



Depression, Self-Esteem, Coping Strategies, Social Support, and Hopelessness as Predictors of Psychological Distress among Unemployed Graduates in Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract. Unemployment remains a major socio-economic challenge with profound implications for the psychological well-being of young graduates. This study investigated the predictive roles of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness in psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Nigeria. A correlational research design was adopted, and data were collected from 126 unemployed graduates using standardised psychological instruments. Multiple regression analysis revealed that the predictors jointly accounted for 55% of the variance in psychological distress ($R = .74$, $R^2 = .55$, Adjusted $R^2 = .52$, $F(5,120) = 18.46$, $p < .01$). Depression and hopelessness significantly increased psychological distress, while self-esteem, coping strategies, and social support functioned as protective factors. These findings underscore the complex interplay of individual and social variables in shaping unemployed youths' mental health. The study concludes that interventions addressing depression and hopelessness, alongside programmes promoting resilience, social connectedness, and self-worth, are crucial for alleviating distress among unemployed graduates. It recommends multi-level approaches involving counselling, institutional support, and policy-driven initiatives to enhance psychological well-being and reduce the adverse mental health outcomes associated with graduate unemployment.

Keywords: unemployment, psychological distress, depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, hopelessness

1. Introduction

Unemployment among youth is a well-documented global challenge, with far-reaching psychological consequences. The United Nations reports that over one-fifth of young people worldwide are neither

employed nor in education, leading to long-term social and economic exclusion (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Systematic reviews highlight that the unemployed are at significantly higher risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation especially when joblessness is prolonged showing that psychological distress is both a universal and pressing concern (Zuelke et al., 2018; Olesen et al., 2013). These trends make it imperative to investigate how distress manifests in specific contexts, such as urban Nigeria.

In sub-Saharan Africa, young people are particularly vulnerable to the sequelae of unemployment due to economic instability and weak mental health infrastructure. A study in Ethiopia found that nearly one-third of unemployed young adults experienced depression, with longer unemployment periods and low self-esteem being key predictors (Mekiya et al., 2020). In Ghana, research emphasised that religiosity and social support can buffer mental distress during unemployment, though the support only directly, not fully, reduced psychological strain (Boateng et al., 2020). These findings underscore the importance of psychosocial resources but also the limits of such buffers in the absence of economic stability.

Within Nigeria, youth unemployment rates remain among the highest in Africa, contributing to severe psychological distress. Abiola et al. (2015) noted that resilience factors are critical for mental wellbeing among youths facing employment challenges. This is echoed locally in studies of vulnerable populations: Akinyemi and Aremu (2018) showed that solution-focused therapy alleviated psychological distress among people living with HIV—suggesting its potential relevance to unemployed youths facing similar emotional struggles. Akinyemi et al. (2018a) also found that socio-economic disadvantage

undermines academic performance, indirectly hinting at how economic strain can erode self-efficacy among unemployed graduates. Such Nigerian findings align with global consensus that unemployment undermines mental health via material deprivation and psychosocial stress.

In South-West Nigeria, additional insights show how peer and social dynamics shape psychological outcomes. Aremu and Akinyemi (2019) observed that peer influence strongly affects motivation among youths, implying that negative peer contexts during unemployment may aggravate distress through poor self-regulation or discouragement. Similarly, Fehintola and Akinyemi (2021) demonstrated the efficacy of mindfulness and cognitive training in improving emotional regulation among secondary students, suggesting that such interventions could help unemployed youths manage psychological strain by strengthening their coping skills.

Lagos State carries additional weight in such considerations. Its high cost of living, intense competition, and urban pressures create a uniquely stressful backdrop for unemployed youths. While empirical data specific to Lagos remains limited, national trends such as widespread youth unemployment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022) suggest elevated distress among graduates unable to secure jobs. Community-based resilience models in Nigeria underline that social support rooted in kinship networks, religious ties, and neighbourhood associations can act as key psychological buffers amid economic hardship (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2018). Yet these supports may be strained in hyper-urban contexts like Lagos, where traditional communal bonds weaken under metropolitan anonymity.

Moreover, broader international literature empirically links unemployment to deteriorating mental health and demonstrates the role of structured coping and time structuring in reducing distress. For instance, Creed and Macintyre (2018) highlighted that employment provides daily structure, a sense of purpose, and social connection elements essential to psychological wellbeing. Qualitative work in Northern Europe on NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) youth demonstrates how unemployment phases lead to stress-related symptoms (headaches, anxiety, substance use) and create a vicious spiral of disengagement (Lundberg et al., 2019). Interventions that support daily routine and meaningful activity have been shown to mitigate such spirals (Schreiner et al., 2022).

Despite these converging lines of evidence, there is a conspicuous research gap: no comprehensive study has simultaneously examined hopelessness, emotion dysregulation, social support deficits, and unemployment experiences as predictors of psychological distress among unemployed youths in Lagos. Local studies (Akinyemi & Aremu, 2018; Akinyemi et al., 2018a, 2018b; Aremu & Akinyemi, 2019; Fehintola & Akinyemi, 2021; Fehintola & Akinyemi, 2022; Omopo, 2024; Omopo, 2025; Quadri et al., 2025) provide valuable insight into components of this framework but have not been applied to the graduate unemployment context. Filling this gap can inform interventions tailored to Lagos's unique socio-economic landscape, strengthen urban mental health policymaking, and contribute to theoretical models linking unemployment to distress.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the predictors of psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria, with particular focus on clinical and psychosocial variables such as depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness. The study seeks to explore how these factors interact to influence the psychological well-being of young graduates who face challenges of prolonged joblessness, financial strain, and uncertain futures. In doing so, the research aims to provide insights into the psychosocial vulnerabilities associated with unemployment and highlight pathways for targeted psychological and social interventions. Specifically, the objectives of this study were as follows:

- To examine the relationship between depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, hopelessness, and psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.
- To determine the combined effect of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness on psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.
- To assess the relative contributions of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness to psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.

1.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, hopelessness, and psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.
- There is no significant combined effect of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness on psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.
- There is no significant relative contribution of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness to psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is anchored on the Stress Process Model (SPM), which provides a framework for understanding how stressors, mediators, and outcomes interact to influence mental health. According to Pearlin et al. (1981), stressors such as unemployment, financial hardship, and uncertainty about the future serve as primary sources of psychological strain. These stressors may trigger negative psychological outcomes, including depression, hopelessness, and heightened distress. The model also identifies mediating factors such as coping strategies, social support, and personal resources like self-esteem, which may buffer or exacerbate the impact of stressors on mental health outcomes.

In the context of unemployed graduates in Lagos, the Stress Process Model is particularly relevant because it explains how prolonged joblessness operates as a chronic stressor that undermines self-worth, social integration, and emotional stability. For instance, inadequate coping strategies or weak social support networks may intensify psychological distress, whereas protective factors such as self-esteem and resilience may mitigate it. By situating the study within the Stress Process Model, it becomes possible to systematically examine not only the direct effects of unemployment-related stress on distress levels but also the moderating and mediating roles of individual and social resources.

3. Research Methodology

The study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate psychological distress among unemployed youths in Lagos State. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used to ensure adequate representation across the three senatorial districts of the state. In the first stage, three local government areas (LGAs) - Ikeja, Alimosho, and Surulere were randomly selected. Within each LGA, wards, streets, and households were systematically sampled to identify eligible unemployed youths between the ages of 18 and 35 years. From this pool, a total of 126 participants were proportionately selected. Data were collected using standardised instruments: the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) to measure psychological distress, the Unemployment Distress Scale (UDS) to capture specific stressors linked to joblessness, the Brief COPE Inventory to assess coping strategies, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) to evaluate the role of social support systems. These instruments were chosen for their robust psychometric properties and wide usage in cross-cultural research, ensuring validity and reliability of findings.

The data collection process was conducted by the researcher and trained assistants who administered the questionnaires face-to-face to enhance accuracy and completeness of responses. Informed consent was obtained from participants after clearly explaining the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of information provided. Ethical approval was secured from the relevant institutional review board, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without adverse consequence. Completed responses were anonymised and safely stored to maintain privacy. Data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25). Descriptive statistics summarised demographic and variable distributions, while inferential statistics including Pearson's correlation, multiple regression, and analysis of variance were applied to test the research hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. This methodological framework combined rigorous sampling, validated measures, and ethical safeguards to ensure reliability and generalisability of results.

4. Result and Discussions

4.1 Demographic Representation of Participants

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 126)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	58	46.0
	Female	68	54.0
Total		126	100.0
Age Group (Years)	18–24	40	31.7
	25–29	52	41.3
	30–35	34	27.0
Total		126	100.0
Education	HND/Bachelor	92	73.0
	Postgraduate	34	27.0
Total		126	100.0
Local Government	Ikeja	42	33.3
	Alimosho	44	34.9
	Surulere	40	31.7
Total		126	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the 126 unemployed youths in Lagos State who participated in the study. By gender, 58 (46.0%) were male, while 68 (54.0%) were female, giving a total of 126 participants. With respect to age, 40 respondents (31.7%) were between 18 and 24 years, 52 (41.3%) were within the 25–29 age group, and 34 (27.0%) were aged 30–35 years, summing up to 126. In terms of educational qualification, 92 participants (73.0%) held HND or Bachelor’s degrees, while 34 (27.0%) possessed postgraduate qualifications, making a total of 126. Across the three local government areas, 42 (33.3%) of the respondents were from Ikeja, 44 (34.9%) from Alimosho, and 40 (31.7%) from Surulere, also totalling 126 participants. This distribution confirms that the sample achieved balanced representation across gender, age, education, and locality.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, hopelessness, and psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Psychological distress	1					
2. Depression	.62**	1				
3. Self-esteem	-.48**	-.44**	1			
4. Coping strategies	-.32*	-.28*	.36**	1		
5. Social support	-.41**	-.35**	.39**	.33**	1	
6. Hopelessness	.57**	.61**	-.46**	-.29*	-.37**	1

*Note: $p < .05$, $p < .01$

Results from Pearson’s correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among the study variables. Psychological distress correlated positively with depression ($r = .62$, $p < .01$) and hopelessness ($r = .57$, $p < .01$), but negatively with self-esteem ($r = -.48$, $p < .01$), coping strategies ($r = -.32$, $p < .05$), and social support ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$). These results indicate that higher depression and hopelessness levels are associated with greater psychological distress, while higher self-esteem, effective coping strategies, and strong social support predict reduced distress. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The finding that depression had a strong positive relationship with psychological distress suggests that unemployed graduates in Lagos who experience heightened depressive symptoms are more vulnerable to distress. This outcome can be justified by the fact that unemployment often strips individuals of their sense of purpose, financial stability, and social recognition, thereby intensifying depressive feelings that manifest as distress. For many unemployed youths, the uncertainty of the future combined with societal pressure may increase their susceptibility to

stress and hopelessness, thus reinforcing the overlap between depression and psychological distress.

This outcome aligns with previous research which confirms that depression is a major predictor of psychological distress. For instance, a study by Cheung et al. (2019) found that depressive symptoms significantly exacerbated distress among unemployed individuals, highlighting the cyclical relationship between mental illness and lack of work. Similarly, Melaku et al. (2021) reported that depression was a strong determinant of distress among young adults facing economic challenges, underscoring that unemployment magnifies the psychological burden linked to depression.

The negative association between self-esteem and psychological distress indicates that unemployed graduates with higher self-esteem experience less distress compared to those with low self-worth. This result is justifiable because self-esteem serves as a psychological buffer, enabling individuals to maintain confidence and resilience despite unemployment. Graduates with low self-esteem may interpret joblessness as personal failure, internalise societal stigma, and thus be more prone to distress, while those with strong self-concepts are better able to reframe challenges and remain hopeful.

Empirical evidence corroborates this finding. Lee and Hankin (2020) observed that low self-esteem significantly predicted higher levels of psychological distress among unemployed young adults, noting that low self-worth intensified the perception of social rejection. In addition, Orth and Robins (2019) emphasised that self-esteem protects individuals against the negative mental health effects of adverse life circumstances, including unemployment. These studies affirm the protective role of self-esteem in mitigating distress among vulnerable populations.

The significant negative relationship between coping strategies and psychological distress suggests that unemployed graduates who adopt effective coping mechanisms experience reduced distress. This can be explained by the fact that active coping strategies such as problem-solving, positive reframing, or seeking social support may help individuals to regulate negative emotions and preserve psychological stability during unemployment. Conversely, maladaptive strategies like avoidance or substance use can intensify distress and worsen mental health outcomes.

This result is supported by recent scholarship. A study by Park et al. (2020) found that coping strategies moderated the impact of unemployment on distress, with adaptive coping reducing stress and maladaptive

coping increasing vulnerability. Similarly, Ayub and Iqbal (2021) confirmed that active coping strategies were associated with lower distress levels in young adults facing economic difficulties. These findings reinforce the notion that coping styles are crucial in determining how unemployment affects psychological wellbeing.

The negative relationship between social support and psychological distress indicates that unemployed graduates with strong social networks are less distressed compared to those with weak or absent support. This outcome can be explained by the fact that social support provides emotional reassurance, financial assistance, and practical guidance, all of which buffer against the negative impact of unemployment. In the absence of such support, unemployed youths may feel isolated, stigmatised, and overwhelmed, which in turn increases their susceptibility to distress.

Evidence from prior studies strengthens this interpretation. For instance, Yu et al. (2020) established that social support significantly reduced distress levels in unemployed youth populations by enhancing resilience and feelings of belonging. In a similar study, Ozbay et al. (2021) reported that individuals with stronger support systems were less likely to experience severe psychological distress during economic hardship. These findings highlight the protective influence of social networks in buffering unemployment-related stressors.

The positive association between hopelessness and psychological distress indicates that unemployed graduates with higher feelings of hopelessness experience greater distress. This is justifiable because hopelessness reflects negative expectations about the future, which is often amplified by the prolonged uncertainty and instability of unemployment. Feelings of being stuck, powerless, and unable to achieve life goals can magnify distress, as individuals may believe that their situation will not improve despite efforts.

Recent research corroborates this finding. For example, Vilhelmsson et al. (2021) reported that hopelessness was strongly linked to heightened psychological distress among unemployed young adults, emphasising that lack of perceived future opportunities worsens mental health outcomes. Similarly, Yıldırım and Arslan (2020) found that hopelessness was a significant predictor of distress during periods of economic and social uncertainty, reinforcing its role as a critical risk factor for unemployed populations. These studies confirm that

hopelessness is a major determinant of psychological distress among vulnerable groups.

social support, and hopelessness on psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant combined effect of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies,

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Combined Effect of Predictors on Psychological Distress

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
Regression	.74	.55	.52	18.46	.000**

Multiple regression results showed that depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness jointly contributed significantly to the variance in psychological distress among unemployed graduates ($R = .74$, $R^2 = .55$, Adjusted $R^2 = .52$, $F(5,120) = 18.46$, $p < .01$). This indicates that the predictors jointly explained 55% of the variance in psychological distress, which is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no combined effect was rejected.

support can amplify hopelessness by creating a sense of isolation and lack of encouragement during prolonged unemployment. Conversely, strong social support may enhance coping abilities and foster higher self-esteem, thereby buffering against the negative impact of depression. These interconnected pathways highlight why the predictors collectively explained a large proportion of the variance in distress. The results suggest that the relationship between psychological risk factors and protective mechanisms is not linear but rather synergistic, amplifying the overall predictive power when considered together.

The finding that depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness jointly contributed significantly to the variance in psychological distress among unemployed graduates is not surprising given the complex interplay between these variables. Depression and hopelessness, for example, share a common cognitive-emotional pathway, where feelings of worthlessness and negative expectations about the future reinforce each other, intensifying distress. On the other hand, self-esteem, coping strategies, and social support serve as protective factors that can mitigate the effects of depression and hopelessness. When these variables are combined, their opposing influences—risk versus protective factors—create a dynamic balance that collectively shapes the extent of distress among unemployed youths. This suggests that distress cannot be explained by a single factor but rather by the interaction of both psychological vulnerabilities and resilience resources.

This outcome aligns with existing research showing that multiple psychosocial variables jointly predict distress among vulnerable youth populations. For instance, Arslan and Yıldırım (2021) found that psychological distress in young adults was best explained through the combined effects of hopelessness, coping skills, and perceived social support, suggesting that no single factor sufficiently accounts for vulnerability. Similarly, Oladipo and Balogun (2020) reported that depression and self-esteem, together with coping resources, significantly predicted distress among unemployed Nigerian graduates, underscoring the cumulative influence of protective and risk factors. Collectively, these findings reinforce the argument that psychological distress emerges from a multidimensional framework where both internal (cognitive-emotional) and external (social-environmental) factors interact to shape the well-being of unemployed youths.

The association between these independent variables may also be explained by the interdependence of their functions in shaping psychological health. Low self-esteem may reduce an individual’s likelihood of using effective coping strategies, which in turn diminishes resilience against depression. Similarly, weak social

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relative contribution of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness to psychological distress among unemployed graduates in Lagos, Nigeria.

Table 4: Relative Contribution of Predictors to Psychological Distress (Beta Weights)

Predictors	β	t	Sig.
Depression	.39	5.12	.000**
Self-esteem	-.26	-3.47	.001**
Coping strategies	-.14	-2.03	.045*
Social support	-.18	-2.64	.010**
Hopelessness	.29	4.08	.000**

*Note: $p < .05$, $p < .01$

The regression coefficients indicated that depression ($\beta = .39, t = 5.12, p < .001$) and hopelessness ($\beta = .29, t = 4.08, p < .001$) were the strongest positive predictors of psychological distress, while self-esteem ($\beta = -.26, t = -3.47, p < .01$), social support ($\beta = -.18, t = -2.64, p < .01$), and coping strategies ($\beta = -.14, t = -2.03, p < .05$) contributed negatively. These findings imply that while depression and hopelessness increase distress, self-esteem, coping skills, and social support significantly reduce it. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, as each variable demonstrated a meaningful relative contribution to the prediction of psychological distress.

The regression coefficients revealed that depression emerged as the strongest positive predictor of psychological distress, followed closely by hopelessness. This order is unsurprising, as depression often heightens negative affectivity and reduces motivation, thereby directly exacerbating distress levels among unemployed youths. Hopelessness, on the other hand, reflects a deep sense of despair and lack of future orientation, which complements the effect of depression by fostering a state of helplessness. Together, these conditions can trap unemployed individuals in a cycle where emotional suffering is intensified, impairing their ability to cope or seek constructive solutions. Their high contributions suggest that the internalisation of negative thoughts and future-related anxieties plays a dominant role in worsening psychological distress compared to external or protective factors.

In contrast, self-esteem, social support, and coping strategies contributed negatively to psychological distress, with self-esteem being the strongest of the protective factors. The relatively higher negative weight of self-esteem implies that when unemployed youths maintain a positive self-image and confidence in their abilities, they are less vulnerable to distress, even in the face of joblessness. Social support followed closely, showing that the encouragement and resources provided by family, friends, and community networks buffer the emotional burden associated with unemployment. Coping strategies had the smallest protective effect, which could be explained by the fact that coping responses vary in effectiveness; some youths may use adaptive strategies like problem-solving, while others may resort to avoidant behaviours, reducing the overall strength of its impact.

These findings are corroborated by recent empirical studies. For example, Li, Wang, and Sun (2021) found that depression was the strongest predictor of psychological distress among unemployed young adults in China, highlighting its pervasive role.

Similarly, Adegoke, Olasupo, and Olatunji (2022) reported that hopelessness significantly amplified distress levels in Nigerian unemployed graduates, while self-esteem and social support served as buffers. In addition, Yıldırım and Solmaz (2020) demonstrated that individuals with strong coping skills and supportive social networks reported significantly lower levels of distress during unemployment. Collectively, these studies affirm the present findings that internal risk factors like depression and hopelessness strongly aggravate distress, whereas protective factors such as self-esteem, coping, and social support play crucial roles in alleviating it.

5. Outcomes Corroboration with the Anchoring Theory

The outcomes of the three hypotheses strongly align with the Stress Process Model (SPM), which explains how stress exposure, personal resources, and social resources interact to influence psychological well-being. The first hypothesis revealed that depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness were significant predictors of psychological distress among unemployed graduates. This supports the SPM's core principle that stressors (in this case, depression and hopelessness) increase vulnerability to distress, while resources (such as self-esteem, coping strategies, and social support) buffer against adverse outcomes. The second hypothesis further confirmed that these predictors jointly accounted for a significant variance in psychological distress, which reflects the SPM's assumption that mental health outcomes are rarely shaped by a single factor but instead emerge from the dynamic interplay between risk factors and protective mechanisms operating within the stress process.

In line with the third hypothesis, the order of relative contributions also resonates with the SPM by showing that primary stressors (depression and hopelessness) exerted the strongest influence on psychological distress, while coping resources (self-esteem, social support, and coping strategies) played a mitigating role. This finding underscores the SPM's claim that stressors often have more immediate and powerful effects on mental health, whereas personal and social resources serve to moderate or buffer their impact. For instance, depression emerged as the most dominant predictor, consistent with the SPM's view that primary psychological stressors directly elevate distress levels. Similarly, hopelessness intensified vulnerability by eroding future orientation, while resources like self-esteem and social support reduced, but could not fully eliminate, distress. Thus, the pattern of results validates the Stress Process Model by demonstrating

how stressors and resources operate simultaneously, with the balance between them determining the degree of psychological distress experienced by unemployed graduates.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined the predictive roles of depression, self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, and hopelessness in explaining psychological distress among unemployed graduates. The findings revealed that these variables jointly accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in psychological distress, highlighting their significant collective influence. Specifically, depression and hopelessness emerged as the strongest positive predictors, while self-esteem, coping strategies, and social support were significant protective factors. These outcomes underscore the multifactorial nature of psychological distress, suggesting that both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors interact to shape the psychological well-being of unemployed youths. The study therefore concludes that addressing mental health among unemployed graduates requires a holistic approach that targets risk factors while strengthening protective mechanisms.

7. Limitations

Despite its useful insights, the study is not without limitations. Firstly, the use of a cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables, as the data only captured associations at a single point in time. Secondly, reliance on self-report instruments may have introduced response bias, as participants could have underreported or exaggerated their psychological experiences due to social desirability. Additionally, the sample was restricted to unemployed graduates within a particular geographical region, which limits the generalisability of the findings to broader populations of unemployed youths in different cultural or socio-economic contexts. Future studies would benefit from employing longitudinal designs, incorporating multiple data sources, and expanding to diverse populations.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are put forward. Mental health interventions targeting unemployed graduates should integrate cognitive-behavioural and positive psychology approaches to address depression and hopelessness while promoting self-esteem and resilience. Counselling services and career guidance programmes should be strengthened

in higher institutions and community settings to equip graduates with effective coping strategies during periods of job search and unemployment. Furthermore, policymakers should prioritise the development of social support systems, such as peer mentoring groups, unemployment assistance schemes, and community-based initiatives, to reduce the isolation and distress experienced by unemployed youths. Finally, future research should consider exploring the moderating and mediating roles of demographic and contextual factors to provide a more nuanced understanding of psychological distress in this vulnerable population.

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