesis of secondary data indicates a strong relationship between unemployment and heightened psychological stress among young adults, driven by factors such as financial instability, uncertainty about future employment, repeated job rejection, and lack of daily structure. These stressors are further intensified by socio-cultural expectations and family pressure, particularly in close-knit communities where employment is closely tied to social identity and status. The review also highlights that unemployment adversely affects mental health, contributing to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem. Young individuals often experience feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and social withdrawal, especially when

there is a mismatch between educational aspirations and employment opportunities. Furthermore, family and socio-cultural influences play a dual role, acting both as sources of support and as contributors to psychological strain. While emotional and financial support from families can buffer stress, expectations to meet social and economic responsibilities often increase pressure on unemployed youth. Overall, the findings emphasize that unemployment in Meghalaya is not only an economic concern but also a significant psychosocial challenge that requires integrated intervention.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study underscores that unemployment among youth in Meghalaya has profound psychological consequences that extend beyond economic deprivation. Prolonged joblessness contributes to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem, ultimately affecting the overall well-being and social functioning of young individuals. The interplay between economic hardship, personal aspirations, and socio-cultural expectations creates a complex environment where youth experience both external pressure and internal emotional struggles. Although family and community networks provide essential support, they can simultaneously intensify stress through expectations and societal norms. Therefore, addressing youth unemployment requires a holistic approach that integrates employment generation initiatives with mental health support systems. Policies should focus on skill development, career guidance, and accessible psychological services to help youth cope with stress and build resilience. Additionally, raising awareness to reduce stigma around unemployment and mental health is crucial in fostering a supportive environment. Such comprehensive efforts are essential to promote the psychological well-being and productive engagement of young people in Meghalaya.

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