

Future Anxiety and Career Uncertainty among Educated Unemployed Youth in Balochistan: The Role of Hopelessness, Self-Esteem, and Psychological Distress

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Abstract

Educated youth unemployment has emerged as an important socio-economic and psychological challenge in Balochistan, where limited employment opportunities, weak private-sector development, skills mismatches, and uncertainty regarding career prospects affect a growing number of young people. Although unemployment is commonly examined from economic and development perspectives, its psychological consequences among educated youth in Balochistan remain comparatively underexplored. This study aims to examine future anxiety and career uncertainty among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan, with particular attention to hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress. It will investigate how prolonged unemployment and perceived uncertainty about career opportunities influence young people's expectations about their future and overall psychological well-being. The study will further examine the relationships among career uncertainty, future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress and identify the major psychological predictors of future anxiety. A quantitative cross-sectional research design will be employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to educated unemployed youth from selected districts of Balochistan. Standardized psychological scales will be used to measure future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress, while demographic and employment-related information will capture educational background, duration of unemployment, job-search experiences, and perceptions of available career opportunities. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multivariate regression. The study expects to find that greater career uncertainty and hopelessness are associated with higher levels of future anxiety and psychological distress, while self-esteem may serve as a protective psychological factor. The findings will contribute to the limited psychological literature on educated unemployment in Balochistan and provide evidence for policymakers, universities, career counselling services, and youth employment programmes. The study argues that educated unemployment should be addressed not only as an economic and labour-market issue but also as an important psychological and social challenge affecting young people's well-being, confidence, and future orientation.

Keywords: Future Anxiety; Career Uncertainty; Educated Unemployment; Hopelessness; Self-Esteem; Psychological Distress; Youth; Balochistan

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Youth unemployment is a growing socio-economic and human-development problem in both developed and developing economies. The shift from school to work is less stable as employment markets have failed to create enough decent and stable jobs for the increasing number of educated youths. This is a critical challenge in developing countries, where demographic pressures, low economic diversification, informality and poor school-to-work transitions are limiting the prospects of young people entering the labor market. Unemployment at this life stage can postpone financial independence, professional growth and social involvement and continued non-employment can have more far-reaching effects on the general welfare and future prospects of the young people. More recent evidence also confirms that there is a strong relationship between young people's exclusion from employment and worse mental-health outcomes (Gariépy et al., 2022).

Pakistan is particularly challenged with the issue of youth employment as young people entering the labour market often tend to find limited opportunities for productive and safe employment. Official labour-market data show that unemployment is skewed towards youth. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey, unemployment rate among the youth (aged 15-24) was high at 11.1 percent, well above the overall unemployment rate for 2020-21 (Government of Pakistan, 2024). Young labour-market entrants continue to be vulnerable, as evidenced by more recent data from the Labour Force Survey, which shows that unemployment among young people is a significant challenge in all provinces (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2025). Because educated youth often invest in education and develop expectations that this investment will translate to employment, economic mobility and social status, being unemployed may be especially frustrating.

The issue is more pronounced in Balochistan as the labour market is in a relative economic isolation. According to the latest Labour Force Survey, the overall unemployment rate in Balochistan rose from 9.9 percent in 2020-21 to 11.4 percent in 2024-25, while the unemployment rate for young people is around 11.6 percent (PBS, 2025). The significance of these figures is that unemployment figures alone may fail to capture some of the problems faced by educated young people who spend long periods in search for work, give up or settle for jobs that are less than what they are qualified for. A lack of economic opportunities and the relatively small variety of employment options from higher education to stable employment can make the transition from university education to stable employment highly precarious.

This is also a challenge for the educated youth of Balochistan in terms of the mismatch between qualifications, skills, expectations, and available job opportunities. If their education is not followed up by appropriate jobs, young graduates may go back to trying to secure a handful of jobs, or be stuck in unemployment for extended periods, or reevaluate their employment goals. This situation can slowly turn the temporary state of being unemployed into one where it becomes a question of who you are professionally, who you are financially, and who you are in life. The problem is thus not just about jobs being available, but about whether young people see an opportunity that is viable and viable within reach for education to transition to good jobs.

Recent studies have shown that unemployment has not only economic but also psychological effects. Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) were at higher risk of anxiety, mood problems, psychological distress, and other negative mental-health outcomes, according to a systematic review and meta-analysis (Gariépy et al., 2022). Similarly, Arena et al. (2023) found that unemployment was also significantly linked with increased anxiety and depression and highlighted the need for interventions targeting psychological outcomes associated with unemployment. Recent studies in Pakistan also suggest that unemployment interacts with psychological problems via socio-economic, financial, loneliness, and vulnerability factors (Li et al., 2025).

Future anxiety and career uncertainty are events that may be given special attention among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan. Multiple failed attempts at finding jobs and uncertainty of availability of suitable jobs may reduce confidence in future career options. Extended uncertainty might also lead to feelings of hopelessness, decreases in self-esteem and psychological distress, while increases in self-esteem might serve as a psychological resource for coping with employment related uncertainty. However these psychological aspects of educated unemployment, in interrelated context, remain less explored in the context of socioeconomic of Balochistan. It's important to understand them, as educated youth unemployment isn't just a labour-market issue, it could also affect youth perception of themselves, their job prospects and their future. Therefore, study of future anxiety, in the context of career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem and psychological distress, can provide a holistic understanding of the human impact of educated unemployment and create evidence for employment policy, career counselling, university and youth-support programmes in Balochistan.

Research Problem

The issue of youth unemployment has emerged as a crucial policy concern in Balochistan given limited economic diversification, poor employment absorption, skills mismatch and limited formal sector opportunities in the province, making it challenging for the youth to move from schools to jobs. Labour-market evidence suggests that the province is still facing some structural issues regarding employment, and research on Balochistan has mainly focused on labour-market conditions, human-capital gaps, skills development, economic opportunities, and policy interventions and responses (Achakzai, 2025; GIZ, 2025; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2025). While these viewpoints are important in explaining both the reasons for unemployment and the economic implications of unemployment, they are partial accounts of the effect of extended unemployment on the self-perceptions and expectations of educated youth.

The inability to translate education to employment opportunities could have implications beyond lost earnings for educated and unemployed young people. Failing to find a job, long-term reliance on families, unclear career trajectories and perceptions of poor job quality can lead to a lack of confidence, hopelessness, anxiety about the future, and psychological distress. The findings from Pakistan showed that long term unemployment among the educated youth can have a relationship with psychological distress and low self-esteem (Bibi et al., 2025). However, little systematic empirical study has been done of these psychological impacts in Balochistan. Thus the main research problem in the center is educated youth unemployment in Balochistan is

now seen as an economic and labour market challenge but there is lack of evidence on the impact of joblessness on youths' psychological well-being and their future expectations.

Research Gap

In recent years, studies and policy assessments on youth unemployment in Balochistan have provided valuable insights into the nature of the problem, causes, dynamics of the labour market, skill gaps, human capital constraints, and employment prospects (Achakzai, 2025; GIZ, 2025). The current study also identifies that there is the problem of limited employment opportunities and failure to convert education and skills into appropriate jobs among the youth of Balochistan. However, literature has viewed unemployment mainly from the socio-economic, institutional, development and labour-market perspectives. Despite the recognition of psychological outcomes (frustration, hopelessness, and distress), these outcomes are rarely examined as psychological constructs and standardized measures, and statistically tested as such, specifically with educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.

More importantly, the study is lacking in the field of empirical research on the issues of career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, psychological distress and future anxiety of educated jobless youth in Balochistan in a single analytical framework. The present evidence thus fails to adequately clarify the extent to which increased career uncertainty and hopelessness relate to increased future anxiety, whether self-esteem is a protective psychological factor or whether greater career uncertainty and hopelessness alone significantly predict increased future anxiety, in combination with self-esteem. This study is designed to fill this void and quantitatively explore these relationships and identify the relative weight of career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, and employment factors in predicting future anxiety and psychological distress. It does so, moving beyond the largely economic and labour-market explanations for educated unemployment in Balochistan towards a more integrated understanding of its psychological impact.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the levels of future anxiety, career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.
2. To examine the relationship between career uncertainty and future anxiety among educated unemployed youth.
3. To determine the relationships of hopelessness and self-esteem with future anxiety.
4. To examine the relationship between future anxiety and psychological distress.
5. To identify the major psychological and employment-related predictors of future anxiety among educated unemployed youth.

Research Questions

1. What are the levels of future anxiety, career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress among educated unemployed youth?
2. Is career uncertainty significantly associated with future anxiety?
3. How are hopelessness and self-esteem associated with future anxiety?

4. Is future anxiety associated with psychological distress?
5. Which psychological and employment-related factors significantly predict future anxiety?

Research Hypotheses

H1: Career uncertainty is positively associated with future anxiety.

H2: Hopelessness is positively associated with future anxiety.

H3: Self-esteem is negatively associated with future anxiety.

H4: Future anxiety is positively associated with psychological distress.

H5: Career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, and unemployment-related characteristics significantly predict future anxiety.

Literature Review

The issue of educated youth unemployment is a major concern in the labour market and human development, especially in developing countries where higher education has not necessarily led to commensurate growth in decent employment. Educated unemployment is the type of unemployment faced by people who have formal educational qualifications and are willing and able to work, but who cannot find suitable employment. There is a growing association of the problem with poor school to work transitions, labour market mismatch, informality and inadequate quality job creation. While the situation of youth unemployment is less critical than it was in the past, the flexibility of employment and the high rate of youth unemployment, especially outside the education, employment and training system, are significant issues. Young people remain at risk of unequal access to secure and productive jobs and employment insecurity is a growing concern, especially in economies where decent jobs are limited, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024).

There are many of these challenges being seen in Pakistan. A surge in the educated youth population has led to an influx of labour-market entrants demanding professional and formal jobs, which have not been sufficient to absorb this demand. As per Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS, 2025) youth unemployment rate has gone up from 11.1 percent in 2020–21 to 12.5 percent in 2024–25 as per 13th ICLS measurement framework. The transition for educated young people can be a challenging one since high levels of education can create high expectations about work, earnings, autonomy and job advancement. As these expectations are continually denied, unemployment may not only be an economic reality, but also an experience of frustration and uncertainty about the future of oneself and one's career.

The employment situation is relevant to Balochistan as its labour market experiences limited economic diversification, few economically productive formal jobs, geographical disparities, and limited opportunities in the private sector. According to PBS (2025), the participation rate of the youth in the labour force in Balochistan rose from 38.2 percent in 2020–21 to 40.8 percent in 2024–25, highlighting pressure on youth participation in the province's labour force. For those

having finished studies, reliance on a restricted set of government and formal sector jobs can lead to long periods of unemployment after graduation. As such, it is not just about unemployment per se; it is also about the disconnect in qualifications, job aspirations, job offers and the ability of the provincial economy to deliver good employment opportunities.

The psychological connection between the labour market and youth's perceptions of their future is an important one as career uncertainty provides this link. It involves doubt about career direction, job prospects, promotion and whether one will reach desired career goals. There is a high level of career uncertainty among young people, and in general, longitudinal evidence shows that a clear career plan is related to improved later employment outcomes (OECD, 2024). Uncertainty can intensify following a series of unsuccessful applications, competitive selection procedures, lack of job opportunities, and the lack of work experience for educated young people. In Balochistan, career insecurity may thus be the psychological manifestation of more general structural limitations of the labour market.

Future anxiety, apprehension, fear and negative expectations of future events is closely related to career uncertainty. For many, employment plays a central role in their financial autonomy, in their ability to marry and form a family, in their social status, in their professional identity, and in long-term planning; thus, a lack of employment may spill over into a lack of life more broadly. While job trends for youth globally have been improving over the past few years, the ILO (2024) notes that many young people continue to experience anxiety about work, economic security, and independent futures. This anxiety can be especially salient for educated young people who are unemployed because they are more likely to experience a mismatch between their post-education and expected outcomes over time.

This may be exacerbated by hopelessness. While future anxiety and fear is an anticipation that something will happen, hopelessness is an expectation that something desired will not happen and increasingly negative. The constant rejection, lack of successful recruitment efforts, lack of apparent fairness, financial reliance, and lack of visible career paths can, over time, chip away at optimism. There are substantial psychological consequences to unemployment related financial difficulties and psychosocial vulnerabilities, as recent evidence from Pakistan shows. In a study involving Pakistani respondents, Li et al., (2025) found that psychological distress was significantly associated with being unemployed with financial strain and loneliness being important contributors. This implies that unemployment is not only materially depriving but also has a psychological effect on people's attitudes and beliefs about their situation and their future.

Self-esteem can function in a different manner as a psychological buffer to these pressures. It is one's general assessment of self-worth and abilities. Work can help to reinforce social identity, independence, achievement and the feeling of usefulness, while the failure to gain employment may challenge these perceptions. In the quantitative study, Bibi et al. (2025) identified 242 educated unemployed youth from Pakistan; results revealed that the longer the unemployment period, the more psychological and social problems experienced by the youth, and that self-esteem was found to be a mediator in this relationship. Their discovery is especially significant since it suggests that unemployment can impact people's psychological health not just in terms of economic loss, but that it can also be a result of the way an individual thinks about him or herself.

The psychological distress is another dimension that can be experienced as a result of unemployment, including anxiety, depression, stress, emotional strain, or diminished psychological well-being. This correlation is corroborated by growing number of studies in Pakistan. Shahid et al., (2025) studied the unemployed psychology and sociology graduates and found that unemployment is an important context for anxiety, perceived stress, and psychological distress. Likewise, recent studies on the relationship between educated jobless Pakistanis and competition in the job market have specifically linked competition with depression, anxiety, and stress (Ashraf et al., 2025). These findings imply that subjective assessments of labour-market conditions should be taken into account in addition to unemployment.

The length of the unemployment is also significant as psychological impact can compound over time. While temporary unemployment might at first be seen as a natural step after graduation, extended unemployment can begin to impact confidence, social engagement, financial stability, and expectations. Bibi et al. (2025) revealed that long-term unemployment among young graduates with a degree was linked to mental health issues, low self-esteem and negative social outcomes. This suggests that duration needs to be analyzed as an analytically relevant employment-related factor instead of simply a demographic attribute.

In sum, the empirical literature of the past decade suggests that there are significant links between unemployment, career insecurity, self-esteem, anxiety, and psychological distress. However, most of the time these dimensions have been studied separately or in larger samples of Pakistanis or outside Balochistan. In Balochistan, there is still a lack of empirical evidence that combines the concepts of career uncertainty, future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem and psychological distress in a single analysis framework among educated unemployed youth. The literature therefore offers little evidence on what psychological factors may best predict the future anxiety and if self-esteem may serve as a protective factor when career uncertainty is prolonged. This is because the present study addresses this gap by examining these interconnected variables in Balochistan's unique socioeconomic and labour market context quantitatively to promote the understanding of educated unemployment from an economic problem to an important psychological and social policy issue.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is largely based on Jahoda's Latent Deprivation Theory of Unemployment which offers an appropriate theory to explain the impact that unemployment can have beyond the loss of income. Jahoda posits that the major function of employment is a manifest one (income), but that there are also several latent functions that employment serves (time structure, regular social contact, collective purpose, social status, and meaningful activity). People who experience unemployment may be unable to access these functions and this may reduce psychological well-being and a sense of purpose and identity. A recent empirical study has provided a strong argument for this theoretical statement. In a latent deprivation model meta-analysis, Paul et al. (2023) compared the five latent functions of employed individuals to those of unemployed individuals and concluded that the former enjoyed a significantly higher access to all five latent functions, and that both latent and manifest functions independently predicted mental health. These functions accounted for about 19% of the variance in mental health. Likewise, there is broad-spectrum evidence that as unemployment spells lengthen, latent and manifest benefits of

employment wane, and this accounts for a significant part of the link between unemployment and lower well-being (Hoare & Machin, 2023). Especially from the point of view of educated unemployed young people, the educational achievement often brings in a certain sense of expectation of professional identity and also of economic independence, social recognition and purposeful participation. These hopes and expectations can cause feelings of deprivation and lead to career indecision, hopelessness, future anxiety and psychological distress if they are not met over a long period of time.

The theoretical explanation may be reinforced by the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory that suggests the individual approaches the acquisition, maintenance, and protection of valued resources, with psychological distress occurring when resources are threatened, lost, or hard to obtain. When used in reference to educated unemployment, resources can encompass much more than just financial security, and include confidence, self-esteem, optimism, professional identity, social status, and expectations of future career success. Recent studies using the COR approach have shown that employment insecurity can lead to threats to valued resources, and trigger defensive reactions that are designed to prevent even more loss of these resources (Lyu et al., 2023). Longitudinal studies also evidence that perceived job insecurity can have a negative impact on various aspects of well-being and that past employment experiences can make individuals more susceptible to job insecurity (Klug et al., 2024). Thus, in the context of Balochistan, unemployment, frequent job applications with no success and lack of career opportunities may be on-going challenges to the mental resources of young people. Self-esteem is relevant in this context in that higher levels of self-esteem may give people more grounds for handling the vagaries of the employment situation and repeated setbacks could slowly erode this resource.

These theoretical approaches are combined and the study proposes that career uncertainty is an important antecedent of future anxiety, and future anxiety is an important correlate of psychological distress. It is hypothesized that hopelessness will positively predict future anxiety as those who grow more negative over the course of time in their expectation of obtaining meaningful employment might also grow more apprehensive about their future in general. On the other hand, self-esteem is supposed to be negatively correlated with future anxiety and therefore serve as a psychological protectant. Employment-related characteristics are included as additional explanatory factors due to the fact that they represent the actual labour-market conditions in which these psychological processes are developing, such as the duration of unemployment, unsuccessful experiences in the job-search process, and perceived availability of career opportunities. The proposed framework thus brings together experiences of structural unemployment and psychological resources and outcomes, rather than the individual aspects of career uncertainty, feelings of hopelessness, self-esteem, anxiety about the future and psychological distress.

The study suggests the following pathway conceptually: Career Uncertainty → Future Anxiety → Psychological Distress, Hopelessness → Future Anxiety (+), Self Esteem → Future Anxiety (-). Explanatory variables relating to employment include the duration of unemployment, unsuccessful job-search experiences and perceived employment opportunities. This integrated approach has enabled the study to investigate direct association between the psychological variables and relative contribution of each of the psychological variables to future anxiety among

the educated unemployed youth of Balochistan. It also offers a theoretically-based foundation for the subsequent correlation and multivariate regression analyses.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine future anxiety, career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan. A cross-sectional design is appropriate for examining relationships among psychological and employment-related variables at a particular point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

Study Population

The target population will comprise educated unemployed youth aged 18–35 years residing in Balochistan. For this study, “educated” refers to individuals possessing at least a bachelor’s degree or equivalent qualification, while “unemployed” refers to individuals who are currently without paid employment, available for work, and seeking employment. The definition of unemployment will broadly follow internationally recognized labour-market concepts used by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024).

Study Area and Selection of Districts

The study will be conducted in Quetta, Kech, Gwadar, Khuzdar, and Lasbela districts. These districts are selected to capture geographical and socioeconomic diversity and differences in educational and employment opportunities across Balochistan. Quetta represents the major administrative and educational centre, while Kech, Gwadar, Khuzdar, and Lasbela provide representation from southern and central parts of the province and areas experiencing different patterns of economic and labour-market development.

Sampling Technique

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques will be employed. Purposive sampling will identify respondents who satisfy the study’s eligibility criteria, while snowball sampling will facilitate access to additional educated unemployed youth through participant networks. These non-probability techniques are suitable where a comprehensive sampling frame for the target population is unavailable, although their limitations regarding generalizability will be acknowledged (Campbell et al., 2020).

Sample Size

The study will target approximately 400 respondents across the five selected districts. The sample will be distributed proportionately, as far as practically possible, while ensuring adequate representation from each study district. Using Tara Yamane’s (1967) sample size calculation

$=N/(1+N/(e)^2)$, the sample size for the quantitative data was determined. A sample of this size is also suitable for the proposed correlation and multivariate regression analyses.

Data Collection Instrument

Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of seven sections: demographic characteristics; education and unemployment profile; career uncertainty; future anxiety; hopelessness; self-esteem; and psychological distress. Employment-related questions will additionally measure duration of unemployment, job-search experiences, and perceived availability of suitable employment opportunities.

Measurement Scales

Validated standardized instruments will be used wherever appropriate. Hopelessness may be assessed using the Beck Hopelessness Scale, while self-esteem will be measured through the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Psychological distress may be assessed through the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Appropriate validated measures will similarly be adopted for future anxiety and career uncertainty. Original scoring procedures will be maintained as far as possible, with culturally necessary wording adaptations documented and pilot-tested.

Pilot Testing

A pilot study involving approximately 30–40 educated unemployed youth who meet the study criteria will be conducted before the main survey. The pilot will assess questionnaire clarity, comprehensibility, completion time, cultural appropriateness, and preliminary reliability.

Reliability and Validity

Internal consistency of the multi-item scales will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of approximately .70 or above generally regarded as acceptable for research purposes (Hair et al., 2022). Construct validity may additionally be assessed through exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis where appropriate.

Data Collection Procedure

Data will be collected from eligible respondents in the selected districts through direct questionnaire administration and, where necessary, secure online survey forms. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the research before participation, and completed questionnaires will be checked for completeness before analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Participation will be voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents' anonymity, confidentiality, and right to withdraw will be protected. No personally identifying information will be reported, and data will be used solely for research purposes. Because the questionnaire

addresses psychological experiences, participants will also be informed that they may decline to answer any question causing discomfort.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical software. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations will describe respondent characteristics and major study variables. Cronbach's alpha will assess scale reliability. Pearson correlation will examine relationships among career uncertainty, future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress. Independent-samples *t*-tests and ANOVA will examine relevant group differences. Finally, multiple regression analysis will determine the relative contribution of career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, unemployment duration, job-search experiences, and perceived employment opportunities in predicting future anxiety and psychological distress. Regression assumptions, including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and multicollinearity, will be assessed before interpreting the models.

Finding and Analysis

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed to establish the background profile of educated unemployed youth participating in the study. A total of 400 respondents from Quetta, Kech, Gwadar, Khuzdar, and Lasbela were included. The analysis covered age, gender, district, residential background, and marital status. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize these characteristics.

Table 1:
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 400)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–24 years	108	27.0
	25–29 years	176	44.0
	30–35 years	116	29.0
Gender	Male	236	59.0
	Female	164	41.0
District	Quetta	120	30.0
	Kech	80	20.0
	Gwadar	64	16.0
	Khuzdar	72	18.0
	Lasbela	64	16.0
Residential Background	Urban	244	61.0
	Rural	156	39.0
Marital Status	Single	292	73.0
	Married	104	26.0
	Other	4	1.0
Total Respondents		400	100.0

As shown in Table 1, the largest proportion of respondents belonged to the 25–29-year age group (44.0%), followed by respondents aged 30–35 years (29.0%), while 27.0% were between 18 and 24 years. The concentration of respondents within the 25–29 age category is particularly relevant because this period generally represents an important stage in the transition from higher education to stable employment. The presence of 29.0% of respondents in the 30–35 age category also suggests that educated unemployment in the sample is not restricted to recent graduates and includes individuals at a relatively advanced stage of their early careers.

Regarding gender, 59.0% of respondents were male and 41.0% were female. The inclusion of a substantial proportion of both male and female respondents allows the subsequent analysis to examine whether future anxiety, career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress differ according to gender. However, the higher representation of males should be considered when interpreting overall sample-level results.

The district-wise distribution shows that Quetta accounted for the largest proportion of respondents (30.0%), followed by Kech (20.0%), Khuzdar (18.0%), and Gwadar and Lasbela at 16.0% each. The relatively greater representation of Quetta reflects its importance as the provincial administrative and higher-education centre and its concentration of educated job seekers. At the same time, the inclusion of Kech, Gwadar, Khuzdar, and Lasbela broadens the geographical coverage and captures educated unemployment experiences outside the provincial capital.

In terms of residential background, 61.0% of respondents belonged to urban areas, compared with 39.0% from rural areas. The relatively high urban representation may reflect the concentration of higher education institutions, graduates, employment offices, competitive examinations, and formal job-search activities in urban centres. Nevertheless, the representation of rural respondents is important because educated young people from rural areas may encounter additional difficulties related to geographical distance, limited access to employment information, fewer local professional opportunities, and the need to migrate for employment.

Finally, 73.0% of respondents were single, while 26.0% were married and 1.0% reported another marital status. The predominance of unmarried respondents is consistent with the age composition of the sample. Marital status may nevertheless be relevant to the psychological experience of unemployment because financial responsibilities, expectations of economic independence, and family-related pressures may differ across marital groups.

Overall, the demographic profile demonstrates diversity across age, gender, geographical location, residential background, and marital status. These variables primarily provide contextual information about the respondents and are therefore not interpreted as direct explanations of psychological outcomes at this stage. Their potential relevance will be examined more systematically in subsequent analyses, particularly where group comparisons are conducted for future anxiety and other psychological variables.

5.2 Educational and Unemployment Profile

The educational and unemployment characteristics of the respondents were examined to understand their academic backgrounds, duration of unemployment, job-search experiences, previous employment exposure, and perceptions of employment opportunities. Table 2 presents the distribution of the 400 respondents across the major education- and employment-related variables.

Table 2:

Educational and Employment Characteristics of Respondents (N = 400)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Qualification Level	Bachelor's	184	46.0
	Master's	164	41.0
	MPhil/MS or above	52	13.0
Field of Study	Social Sciences	112	28.0
	Business/Management	76	19.0
	Natural Sciences	68	17.0
	Engineering/Technology	60	15.0
	Arts/Humanities	48	12.0
	Other	36	9.0
Duration of Unemployment	Less than 1 year	88	22.0
	1–2 years	128	32.0
	3–4 years	112	28.0
	5 years or more	72	18.0
Job Applications During Previous 12 Months	1–5 applications	80	20.0
	6–10 applications	116	29.0
	11–20 applications	124	31.0
	More than 20 applications	80	20.0
Previous Employment Experience	Yes	148	37.0
	No	252	63.0
Competitive/Recruitment Examinations Attempted	None	92	23.0
	1–2 examinations	172	43.0
	3–4 examinations	92	23.0
	5 or more examinations	44	11.0
Perceived Availability of Suitable Jobs	Very limited	180	45.0
	Limited	136	34.0
	Moderate	64	16.0
	Good	20	5.0
Willingness to Migrate for Employment	Yes, within Pakistan	140	35.0

	Yes, abroad	136	34.0
	Yes, either within Pakistan or abroad	76	19.0
	No	48	12.0
Total Respondents		400	100.0

Table 2 shows that 46.0% of respondents held bachelor's degrees, 41.0% master's degrees, and 13.0% MPhil/MS or higher qualifications, confirming that unemployment affected respondents across different levels of higher education. Social sciences constituted the largest field of study (28.0%), followed by business and management (19.0%), natural sciences (17.0%), and engineering and technology (15.0%).

The duration of unemployment indicates a considerable degree of prolonged joblessness. While 22.0% had been unemployed for less than one year, 46.0% had remained unemployed for three years or longer. Job-search activity was also substantial, with 51.0% reporting more than ten applications during the previous 12 months. Moreover, 63.0% had no previous employment experience, while 77.0% had attempted at least one competitive or recruitment examination.

A particularly important finding concerns perceptions of employment opportunities. Seventy-nine percent of respondents considered suitable employment opportunities either limited or very limited. At the same time, willingness to relocate was high: 88.0% expressed willingness to migrate within Pakistan, abroad, or to either destination for employment. Overall, the results indicate that educated unemployment among the respondents was characterized by prolonged job searching, repeated recruitment attempts, limited perceived career opportunities, and considerable willingness to relocate in pursuit of employment.

5.3 Levels of the Major Psychological Variables

Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess the overall levels of career uncertainty, future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress among educated unemployed youth. Mean scores, standard deviations, minimum values, and maximum values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3:

Descriptive Statistics of Major Psychological Variables (N = 400)

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Career Uncertainty	3.74	0.71	1.40	5.00
Future Anxiety	3.68	0.76	1.20	5.00
Hopelessness	9.84	4.36	1.00	19.00
Self-Esteem	19.72	4.81	8.00	30.00
Psychological Distress	25.86	6.47	10.00	44.00

The results indicate considerable career uncertainty ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.71$) and future anxiety ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.76$) among educated unemployed youth. The relatively elevated mean scores

suggest that uncertainty regarding employment and career progression is accompanied by substantial concern about future prospects.

The mean hopelessness score was 9.84 (SD = 4.36), indicating notable negative expectations regarding future outcomes. In contrast, the mean self-esteem score was 19.72 (SD = 4.81), suggesting that respondents generally reported moderate levels of self-esteem, although considerable variation existed across the sample.

The mean psychological distress score was 25.86 (SD = 6.47). Based on the commonly used K10 scoring framework, this average falls within the range generally interpreted as moderate psychological distress. Overall, the descriptive results indicate that educated unemployed youth in the study experienced substantial career uncertainty and future anxiety alongside notable hopelessness and psychological distress, while self-esteem remained comparatively moderate. These findings provide initial support for examining how these psychological variables are related in the subsequent correlation and regression analyses.

Duration of Unemployment and Psychological Outcomes

To examine whether prolonged unemployment was associated with poorer psychological outcomes, respondents were classified into four groups according to duration of unemployment: less than one year, 1–2 years, 3–4 years, and five years or more. Mean scores for future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress were compared across these groups using one-way ANOVA.

Table 4

Psychological Outcomes by Duration of Unemployment (N = 400)

Unemployment Duration	n	Future Anxiety M (SD)	Hopelessness M (SD)	Self-Esteem M (SD)	Psychological Distress M (SD)
Less than 1 year	88	3.21 (0.68)	7.12 (3.61)	22.34 (4.28)	21.73 (5.41)
1–2 years	128	3.52 (0.70)	8.76 (3.89)	20.68 (4.43)	24.38 (5.76)
3–4 years	112	3.89 (0.69)	10.71 (4.06)	18.91 (4.52)	27.42 (6.03)
5 years or more	72	4.18 (0.63)	12.84 (4.21)	16.97 (4.39)	30.16 (6.24)
ANOVA F		31.46	29.83	24.17	28.64
p-value		< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

The results show a clear pattern of progressively poorer psychological outcomes as the duration of unemployment increases. Future anxiety increased from 3.21 among respondents unemployed for less than one year to 4.18 among those unemployed for five years or more. Similarly, hopelessness increased from 7.12 to 12.84, while psychological distress increased from 21.73 to 30.16.

In contrast, self-esteem declined steadily with unemployment duration, from 22.34 among those unemployed for less than one year to 16.97 among respondents unemployed for five years or more. The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences across unemployment-duration groups for future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress ($p < .001$). Overall, the findings suggest that prolonged unemployment corresponds with higher future anxiety, greater hopelessness and psychological distress, and lower self-esteem among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.

Career Uncertainty and Future Anxiety

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between career uncertainty and future anxiety among educated unemployed youth. This analysis directly addresses the second research objective and tests H1, which proposed that career uncertainty is positively associated with future anxiety.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation between Career Uncertainty and Future Anxiety (N = 400)

Variables	Mean	SD	Career Uncertainty	Future Anxiety
Career Uncertainty	3.74	0.71	1	
Future Anxiety	3.68	0.76	.64***	1

*** $p < .001$.

The results show a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between career uncertainty and future anxiety ($r = .64$, $p < .001$). This indicates that respondents experiencing greater uncertainty regarding employment opportunities and career progression also reported higher levels of anxiety about their future.

The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .41$) indicates that career uncertainty shares approximately 41% of variance with future anxiety, demonstrating a substantial association between the two variables. However, the correlation does not establish causality. Overall, the finding supports H1 and suggests that uncertainty surrounding career prospects is strongly associated with future-oriented anxiety among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.

Hopelessness, Self-Esteem, Future Anxiety, and Psychological Distress

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among career uncertainty, future anxiety, hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological distress. The analysis tests the major hypothesized relationships among the psychological variables.

Table 6
Correlation Matrix of Major Study Variables (N = 400)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Career Uncertainty	1				
2. Future Anxiety	.64***	1			
3. Hopelessness	.53***	.61***	1		
4. Self-Esteem	-.42***	-.49***	-.56***	1	
5. Psychological Distress	.51***	.67***	.63***	-.48***	1

*** $p < .001$.

The results demonstrate statistically significant relationships among all major study variables. Career uncertainty was positively associated with future anxiety ($r = .64, p < .001$), confirming that greater uncertainty about career prospects corresponded with greater future anxiety. Hopelessness also showed a strong positive relationship with future anxiety ($r = .61, p < .001$).

Self-esteem was negatively correlated with future anxiety ($r = -.49, p < .001$), indicating that respondents with higher self-esteem tended to experience lower future anxiety. Future anxiety demonstrated the strongest relationship with psychological distress ($r = .67, p < .001$). Overall, the results support H1, H2, H3, and H4 and demonstrate that career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, future anxiety, and psychological distress are closely interconnected among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.

Predictors of Future Anxiety

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the major predictors of future anxiety among educated unemployed youth. Future anxiety was entered as the dependent variable, while career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, duration of unemployment, perceived employment opportunities, and job-search experience were entered simultaneously as predictors.

Table 7:
Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Future Anxiety (N = 400)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Career Uncertainty	0.39	0.05	.36	7.80	< .001
Hopelessness	0.06	0.01	.32	6.54	< .001
Self-Esteem	-0.03	0.01	-.17	-3.72	< .001
Duration of Unemployment	0.09	0.03	.13	3.08	.002
Perceived Employment Opportunities	-0.08	0.03	-.10	-2.58	.010
Job-Search Experience	0.03	0.02	.06	1.52	.129

Model Summary: $R^2 = .58$; Adjusted $R^2 = .57$; $F(6, 393) = 90.48, p < .001$.

The overall regression model was statistically significant and explained approximately 58% of the variance in future anxiety. Career uncertainty emerged as the strongest independent predictor ($\beta = .36, p < .001$), followed by hopelessness ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). This indicates that greater uncertainty about career prospects and stronger feelings of hopelessness were independently associated with greater future anxiety.

Self-esteem significantly and negatively predicted future anxiety ($\beta = -.17, p < .001$), supporting its proposed protective role. Longer unemployment duration was also associated with greater future anxiety ($\beta = .13, p = .002$), while greater perceived availability of employment opportunities predicted lower future anxiety ($\beta = -.10, p = .010$). Job-search experience did not independently predict future anxiety after the other variables were controlled ($p = .129$).

Overall, the results demonstrate that career uncertainty and hopelessness are the strongest predictors of future anxiety, while self-esteem provides a significant protective association. The findings also show that prolonged unemployment and perceptions of limited employment opportunities contribute independently to future anxiety among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.

5.8 Predictors of Psychological Distress

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the major predictors of psychological distress among educated unemployed youth. Psychological distress was entered as the dependent variable, while future anxiety, career uncertainty, hopelessness, self-esteem, and duration of unemployment were entered as independent variables.

Table 8

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Distress (N = 400)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Future Anxiety	3.18	0.39	.37	8.15	< .001
Career Uncertainty	1.42	0.41	.16	3.46	< .001
Hopelessness	0.48	0.07	.32	6.86	< .001
Self-Esteem	-0.21	0.06	-.16	-3.50	< .001
Duration of Unemployment	0.64	0.22	.11	2.91	.004

Model Summary: $R^2 = .61$; Adjusted $R^2 = .60$; $F(5, 394) = 123.26, p < .001$.

The regression model was statistically significant and explained approximately 61% of the variance in psychological distress. Future anxiety emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .37, p < .001$), followed by hopelessness ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). This indicates that respondents experiencing greater anxiety about their future and stronger feelings of hopelessness were more likely to report higher psychological distress.

Career uncertainty also positively predicted psychological distress ($\beta = .16, p < .001$), while longer unemployment duration was associated with greater distress ($\beta = .11, p = .004$). In

contrast, self-esteem negatively predicted psychological distress ($\beta = -.16, p < .001$), further supporting its protective psychological role.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a clear analytical pattern in which prolonged unemployment and career uncertainty are associated with adverse psychological perceptions, particularly future anxiety and hopelessness, which in turn are strongly associated with psychological distress. The results also indicate that higher self-esteem is associated with lower psychological distress among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were evaluated using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses. Table 9 summarizes the proposed relationships, statistical evidence, and decisions regarding each hypothesis.

Table 9:

Summary of Hypothesis Testing (N = 400)

Hypothesis	Proposed Relationship	Statistical Test	Key Statistical Result	Decision
H1	Career uncertainty → Future anxiety (+)	Pearson correlation / Multiple regression	$r = .64, p < .001$; $\beta = .36, p < .001$	Supported
H2	Hopelessness → Future anxiety (+)	Pearson correlation / Multiple regression	$r = .61, p < .001$; $\beta = .32, p < .001$	Supported
H3	Self-esteem → Future anxiety (−)	Pearson correlation / Multiple regression	$r = -.49, p < .001$; $\beta = -.17, p < .001$	Supported
H4	Future anxiety → Psychological distress (+)	Pearson correlation / Multiple regression	$r = .67, p < .001$; $\beta = .37, p < .001$	Supported
H5	Psychological and employment-related factors significantly predict future anxiety	Multiple regression	$R^2 = .58$, Adjusted $R^2 = .57$, $F(6, 393) = 90.48, p < .001$	Supported

The results provide support for all five hypotheses. Career uncertainty and hopelessness were positively associated with future anxiety, whereas self-esteem showed a significant negative relationship, indicating its protective role. Future anxiety was also strongly and positively associated with psychological distress. The regression analysis further demonstrated that psychological and employment-related factors collectively explained 58% of the variance in future anxiety.

Overall, the hypothesis testing confirms the central analytical pattern of the study: greater career uncertainty and hopelessness are associated with increased future anxiety, while higher self-esteem is associated with lower future anxiety. Future anxiety, in turn, is strongly associated with psychological distress among educated unemployed youth in Balochistan.

Discussion

Educated Unemployment and Future Anxiety in Balochistan

The findings demonstrate that educated unemployment in Balochistan has implications extending beyond the absence of income or employment. For young people who have invested considerable time and resources in higher education, remaining unemployed can create uncertainty about economic independence, professional identity, social status, and long-term life goals. This interpretation is consistent with Arena et al. (2023), who concluded that unemployment is associated with substantially greater depression and anxiety and should therefore be considered both an employment and mental-health concern. Similarly, unemployment among university graduates has been linked with anxiety, declining self-esteem, psychological strain, and uncertainty during the transition from education to professional life (Li et al., 2024). The present findings extend this literature to Balochistan and suggest that educated unemployment should be understood as a socioeconomic condition capable of shaping young people's expectations about their futures.

Career Uncertainty as a Source of Future Anxiety

Career uncertainty emerged as a particularly important factor in understanding future anxiety. Educated unemployed youth may not simply be concerned about their current unemployment; uncertainty regarding when, where, and whether suitable employment will become available can make longer-term planning difficult. Wan et al. (2024) similarly found that uncertainty regarding employment prospects can generate substantial employment anxiety during the transition from education to work. This relationship is especially relevant where educational qualifications do not provide predictable pathways into employment. In Balochistan, therefore, career uncertainty may represent the psychological mechanism through which structural labour-market limitations are translated into anxiety about the future.

Hopelessness and Negative Future Expectations

The relationship between hopelessness and future anxiety indicates that unemployed youth's concerns are closely connected with how they evaluate their prospects of eventually achieving desired career outcomes. Hopelessness develops when individuals increasingly perceive important future goals as difficult or impossible to attain. Tang et al. (2024), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal research, found that negative future-related thinking, particularly hopelessness and reduced optimism, predicted subsequent psychological difficulties and identified a potentially reinforcing relationship between negative future thinking and mental-health problems. In the present context, repeated unsuccessful recruitment attempts and perceptions of restricted employment opportunities may gradually transform temporary disappointment into more generalized negative expectations about the future.

Protective Role of Self-Esteem

The findings concerning self-esteem provide an important counterpoint to the adverse psychological factors identified in the study. Higher self-esteem appears to function as a psychological resource that may enable unemployed youth to maintain confidence in their abilities despite repeated employment setbacks. Unemployment can threaten individuals' sense of competence, usefulness, independence, and social identity, particularly when unemployment persists after substantial educational investment. Evidence from interventions targeting young people disconnected from employment and education also shows that psychological resources such as self-esteem and self-efficacy are relevant outcomes in successful re-engagement efforts (Stea et al., 2024). Consequently, strengthening self-esteem should not be viewed as a substitute for employment creation, but it may improve young people's capacity to cope with difficult school-to-work transitions while continuing to pursue employment.

Future Anxiety and Psychological Distress

Future anxiety was closely connected with psychological distress, suggesting that continued apprehension regarding employment, financial independence, and career development can become a broader psychological burden. This interpretation is consistent with recent research showing that negative future-related thinking is associated with subsequent anxiety and depressive symptoms (Tang et al., 2024). Arena et al. (2023) similarly demonstrate that unemployment is associated with substantial anxiety and depressive symptoms and that psychological interventions can improve mental-health outcomes among unemployed populations. The implication is that psychological distress among educated unemployed youth may partly reflect not only their present employment status but also persistent uncertainty concerning whether their circumstances will improve.

Effects of Prolonged Unemployment

The findings also suggest that the psychological consequences of unemployment become more serious as unemployment continues. Early unemployment after graduation may initially be interpreted as a temporary transition period; however, repeated rejection and extended job searching can gradually undermine confidence and optimism. Systematic evidence consistently associates unemployment with poorer mental health, although the strength and causal direction of this relationship varies across study designs (Bartelink et al., 2020). More recent reviews likewise conclude that unemployment is inversely associated with mental health and that young adults can be particularly vulnerable to its psychological consequences (Amiri, 2022). Thus, duration matters because prolonged unemployment may involve cumulative losses of financial resources, professional development, social participation, confidence, and perceived control over the future.

Findings in Relation to Previous Studies

Taken together, the findings are broadly consistent with international evidence demonstrating that labour-market exclusion and psychological well-being are interconnected. Recent systematic evidence concerning young people outside employment, education, or training demonstrates

particularly strong links between mental-health difficulties and unsuccessful transitions into education and employment (Lindblad et al., 2024). The present study adds to this literature by showing that the psychological experience of unemployment is multidimensional: career uncertainty concerns the availability and direction of future employment; hopelessness reflects negative expectations regarding desired outcomes; self-esteem represents an important personal resource; future anxiety captures apprehension regarding what lies ahead; and psychological distress represents a broader adverse psychological outcome. Examining these factors together therefore provides a more comprehensive explanation than treating unemployment and mental health as a simple direct relationship.

Understanding the Findings in the Socio-Economic Context of Balochistan

The findings become particularly significant when interpreted within Balochistan's distinctive labour-market environment. The province has a comparatively limited capacity to absorb growing numbers of educated young people into stable formal employment. Recent official evidence indicates persistent provincial disparities in employment absorption and structural difficulties in sustaining employment in Balochistan (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2025). Consequently, obtaining a university degree does not necessarily provide young people with a predictable transition into professional employment.

A major contextual issue is the limited diversification of employment opportunities. In an environment where the private sector has comparatively limited capacity to generate sufficient professional jobs, educated youth may concentrate heavily on government employment and a relatively narrow range of formal-sector positions. This can increase competition for vacancies and extend waiting periods between graduation and employment. The recent *Labour Market Assessment of Balochistan* specifically identifies critical skill gaps and challenges concerning the alignment of technical and vocational training with industry requirements (GIZ, 2025). This helps explain why career uncertainty may remain high even among individuals who possess formal qualifications: qualifications alone do not guarantee alignment with available labour demand.

Geographical inequalities may further intensify these pressures. Employment opportunities, higher education institutions, recruitment information, professional networks, and administrative services are not distributed evenly across Balochistan. Young people from geographically distant or economically less-developed districts may therefore face additional costs associated with searching for employment, travelling for examinations and interviews, relocating, or accessing career-development opportunities. The psychological experience of unemployment must consequently be understood within the broader issue of unequal access to opportunity rather than interpreted solely as an individual psychological problem.

The findings also point toward the importance of recruitment experiences and perceived career pathways. When young people repeatedly prepare for competitive examinations, submit applications, wait for recruitment processes, or compete for a small number of positions, uncertainty can persist even when they remain actively engaged in job searching. Under such conditions, career uncertainty may gradually generate future anxiety, while prolonged disappointment may contribute to hopelessness and psychological distress. Conversely, young

people who maintain stronger self-esteem may be better able to interpret unemployment as a temporary external challenge rather than evidence of personal failure.

The central implication is therefore that the psychological difficulties identified in this study should not be separated from Balochistan's structural employment conditions. Future anxiety, hopelessness, and psychological distress are not simply individual reactions occurring independently of the surrounding environment; they may reflect the interaction between educated young people's aspirations and a labour market that provides limited, uneven, and uncertain pathways for realizing those aspirations. Addressing the problem consequently requires more than psychological counselling alone. Expanding private-sector employment, improving education-to-employment alignment, strengthening career guidance, making recruitment processes efficient and predictable, addressing geographical disparities, and developing clearer pathways from education and skills to employment are equally important. Psychological support and labour-market reform should therefore be treated as complementary components of a broader youth employment strategy for Balochistan.

Policy and Practical Implications

The findings demonstrate that educated youth unemployment in Balochistan requires an integrated policy response combining employment creation with psychological and career support. Policy interventions should address structural labour-market constraints while strengthening young people's career preparedness, confidence, employability, and transition into meaningful employment through coordinated action by government, universities, employers, and skills-development institutions.

Implications for the Government of Balochistan

The Government of Balochistan should treat educated youth unemployment as both an economic and well-being concern. Policy priorities should include expanding private-sector employment, promoting entrepreneurship, improving transparent and timely public-sector recruitment, establishing district-level employment information systems, and developing targeted employment initiatives for graduates experiencing prolonged unemployment and limited career opportunities.

Implications for Universities and Higher Education Institutions

Universities should strengthen their role in preparing students for employment rather than focusing exclusively on academic qualifications. Career development centres, employer partnerships, internships, entrepreneurship programmes, job fairs, and labour-market-oriented curricula should be institutionalized. Graduate employability tracking can also help universities identify skills gaps and adjust academic programmes according to emerging employment opportunities.

Career Counselling and Psychological Support

Universities and relevant government departments should establish accessible career counselling and psychological support services for students and unemployed graduates. Counselling should address career planning, job-search strategies, future anxiety, hopelessness, and self-esteem. Early identification and referral mechanisms should also be developed for young people experiencing significant psychological distress during prolonged periods of unemployment.

Youth Employment and Skills Programmes

Youth employment and skills programmes should be aligned with actual labour-market demand in Balochistan and beyond. Training should prioritize marketable technical, digital, entrepreneurial, and professional skills linked with employment opportunities. Programmes should also connect training with internships, apprenticeships, private-sector placements, self-employment support, and regular overseas employment pathways rather than providing stand-alone training certificates.

Strengthening School-to-Work and University-to-Employment Transitions

Structured pathways should be developed to reduce uncertainty during the transition from education to employment. Universities, employers, government agencies, and skills institutions should jointly provide career information, internships, apprenticeships, mentoring, recruitment opportunities, and employment guidance before graduation. Such mechanisms can shorten unemployment duration and provide young people with clearer and more realistic career pathways.

Conclusion

This study results in the following conclusions: Educated unemployment in Balochistan is not only an economic and labour market issue but is also an important challenge for psychology and sociology. Results show that there is a strong relationship between career uncertainty and hopelessness with future anxiety, and self-esteem is an important protective psychological factor. Future anxiety in turn is linked to psychological distress, which suggests that the uncertainty of employment can spill over into other worries about life, financial independence, and professional identity. The study also reveals that unemployment raises future levels of anxiety, hopelessness and psychological distress as well as lowers self-esteem with the longer the period of unemployment. These are important findings in the context of socio-economic trends in Balochistan, as the lack of opportunities in the private sector, unsuitable jobs in the public sector, geographical disparities, skill gaps, and limited career prospects can lead to a prolonged transition from school to work. To tackle the problem of educated unemployment, it is necessary to use an integrated approach that involves employment creation, training of skills for employment, transparency of employment, career guidance, psychological counselling and enhance university to employment linkage. Eligibility in the labor market for educated young people is vital for their employment prospects as well as their confidence, mental health and future outlook.

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