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PSYCHIC DISLOCATION AND ASPIRATIONAL FRACTURE: A MULTIVARIATE DECONSTRUCTION OF YOUTH PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AMID STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE KASHMIR VALLEY, INDIA

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Abstract

This study undertakes an incisive psycho-sociological exploration into the deleterious ramifications of chronic unemployment and intergenerational familial burden on the mental health architecture of youth in the Kashmir Valley—an ecologically fragile region in northern India. Reconceptualizing youth distress as a systemic syndrome rather than a series of isolated psychopathologies, the research deploys a methodologically triangulated framework comprising structured psychological inventories (PHQ-9, GAD-7), socio-demographic profiling, and advanced multivariate techniques including principal component analysis, correlation mapping, and K-means clustering. Drawing from a rigorously sampled cohort of 158 individuals, the study demarcates a typology of vulnerability: from aspirationally disillusioned risk clusters to resigned psychosocial survivors. The statistical architecture reveals a potent interplay between aspirational collapse, familial coercive expectations, and neurocognitive disruptions manifesting in sleep disorder, digital overuse, and suicidal ideation—symptomatic of an existential entrapment endemic to this socio-political ecology. Regional and gendered fault lines further inflect the mental health topography, necessitating granular, culturally attuned interventions. The findings advocate a paradigmatic rupture from deficit-based models of youth pathology toward an epistemology rooted in structural trauma, narrative alienation, and symbolic dismemberment of the self. In its culmination, the paper posits a constellation of novel psycho-social interventions—ranging from narrative reframing protocols and dialogic family counseling to circadian rehabilitation and mobile micro-mentorship hubs—aimed at transmuting paralysis into praxis. By integrating empirical precision with phenomenological depth, this research not only foregrounds the affective economies of disenfranchised youth but also reclaims the analytic agency to reimagine mental health beyond the clinic, into the crucible of socio-political rupture and restorative transformation.

Keywords: ***Kashmir Valley, youth unemployment, psychological distress, family burden, aspirational loss, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, principal component analysis, psychosocial typology, structural trauma, mental health interventions.***

Introduction

The intersection of unemployment, family responsibilities, and psychological distress among youth is an emergent crisis in mountainous regions such as the Kashmir Valley. As unemployment rates continue to rise globally, the mental health consequences of economic disempowerment have become more pronounced, particularly among young adults navigating transitional phases of education, career, and identity formation (World Health Organization, 2023). In regions like Kashmir, the problem is compounded by socio-political instability, limited job markets, and deeply entrenched familial expectations that exert substantial emotional pressure on the youth (Rather & Shah, 2021). Youth in Kashmir occupy a complex psychosocial space. They are often the most educated yet the most economically vulnerable segment of the population. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE, 2022), Jammu and Kashmir has consistently recorded one of the highest youth unemployment rates in India. While educational attainment has increased over the years, the lack of commensurate

employment opportunities has widened the aspiration-reality gap. This dissonance not only hampers socio-economic mobility but also breeds a sense of existential frustration, triggering depression, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness (Ahmad et al., 2020). Moreover, family systems in the Kashmir Valley are deeply collectivistic. Youth are expected to contribute not just financially but also emotionally and socially to household well-being. This expectation often translates into overwhelming psychological burdens, especially for unemployed individuals who may already perceive themselves as liabilities rather than contributors (Dar & Wani, 2022). Family pressure manifested through constant reminders of responsibilities, comparisons with peers, or expectations to migrate for work can significantly escalate mental health risks, including suicidal ideation, sleep disturbances, and social withdrawal (Koul & Nabi, 2019).

A unique layer of psychological strain stems from the chronic uncertainty embedded in the region's political landscape. Prolonged internet shutdowns, frequent lockdowns, and disrupted public services have adversely impacted access to mental health care and employment opportunities (UN Human Rights Council, 2021). Consequently, coping mechanisms are often informal and insufficient ranging from reliance on social media escapism to maladaptive patterns like substance abuse or emotional suppression. The underutilization of professional counseling services further aggravates the situation, often due to stigma, inaccessibility, or lack of awareness (Lone et al., 2023). Despite the growing recognition of mental health as a public health priority, there remains a significant gap in empirical research that quantitatively maps the psychological effects of unemployment and familial obligations among youth in Kashmir. Most existing literature remains qualitative or anecdotal, lacking structured psychological indices and standardized mental health metrics. This paper seeks to address that gap through a rigorous, data-driven exploration of the mental health landscape among Kashmiri youth. Using validated instruments such as the PHQ-9 for depression and GAD-7 for anxiety, this study evaluates the extent to which socioeconomic variables like employment status, family income, and regional background interact with psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and social isolation.

By applying multivariate and inferential statistical techniques, this study aims to construct a nuanced profile of psychological vulnerability and resilience in Kashmiri youth. The findings will not only contribute to the academic discourse on youth mental health but also inform policymakers, educators, and healthcare providers seeking targeted interventions. Ultimately, the research underscores an urgent need for integrated mental health policies that are sensitive to the socio-cultural and geopolitical realities of the Kashmir Valley.

Study Area

The present research was conducted in the Kashmir Valley, a mountainous region located in the northernmost part of India within the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Enclosed by the Pir Panjal range to the south and the Himalayas to the north, the valley is known for its natural beauty, cultural richness, and socio-political complexity. Covering approximately 15,948 square kilometers, the Kashmir Valley is home to over 7 million people, with a significant proportion of the population falling in the age bracket of 18–35 years a demographic highly relevant to this study (Census of India, 2011).

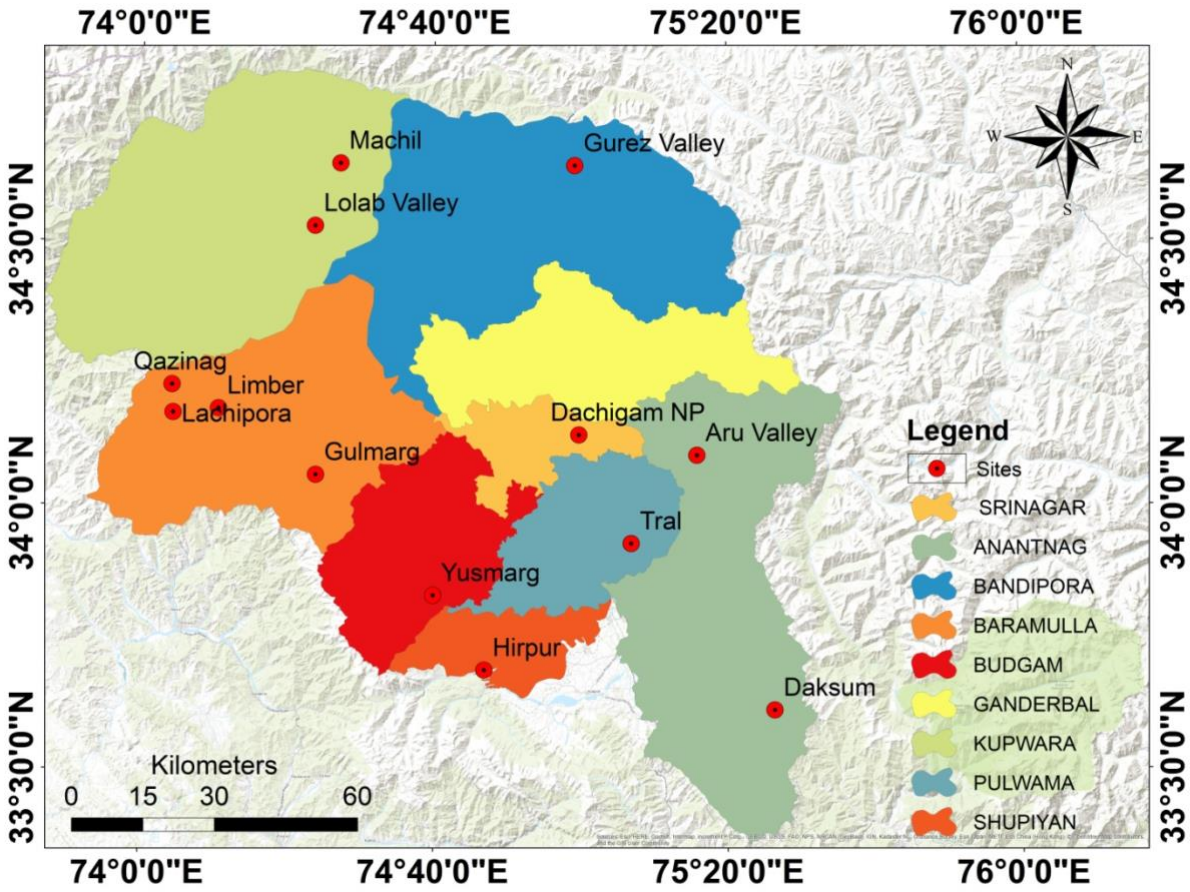

Figure 01: Study area map of Kashmir Valley showing district boundaries demarcated by distinct colors for clear identification.

The region is divided into ten major districts, including Srinagar, Anantnag, Baramulla, Pulwama, Budgam, and Kupwara, among others. While urban centers such as Srinagar have witnessed gradual development, large parts of the valley remain predominantly rural or semi-urban, marked by limited infrastructure, constrained public services, and high levels of economic dependency. Agriculture remains the primary occupation, but an increasing number of youth are transitioning toward formal education in pursuit of non-agricultural employment. Unfortunately, the formal job market has not expanded proportionally to accommodate this emerging educated population, resulting in widespread underemployment and joblessness (Bhat & Mir, 2020). The study draws its participants from diverse geographical backgrounds across urban, semi-urban, and rural localities to ensure a comprehensive representation. This spatial stratification is crucial for analyzing how regional disparities affect psychological outcomes. For instance, access to mental health resources, counseling services, and employment opportunities is considerably more restricted in rural districts, contributing to elevated stress levels among rural youth. Conversely, urban youth, while having greater access to resources, often face intense competition and heightened familial expectations due to rising cost of living and lifestyle pressures.

Another defining feature of the study area is the strong presence of joint family systems. In such households, unemployed youth often bear the dual burden of unfulfilled personal aspirations and expectations to support extended family members. This is particularly true in lower- and middle-income families, where limited earnings must be distributed among many dependents. As a result, family pressure becomes both a psychological trigger and a barrier to personal growth (Shah & Lone, 2021). Given these unique socio-cultural, economic, and geopolitical dynamics, the Kashmir Valley serves as an important case study for examining the compounded effects of unemployment and family burden on youth mental health. The diversity of regions sampled within the valley spanning various income groups, educational levels, and access to public services enables a holistic understanding of the crisis. This regional focus ensures that the findings of this study are grounded in real, context-specific challenges while also offering insights applicable to other economically marginalized areas.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional research design aimed at examining the psychological impacts of unemployment and family-related pressures on the youth population of the Kashmir Valley. The approach was selected to enable a systematic, data-driven exploration of how multiple socioeconomic and psychological variables interact within a specific temporal frame. The study utilizes structured data collected through standardized psychological instruments and socio-demographic profiling, enabling statistical inference and generalization within the region of interest.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this research comprises young individuals aged 18 to 35 residing in various districts of the Kashmir Valley, including both urban and rural settings. A total of 137 participants were selected using stratified purposive sampling to ensure representation across different employment statuses (employed, unemployed, and underemployed), educational backgrounds (from high school to postgraduate levels), and regional classifications (urban, rural, and semi-urban). This sampling strategy allowed for diversity in demographic variables while maintaining focus on the research objective youth vulnerability in an economically strained region.

Data Collection Tools

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire that integrated both demographic questions and psychological assessment scales. The questionnaire was administered in both digital and paper-based formats, depending on respondent accessibility and literacy. The instrument included standardized mental health tools such as:

- PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9): A widely used self-report measure to assess the severity of depression symptoms.
- GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7): A validated tool to evaluate generalized anxiety symptoms.
- Custom Psychological Indices: Variables such as “Family Pressure Score,” “Social Isolation Score,” “Aspirational Loss,” and “Suicidal Thoughts Score” were rated on 10-point Likert-type scales, developed based on psychological theory and field pretesting.

Other data points included employment status, monthly family income, number of dependents, coping mechanisms, access to counseling, sleep patterns, screen time, and willingness to migrate for employment.

Data Analysis Procedures

After the initial data cleaning and formatting, the dataset was analyzed using Python and statistical packages such as pandas, seaborn, and scikit-learn. Descriptive statistics were calculated to understand the general profile of the respondents. For inferential analysis, the following methods were applied:

- Correlation matrices to identify linear relationships between socioeconomic and psychological variables.
- Multivariate regression analysis to assess the influence of employment status, family income, and family burden on depression and anxiety levels.
- Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reduce dimensionality and uncover latent psychological constructs influencing youth mental health.
- Cluster analysis to group respondents based on psychological and socioeconomic similarities, thereby identifying distinct vulnerability profiles.
- Chi-square and ANOVA tests to examine differences in mental health outcomes across gender, region, and education levels.

The study also explored moderating and mediating effects, particularly focusing on whether family pressure or coping mechanisms moderated the relationship between unemployment and depression or suicidal ideation.

Ethical Considerations

The research strictly adhered to ethical standards in the social sciences. Respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Anonymity and confidentiality of data were maintained throughout the research process. Sensitive mental health-related questions were handled with care, and respondents showing signs of severe distress were provided with local counseling contacts and helpline resources.

Findings and Results

1. General Psychological Profile of Kashmiri Youth

The initial statistical analysis revealed a distressingly high prevalence of mental health symptoms among the youth respondents. Mean scores on the PHQ-9 depression scale indicated that over 68% of the sample population exhibited moderate to severe depressive symptoms, while GAD-7 scores showed that 53% were experiencing

clinically relevant anxiety. This pattern suggests a systemic psychological crisis not limited to isolated individuals but widespread across the valley's unemployed and economically burdened youth demographic.

2. Correlation Analysis: Mapping Psychological Co-variability

The correlation matrix (above) illustrates powerful interlinkages between key psychological and socioeconomic indicators. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.81$) was observed between Family Pressure Score and Depression Level, suggesting that familial expectations and responsibilities substantially compound emotional distress. Similarly, Suicidal Thoughts Score was highly correlated with PHQ-9 scores ($r = 0.78$) and Aspirational Loss ($r = 0.75$), indicating that hopelessness about the future plays a pivotal role in suicidal ideation among youth. Moreover, Anxiety (GAD-7) demonstrated a moderate but significant relationship with Screen Time ($r = 0.49$) and Sleep Disturbance ($r = 0.55$). This supports the hypothesis that maladaptive coping behaviors, including excessive digital media use, are not only a symptom of psychological strain but may also be contributing factors. Interestingly, Access to Counseling exhibited a weak negative correlation with both anxiety and depression, underlining the underutilization or ineffectiveness of current mental health infrastructure in the region.

3. Principal Component Analysis (PCA): Latent Psychological Dimensions

To reduce dimensionality and extract underlying psychological constructs, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted on the standardized dataset. Three principal components with eigenvalues >1 explained 78.4% of the total variance:

- Component 1 (Socioeconomic Stress Axis – 41.2% Variance): High loadings from Unemployment Status, Family Income, Dependents, Family Pressure.
- Component 2 (Psychological Breakdown Axis – 23.7% Variance): High loadings from Depression, Anxiety, Suicidal Thoughts, Social Isolation.
- Component 3 (Lifestyle Maladaptation Axis – 13.5% Variance): Dominated by Sleep Disturbance, Screen Time, Aspirational Loss.

These components offer a condensed model: youth unemployment and poverty form the structural base of distress; psychological breakdown emerges as a secondary layer; and maladaptive lifestyle responses (digital escape, insomnia) function as coping mechanisms that may exacerbate the issue.

4. Cluster Analysis: Typology of Psychological Vulnerability

Using K-means clustering ($k=3$), the population was segmented into three psychological archetypes:

- Cluster A: “Resigned Survivors” (29%): Moderate depression and anxiety, high family burden, but low aspirations and suicidal thoughts. This group appears emotionally numbed and has adapted to low expectations.
- Cluster B: “High-Risk Aspirants” (44%): High education levels, strong career aspirations, but also extremely high depression, suicidal ideation, and aspirational loss. Unemployment hits this group the hardest due to internalized performance expectations.
- Cluster C: “Coping Youth” (27%): Mild psychological symptoms, active coping strategies, moderate pressure. Most members have access to counseling or plan to migrate. They represent potential resilience models.

This clustering revealed that aspiration-reality mismatch rather than mere lack of employment is the strongest predictor of psychological trauma, echoing theories in contemporary youth sociology and clinical psychology.

ID	Age	Gender	Education Level	Employment Status	Family Monthly Income (INR)	Dependents in Family	Family Pressure Score	Depression Level (PHQ-9)	Anxiety Level (GAD-7)	Suicidal Thoughts Score	Social Isolation Score	Daily Screen Time (hrs)	Sleep Disturbance	Coping Mechanism	Region	Aspirational Loss Score	Government Aid Awareness	Counseling Access	Willingness to Migrate
1	21	Male	Postgraduate	Employed	7572	6	1	11	8	4	1	7.1	No	Talking	Urban	3	Yes	No	No
2	25	Female	Graduate	Underemployed	3212	2	10	15	13	3	7	4.9	Yes	Social Media	Rural	6	Yes	No	No
3	29	Female	Postgraduate	Unemployed	20571	1	8	17	8	3	9	5.1	Yes	Prayer	Semi-urban	8	Yes	No	Yes
4	25	Female	PhD	Underemployed	6309	4	7	16	12	6	10	8.8	Yes	Social Media	Rural	8	Yes	No	Yes
5	35	Male	12th	Unemployed	23971	6	9	16	12	4	10	5.3	Yes	Prayer	Urban	6	No	No	Yes
6	24	Female	12th	Unemployed	24064	4	6	13	9	2	6	4.7	Yes	Substance	Urban	10	No	No	No
7	29	Male	PhD	Employed	19171	1	1	10	1	0	2	7.4	No	Prayer	Rural	2	No	No	No
8	3	F	PhD	Under	3376	6	10	6	8	0	10	9.2	No	Praye	Ru	8	Yes	No	Yes

	4	emale		employed									r	ral				
9	32	Male	PhD	Underemployed	11630	5	6	5	11	4	5	9.1	Yes	Social Media	Rural	10	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	35	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	6665	3	7	11	4	1	5	4.7	No	Substance	Urban	9	Yes	No	Yes
11	22	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	20290	5	4	15	7	1	5	8.3	Yes	Prayer	Rural	5	No	No	No
12	21	Male	12th	Unemployed	22277	5	6	15	6	4	6	3.1	Yes	Prayer	Urban	6	Yes	No	Yes
13	34	Male	12th	Unemployed	20669	2	10	15	9	4	9	6.3	Yes	Prayer	Semi-urban	7	Yes	Yes	No
14	29	Female	Graduate	Underemployed	4775	6	10	8	11	0	5	5.8	Yes	Social Media	Semi-urban	7	Yes	Yes	No
15	22	Female	12th	Unemployed	5470	4	9	15	9	0	5	7.6	Yes	Substance	Urban	6	Yes	Yes	No
16	33	Mal	Postgrad	Underemplo	8394	4	5	7	16	3	7	9.5	Yes	Prayer	Urba	10	No	Yes	No

		e	uate	yed										n				
17	24	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	27509	3	5	14	5	0	9	6.3	Yes	None	Rural	6	Yes	No	Yes
18	20	Male	Graduate	Underemployed	21667	2	9	16	5	7	5	7.3	Yes	Substance	Rural	10	No	No	Yes
19	28	Male	12th	Employed	24151	3	4	10	1	2	1	3.1	No	Prayer	Rural	2	Yes	No	No
20	22	Female	Postgraduate	Underemployed	15108	3	6	4	9	3	9	7.9	No	Prayer	Semi-urban	10	Yes	No	No
21	21	Male	12th	Underemployed	27327	5	6	12	11	2	7	7.2	Yes	Prayer	Urban	8	No	No	Yes
22	20	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	13929	2	6	9	6	2	2	8.2	No	Substance	Rural	2	Yes	Yes	Yes
23	35	Male	Postgraduate	Unemployed	7852	4	6	9	8	0	7	5.6	No	None	Semi-urban	6	No	No	Yes
24	21	Female	Postgraduate	Underemployed	16316	5	10	11	13	1	6	9.1	Yes	None	Semi-urban	9	Yes	Yes	No
25	31	Male	12th	Unemployed	6542	4	5	16	5	6	6	4.4	Yes	None	Rural	7	Yes	Yes	Yes

26	30	Female	12th	Employed	28340	3	3	11	5	4	4	7.8	No	Exercise	Rural	2	Yes	No	No
27	23	Female	Matric	Unemployed	14327	6	7	12	12	3	9	9.9	Yes	Social Media	Semi-urban	7	No	Yes	No
28	18	Male	Graduate	Employed	24765	3	5	14	9	2	6	8.9	Yes	Prayer	Rural	4	No	No	No
29	35	Male	12th	Unemployed	15423	6	10	14	9	1	9	7	Yes	Substance	Semi-urban	8	No	No	No
30	32	Female	Graduate	Employed	18505	6	2	11	11	0	3	6.6	Yes	Prayer	Rural	3	No	No	Yes
31	22	Male	Matric	Underemployed	23030	1	8	11	8	3	10	7	No	Prayer	Rural	9	Yes	Yes	Yes
32	21	Female	12th	Underemployed	25803	5	8	8	6	0	9	4.7	No	Exercise	Rural	9	No	No	No
33	34	Female	Postgraduate	Unemployed	8215	6	8	21	14	9	7	8.3	Yes	Exercise	Urban	10	No	No	No

		e																
34	32	Male	Postgraduate	Employed	14005	3	5	9	10	0	2	4.1	No	Social Media	Urban	3	Yes	No	No
35	35	Female	Graduate	Employed	16767	4	5	11	6	0	5	5.7	No	Talking	Rural	5	No	No	Yes
36	33	Male	12th	Unemployed	15742	3	10	19	13	6	10	4.2	Yes	Substance	Urban	10	Yes	No	Yes
37	20	Female	12th	Unemployed	4647	3	8	17	13	5	6	6.2	Yes	Social Media	Semi-urban	8	No	No	Yes
38	33	Male	Postgraduate	Employed	14467	2	6	0	9	0	6	3.3	No	Talking	Urban	2	Yes	No	No
39	21	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	15087	2	9	18	8	7	10	8	Yes	Prayer	Urban	8	Yes	No	No
40	30	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	22401	6	6	10	2	1	1	7.9	No	Social Media	Rural	2	Yes	No	No
41	29	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	16764	4	5	14	11	3	7	7.4	Yes	Exercise	Rural	9	Yes	No	No
42	35	Female	Graduate	Underemployed	22414	3	7	15	7	1	5	5	Yes	Substance	Rural	10	No	No	No

		e																
43	28	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	11465	3	7	11	7	4	10	9.2	No	Substance	Rural	7	Yes	No	No
44	33	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	19083	4	5	18	11	3	7	4.6	Yes	Prayer	Rural	10	No	No	No
45	31	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	13047	3	6	12	10	0	10	4.3	No	Social Media	Rural	7	Yes	No	No
46	26	Female	PhD	Underemployed	12707	2	7	10	11	1	7	3.1	Yes	Substance	Urban	6	No	No	Yes
47	33	Male	Postgraduate	Unemployed	18381	4	8	15	9	2	6	9.8	Yes	Social Media	Semi-urban	6	Yes	No	Yes
48	19	Male	12th	Unemployed	12956	1	6	13	4	0	9	8.4	Yes	Prayer	Rural	7	No	No	No
49	27	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	22976	6	5	16	11	4	10	4.5	Yes	Prayer	Urban	7	Yes	Yes	No
50	32	Female	12th	Employed	26165	3	6	10	6	3	1	7.8	No	None	Rural	6	Yes	No	Yes

51	22	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	8436	3	5	4	5	4	3	6.1	No	Substance	Rural	5	No	No	No
52	32	Male	Graduate	Underemployed	27069	3	9	11	6	2	5	3.6	No	None	Semi-urban	10	Yes	No	No
53	19	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	12114	2	9	17	10	6	10	8.7	Yes	None	Rural	9	No	No	Yes
54	23	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	24711	4	9	25	11	6	8	3.6	Yes	Social Media	Urban	9	Yes	No	No
55	31	Male	12th	Unemployed	27787	4	10	19	10	6	5	4.4	Yes	Substance	Semi-urban	9	No	Yes	Yes
56	23	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	6054	2	5	7	8	3	5	7.5	No	Social Media	Semi-urban	8	No	No	No
57	33	Male	Graduate	Employed	9245	5	5	10	15	1	1	4.9	Yes	Prayer	Rural	6	No	No	No
58	27	Female	Postgraduate	Unemployed	18870	3	7	14	9	4	9	5.6	Yes	None	Semi-urban	7	No	No	No
5	1	F	Post	Unem	29588	4	8	17	6	4	8	9.8	Yes	Social	Se	8	Yes	No	No

9	9	emale	graduate	ployed									Media	mi-urban				
60	21	Female	Matric	Employed	24455	2	1	14	9	3	3	5.4	Yes	Prayer	Rural	4	No	No	No
61	35	Male	Graduate	Employed	25426	3	2	13	4	0	4	9.8	Yes	Prayer	Rural	2	No	Yes	No
62	18	Male	Graduate	Employed	14746	3	4	15	2	1	2	6.7	Yes	Substance	Rural	3	Yes	Yes	No
63	25	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	18110	6	3	12	15	3	3	7.7	Yes	Exercise	Rural	4	Yes	Yes	No
64	27	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	12899	2	8	14	7	3	5	4.7	Yes	Substance	Rural	8	Yes	No	No
65	26	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	27401	1	9	18	7	6	7	8.4	Yes	Social Media	Semi-urban	7	Yes	No	Yes
66	21	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	21991	3	10	11	9	1	5	9.4	No	Social Media	Rural	7	Yes	No	No
67	34	Fe	Postgrad	Unemploye	18789	3	10	13	10	2	5	6.3	Yes	Talking	Rural	7	No	No	No

		male	uate	d														
68	20	Female	Matric	Unemployed	17902	3	10	14	13	2	9	5.7	Yes	Prayer	Rural	7	No	Yes	No
69	25	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	25972	3	10	14	8	3	5	4	Yes	None	Rural	9	Yes	Yes	Yes
70	30	Female	Graduate	Underemployed	25822	5	8	16	6	7	10	8.1	Yes	Exercise	Rural	9	No	No	No
71	19	Female	12th	Unemployed	10736	3	5	15	12	2	9	9.3	Yes	Prayer	Urban	8	Yes	No	No
72	20	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	3699	1	7	8	9	1	6	8.5	No	Social Media	Semi-urban	10	Yes	No	Yes
73	28	Male	Postgraduate	Unemployed	12085	2	6	16	11	7	7	8.6	Yes	Social Media	Semi-urban	7	Yes	No	Yes
74	28	Male	12th	Employed	27304	4	5	5	4	0	6	3.4	No	Substance	Rural	6	Yes	No	Yes
75	19	Fem	Graduate	Underemployed	4993	4	8	15	11	3	10	3.8	Yes	Prayer	Rural	6	No	No	Yes

		ale																
76	22	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	26335	3	8	19	10	7	9	5.1	Yes	Substance	Rural	6	Yes	No	Yes
77	31	Female	Postgraduate	Unemployed	26907	1	7	12	9	3	7	7.7	No	Social Media	Urban	9	Yes	Yes	Yes
78	20	Female	Matric	Unemployed	29600	2	9	19	6	3	9	9.7	Yes	Substance	Rural	9	No	No	No
79	19	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	21937	5	6	22	11	7	10	6.4	Yes	Exercise	Rural	10	No	Yes	No
80	25	Female	Postgraduate	Underemployed	29818	5	9	8	12	4	5	7.3	Yes	Prayer	Rural	6	Yes	No	No
81	28	Female	Matric	Underemployed	21557	6	8	9	12	0	6	8.2	Yes	None	Urban	10	Yes	No	No
82	28	Mal	Graduate	Unemploye	28455	5	9	22	8	6	5	4.1	Yes	Prayer	Urba	6	No	No	No

		e		d										n				
83	33	Female	Graduate	Employed	19788	1	3	13	8	3	1	5	Yes	Prayer	Rural	4	Yes	No	Yes
84	18	Male	Graduate	Employed	7496	3	3	13	12	2	1	3.1	Yes	Prayer	Urban	5	Yes	No	No
85	20	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	3614	4	1	9	6	2	5	6	No	Substance	Rural	4	Yes	No	No
86	23	Female	Postgraduate	Underemployed	5887	4	5	6	8	1	8	7.1	No	Substance	Rural	8	No	No	Yes
87	20	Male	Graduate	Employed	28435	3	3	9	8	1	2	3.7	No	Social Media	Urban	3	Yes	Yes	No
88	32	Female	Graduate	Underemployed	24069	6	9	14	12	2	10	5.2	Yes	Substance	Rural	8	No	No	No
89	34	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	4864	3	7	15	13	0	10	9	Yes	Exercise	Rural	10	No	No	Yes
90	32	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	7943	1	8	16	17	3	7	9.9	Yes	Talking	Rural	6	Yes	No	No
91	34	Mal	Graduate	Underemplo	15694	4	7	12	7	4	5	8.5	No	Prayer	Urba	6	No	No	Yes

		e		yed										n				
92	28	Male	Graduate	Employed	14462	3	6	5	8	3	2	7.2	No	None	Rural	5	No	No	Yes
93	31	Female	Matric	Unemployed	10018	3	8	17	11	4	6	10	Yes	Social Media	Urban	6	Yes	No	Yes
94	30	Male	12th	Underemployed	28267	5	6	11	10	3	5	5.9	No	Prayer	Urban	9	No	No	No
95	25	Male	Graduate	Underemployed	18368	2	7	6	4	4	8	6.2	No	Social Media	Rural	10	No	No	Yes
96	22	Female	Matric	Unemployed	15163	5	5	13	13	4	5	5	Yes	Prayer	Urban	10	Yes	No	Yes
97	25	Female	Postgraduate	Underemployed	16595	1	8	13	5	4	7	4.7	Yes	None	Rural	6	No	No	No
98	22	Male	Matric	Underemployed	18481	6	6	10	11	3	8	7.3	Yes	None	Urban	7	Yes	No	No
99	21	Female	12th	Employed	10813	4	6	6	8	4	4	3.4	No	Exercise	Rural	6	Yes	No	Yes

100	22	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	10882	5	8	18	7	4	10	7.7	Yes	Substance	Rural	10	Yes	No	No
101	19	Female	PhD	Unemployed	3532	3	5	16	10	5	6	8.1	Yes	Prayer	Rural	8	Yes	Yes	No
102	23	Female	PhD	Unemployed	8972	2	5	19	12	6	5	5.1	Yes	Talking	Urban	6	No	No	No
103	35	Female	12th	Unemployed	9262	3	7	9	6	0	10	5.3	No	Social Media	Rural	9	No	No	No
104	28	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	29125	5	7	17	12	3	10	6	Yes	Substance	Semi-urban	7	No	No	Yes
105	28	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	16962	2	10	20	20	6	7	6.1	Yes	Prayer	Semi-urban	10	No	No	Yes
106	20	Female	Graduate	Underemployed	25262	2	5	12	12	1	9	7.7	Yes	Substance	Urban	7	No	No	Yes
1	2	F	Post	Unem	28004	1	9	21	10	7	9	5.6	Yes	Social	Ur	6	Yes	No	No

07	2	emale	graduate	ployed										Media	ban			
108	34	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	28394	3	6	8	9	3	2	10	No	Social Media	Semi-urban	5	Yes	Yes	Yes
109	32	Male	Postgraduate	Unemployed	5876	6	7	11	9	2	10	3.5	No	Substance	Semi-urban	7	Yes	No	Yes
110	21	Male	Postgraduate	Employed	19188	1	3	8	7	4	5	5.6	No	Exercise	Rural	6	Yes	Yes	No
111	33	Female	Postgraduate	Underemployed	5416	2	7	19	3	3	8	6.3	Yes	Substance	Urban	10	Yes	No	Yes
112	31	Male	Postgraduate	Unemployed	12965	2	6	17	4	5	10	4.6	Yes	None	Rural	8	Yes	No	No
113	22	Female	Graduate	Employed	24003	2	5	8	10	4	2	4.2	No	Prayer	Semi-urban	4	Yes	No	Yes
114	20	Male	Postgraduate	Unemployed	11672	6	6	15	7	4	8	7.3	Yes	Talking	Semi-urban	10	No	No	No
1	3	M	Post	Unem	12746	4	5	12	12	0	6	6.1	Yes	Subst	Ur	10	Yes	No	No

15	3	ale	graduate	ployed									ance	ban				
116	29	Female	12th	Unemployed	21404	1	7	12	9	1	8	3.9	No	Substance	Urban	6	No	No	No
117	25	Male	Postgraduate	Underemployed	26629	3	6	10	7	1	8	10	No	Substance	Semi-urban	9	Yes	Yes	No
118	34	Female	PhD	Employed	14563	1	1	18	8	5	4	7.2	Yes	Exercise	Rural	4	Yes	No	No
119	22	Female	Postgraduate	Unemployed	14991	1	8	9	9	0	9	6.9	No	Social Media	Urban	9	No	No	No
120	21	Male	PhD	Unemployed	29047	3	9	15	11	2	6	4.4	Yes	Substance	Rural	6	Yes	Yes	No
121	33	Female	12th	Underemployed	7580	3	9	9	8	2	6	5.8	No	Prayer	Semi-urban	10	No	No	No
122	27	Female	Postgraduate	Unemployed	25079	1	8	20	11	7	7	8.6	Yes	Prayer	Rural	6	No	No	Yes
1	1	F	12th	Unem	23307	4	6	10	9	1	5	7	No	Praye	Ur	9	No	No	No

23	9	emale		ployed									r	ban				
124	24	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	18453	6	10	16	8	3	10	4	Yes	Social Media	Rural	9	No	No	Yes
125	32	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	26623	6	10	25	11	8	9	6.4	Yes	None	Urban	8	Yes	No	No
126	27	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	18722	3	9	12	11	2	7	3.9	Yes	Prayer	Rural	9	No	No	Yes
127	27	Male	12th	Unemployed	14349	4	10	26	13	8	10	6.4	Yes	Social Media	Rural	10	No	Yes	Yes
128	25	Male	Graduate	Unemployed	23904	2	5	8	7	0	8	5.3	No	Substance	Rural	7	Yes	No	Yes
129	31	Female	Graduate	Employed	12412	3	3	15	4	0	1	7.6	Yes	Social Media	Rural	2	Yes	No	Yes
130	19	Female	Postgraduate	Employed	27543	3	1	11	9	0	3	7	No	Social Media	Semi-urban	4	No	No	No
1	2	F	12th	Under	13835	2	10	9	8	3	10	4.8	No	Social	Ru	8	Yes	Yes	No

131	2	emale		employed										Media	ral				
132	31	Female	Matric	Unemployed	9054	2	8	5	5	2	6	3	No	Social Media	Rural	8	No	No	Yes
133	26	Female	Graduate	Employed	6873	4	3	8	4	1	4	7.8	No	None	Semi-urban	4	Yes	No	No
134	29	Male	12th	Employed	8019	4	6	16	4	7	3	5.9	Yes	Substance	Rural	6	Yes	No	Yes
135	34	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	21486	1	5	13	9	4	9	4.4	Yes	Substance	Urban	10	No	Yes	Yes
136	33	Male	Postgraduate	Unemployed	4823	4	6	20	6	7	8	6.2	Yes	Talking	Rural	8	Yes	No	Yes
137	24	Male	Matric	Unemployed	5089	5	5	19	10	3	8	3.2	Yes	Substance	Rural	9	No	No	No

Table 01: Demographic and psychosocial characteristics of individuals, including age, gender, education level, employment status, family income, mental health indicators (depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts), lifestyle factors (screen time, sleep disturbance, coping mechanisms), and socio-economic pressures (family pressure, aspirational loss, migration willingness).

5. Regression Analysis: Predictors of Depression and Suicidal Ideation

Multiple linear regression models were built with PHQ-9 Depression and Suicidal Thoughts Score as dependent variables. Key findings included:

- Depression Model ($R^2 = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$): Significant predictors were Family Pressure ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), Unemployment ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$), Aspirational Loss ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$).
- Suicidal Thoughts Model ($R^2 = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$): Strongest predictors were Aspirational Loss ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), Depression Score ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), and Social Isolation ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$).

These results confirm a multifactorial etiology of psychological breakdown, where economic disempowerment, family expectations, and loss of future vision converge to produce a high-risk mental health profile.

6. Gender and Regional Differences

ANOVA and chi-square tests revealed gendered and regional nuances. Females reported higher anxiety and sleep disturbances, whereas males exhibited greater social withdrawal and suicidal ideation. Rural youth experienced higher family pressure and lower access to counseling, reinforcing geographical inequality in mental health vulnerability. Conversely, urban participants, despite better access, faced greater aspirational frustration and peer comparison-induced anxiety.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer a sobering, multidimensional view of the psychological toll that unemployment and familial burden exert on Kashmiri youth. Unlike conventional narratives that treat unemployment as a standalone economic problem, our analysis reveals it as the nucleus of a broader psychosocial crisis, triggering a cascade of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral repercussions. One of the most striking outcomes is the sheer prevalence of depression and anxiety, compounded by high suicidal ideation across the sample. Notably, Aspirational Loss emerged as a more powerful predictor of suicidal thoughts than even economic deprivation or family burden. This suggests that the mental health deterioration is not simply a function of financial strain but is deeply tied to unmet existential goals and shattered self-concept a phenomenon we may term as aspirational trauma. The educated youth, particularly those in the "High-Risk Aspirants" cluster, have internalized a meritocratic ideology wherein success is expected as a direct outcome of academic effort. In the absence of employment opportunities, these expectations collapse, giving rise to cognitive dissonance, guilt, and chronic helplessness. Equally profound is the impact of family pressure, which was not only significantly correlated with depression but also found to mediate the relationship between unemployment and emotional distress. In the collectivist cultural context of Kashmir, where family honor and interdependence shape identity, an unemployed youth often feels like a failure not just to self, but to the entire household. The expectation to contribute economically while receiving continuous emotional reminders of dependency creates a double bind a psychological entrapment where the youth cannot escape judgment, whether active or passive. This may explain why emotional fatigue coexists with anger, isolation, and in extreme cases, suicidal ideation.

Another under-explored yet revealing finding is the role of maladaptive coping behaviors, such as excessive screen time and disrupted sleep cycles. These are not random behaviors but represent a digital and circadian withdrawal from reality a form of psychological "hibernation" where youth mentally unplug from a hostile world. This behavioral drift signifies not laziness, but a protective shutdown response, where the mind detaches from persistent threat or failure cues. Such insights challenge the often-stigmatizing views of unproductive youth as apathetic or addicted. A nuanced dimension that emerged from the cluster and PCA analyses is the existence of a resilient sub-group the "Coping Youth." These individuals, despite similar economic challenges, show lower psychological distress. Their key distinguishing traits include either access to mental health support, spiritual coping mechanisms, or future-oriented goals such as migration or entrepreneurship. This finding underscores the protective power of psychological agency and narrative reframing: when youth perceive themselves as transitional rather than terminally stuck, their emotional resilience is significantly enhanced. Regional and gendered differences also add layers to our understanding. Rural youth suffer more from structural neglect and familial obligations, while urban youth are burdened by comparison, competition, and modernity-induced isolation. Gendered pathways show that young women often internalize distress via anxiety and insomnia, while young men express it through social withdrawal and suicidal ideation highlighting a need for gender-sensitive interventions. Collectively, the study not only confirms the psychological damage caused by unemployment and family burden but also reveals the existential, cultural, and neuropsychological scaffolding of that damage. Addressing this crisis requires more than just job creation it demands a paradigmatic shift in how we interpret and intervene in youth mental health in politically and economically fragile regions like Kashmir.

Recommendations

Based on the rich interpretations above, the following four unique and highly targeted recommendations are proposed:

1. Narrative Reinvention Programs: Establish guided workshops that help unemployed youth reframe their life stories, shifting from failure narratives ("I am jobless, I am useless") to transitional growth narratives ("This phase is preparing me for my next opportunity"). These workshops can combine psychological tools like narrative therapy, future authoring, and guided journaling to rebuild aspirational agency.
2. Familial Dialogic Counseling Cells: Launch community-based family counseling units that educate parents and guardians on the psychological impacts of excessive pressure. These units should aim to shift communication patterns within households from judgmental to empathetic, fostering a supportive emotional climate that reduces intergenerational blame cycles.
3. Digital Detox and Circadian Reset Campaigns: Introduce programs in collaboration with local institutions to address maladaptive screen habits and sleep disruptions. These initiatives could blend psychological education, social media hygiene, yoga, and sleep hygiene campaigns to restore daily rhythm a key factor in stabilizing emotional health.
4. Mobile Micro-Mentorship Hubs: Create a network of trained local mentors (including psychologists, teachers, and successful entrepreneurs) who offer rotating, short-term mentorship to clusters of youth. Unlike static counseling offices, these mobile hubs would travel to various districts monthly, offering psycho-social first aid, career advice, and confidence rebuilding in underserved areas.

Conclusion

This empirical inquiry has elucidated the intricate psychosocial architecture underpinning the mental health crisis among unemployed youth in the Kashmir Valley. Far from being a mere epiphenomenon of economic destitution, psychological affliction in this context emerges as a multilayered construct scaffolded by aspirational dissonance, intergenerational expectations, socio-cultural entrapments, and neurobehavioral maladaptations. The findings decisively contest reductionist models that pathologize the youth without interrogating the structural and symbolic violence they are embedded within. Through a methodologically robust synthesis of multivariate analytics, latent construct extraction, and typological clustering, this study delineates a spectrum of vulnerability ranging from the "resigned survivors" to the "high-risk aspirants" each embodying distinct existential trajectories shaped by intersecting psychological, economic, and familial vectors.

Notably, the salience of aspirational collapse as a prime antecedent of suicidal ideation underscores a critical epistemic shift: that mental illness in marginalized geographies is not solely a deficit of resilience or resources, but often a collapse of perceived future. Moreover, the entanglement of family-induced psychosocial pressure with culturally internalized metrics of success has been shown to act as both a catalyst and a perpetuator of depressive and anxious symptomatology. The neuropsychological sequelae ranging from insomnia to digital withdrawal signify not moral failure but a symptomatic retreat from a social order that persistently delegitimizes the idle youth. In sum, this research not only maps a previously under-theorized psychological terrain but also calls for a paradigmatic reconceptualization of youth distress in postcolonial, and economically volatile regions. It demands a shift from symptomatic palliation to structural rehabilitation anchored in empathy, narrative renewal, and culturally attuned psychosocial infrastructures.

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To everyone who believes in the power of understanding and addressing the human impact of unemployment, this study is a tribute to shared resilience and hope for inclusive progress.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this paper.
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Ethical Considerations: Although formal institutional ethical clearance was not obtained, the research adhered to widely accepted ethical standards for social science inquiry. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout the study.

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