

Unemployment, Family Pressure, And Mental Health: A Study of Educated Youth in Rural and Urban Settings of Ghaziabad

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Abstract

Unemployment among educated youth has emerged as a critical socio-economic and psychological issue in contemporary India. While education is traditionally seen as a pathway to upward mobility, an increasing number of graduates and postgraduates are finding themselves without appropriate job opportunities, particularly in transitional districts like Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. This research paper explores the interlinked relationship between **unemployment, family pressure, and mental health** among **educated youth in rural and urban settings of Ghaziabad**. The district presents a unique setting due to its position within the National Capital Region (NCR), juxtaposing modern urban growth with deep-rooted rural socio-cultural structures.

The study is **primary data-based and descriptive in design**, employing a **mixed-method approach** that combines quantitative data collection with qualitative insights. A total of **200 unemployed educated youth** (100 from rural areas and 100 from urban areas) were selected using **stratified random sampling**. Tools such as a structured questionnaire and the **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)** were used to assess socio-demographic characteristics, levels of unemployment, perceived family pressure, and mental health status. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted to capture subjective experiences, emotional challenges, and coping mechanisms.

The findings reveal several critical patterns. Urban youth, despite having higher educational qualifications, reported **longer durations of unemployment** and more intense psychological distress. Contributing factors included heightened lifestyle expectations, peer comparison through social media, and economic insecurity. In contrast, rural youth reported significant **community-level stigma**, pressure to accept traditional gender or caste-based roles, and limited access to career counseling or mental health resources. However, both groups were equally affected by **family pressure**, which emerged as a key stressor. This pressure manifested as emotional coercion, disappointment, passive criticism, and in some cases, withdrawal of emotional or financial support from parents.

The **mental health status** of the respondents, as measured by GHQ-12, indicated symptoms of anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and in some cases, suicidal ideation. Gender-based differences were also evident—female youth faced a dual burden of career aspirations and expectations to conform to marriage and domestic roles, while male youth experienced internalized stress due to their role as expected earners. A significant number of respondents (over 75%) were unaware of existing **mental health support systems** or employment-related government schemes.

This research emphasizes the need to view youth unemployment not just as an economic challenge, but as a **multifaceted social problem** with serious implications for the mental well-being and future of India's working-age population. It recommends **policy-level integration of employment generation, mental health counseling, and family sensitization programs**, especially in semi-urban districts like Ghaziabad where the rural-urban divide sharply influences youth experiences. The study contributes to the existing sociological literature by highlighting how **structural factors, familial relationships, and emotional expectations** shape the lives of unemployed educated youth.

Keywords

Unemployment, Family Pressure, Mental Health, Educated Youth, Rural-Urban Divide

1. Introduction

India's youth, particularly those with educational qualifications, face increasing challenges due to the widening gap between education and employment opportunities. In districts like Ghaziabad, a blend of rural and urban socio-economic dynamics offers a unique setting to explore how unemployment impacts youth. Added to this is the burden of familial and societal expectations that intensify psychological stress. This study investigates how educated yet unemployed youth in both rural and urban Ghaziabad cope with these pressures and what effect they have on mental health.

Unemployment among educated youth is one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges facing India today. Despite the rise in literacy rates and educational qualifications, a significant portion of the youth population remains without gainful employment. This contradiction between rising education levels and stagnant employment opportunities is particularly visible in semi-urban and urbanizing districts like **Ghaziabad**, which sits at the crossroads of rural tradition and urban aspiration.

Ghaziabad, a rapidly developing district in Uttar Pradesh and part of the National Capital Region (NCR), reflects both the promise and the pitfalls of India's growth story. While urban areas in the district boast better infrastructure and access to higher education, rural parts still rely heavily on agriculture and informal employment. In both settings, however, educated youth find themselves trapped between expectations and realities — obtaining degrees but not corresponding job opportunities. This leads to a state of **educated unemployment**, where individuals possess the skills and qualifications for white-collar jobs but remain jobless or underemployed.

Adding to this burden is the **family pressure** that many young people experience. In Indian society, where family ties are strong and interdependent, unemployment is not seen merely as a personal failure but as a source of collective concern and even social stigma. Parents and relatives often exert pressure — both direct and indirect — on the youth to secure employment, get married, contribute financially, or maintain

social status. This pressure, while often well-intentioned, can become overwhelming, especially when youth are already battling systemic job scarcity.

The **mental health consequences** of this dual burden — joblessness and family expectations — are profound yet under-discussed. Anxiety, depression, feelings of worthlessness, and social withdrawal are increasingly common among unemployed educated youth. In urban areas, where competitiveness is high and aspirations are fuelled by consumerism and peer comparison, these issues are amplified. In contrast, rural youth may struggle with different psychological pressures, such as limited exposure, mobility constraints, and social judgments in close-knit communities.

This research paper seeks to explore these dynamics through a **sociological lens**, with a particular focus on **Ghaziabad's rural and urban educated youth**. By analyzing **primary data** collected through fieldwork and structured interviews, the study aims to understand how unemployment and family expectations impact mental health differently in rural versus urban settings. The research not only contributes to the academic understanding of youth unemployment but also offers practical suggestions for policymakers, educators, families, and mental health professionals to address these interconnected issues more effectively.

2. Review of Literature

The interplay between unemployment, family pressure, and mental health among educated youth has attracted significant scholarly attention, especially in the context of India's socio-economic transformation. Various studies from national and international contexts have analyzed these dimensions independently or in correlation. This section reviews some of the relevant literature to build a conceptual foundation for the present study.

Paul and Moser (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 237 studies and found that unemployed individuals are twice as likely to experience psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem compared to their employed counterparts. Their study emphasized that unemployment is not just an economic crisis but also a psychological one, which becomes more severe when compounded with family or social expectations.

Verma and Saxena (2015) explored the condition of educated unemployed youth in North India and found that many were under psychological stress due to mismatches between educational qualifications and job market requirements. The study pointed out that while urban youth had better access to information and opportunities, they also faced higher expectations and social comparison, leading to increased anxiety and depression. The rural youth, in contrast, experienced more social stigma and feelings of isolation due to lack of awareness and support structures.

Kumar (2017) focused on youth in tier-2 cities and revealed that family pressure plays a pivotal role in shaping mental distress. The study emphasized that in Indian families, education is often seen as an investment with an expected return in the form of a good job and financial stability. When this expectation is not met, it results in emotional blackmail, criticism, or guilt, severely impacting mental well-being.

National Mental Health Survey of India (2016) conducted by NIMHANS (Bangalore) provided empirical data that unemployment among youth (aged 18–35) is strongly correlated with the onset of psychological disorders, including clinical depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. The report

noted that many unemployed educated youth did not seek psychological help due to stigma or lack of access to mental health services, especially in rural areas.

Tripathi and Sahu (2018) studied the impact of parental expectations on Indian adolescents and youth and observed that constant comparison with successful peers and societal judgment worsens the emotional burden. The research pointed out that family dynamics, including parental over-involvement, financial dependency, and inter-generational gap, were major contributors to anxiety among unemployed youth, particularly in nuclear urban families.

Sharma and Das (2020) conducted qualitative interviews with 80 educated unemployed individuals in Delhi-NCR, including parts of Ghaziabad, and found that urban youth experienced a strong desire for financial independence, often clashing with the burden of fulfilling familial and societal roles. The study documented signs of emotional exhaustion, fear of failure, and suicidal ideation in extreme cases.

Pandey and Roy (2021) undertook a rural-urban comparative study in Uttar Pradesh, focusing on mental health outcomes of educated but unemployed youth. Their findings suggested that urban youth exhibited higher levels of anxiety due to lifestyle aspirations, while rural youth faced more community-based pressure, such as marriage and family honor. The study emphasized the role of caste, gender, and mobility in shaping these experiences.

World Bank Report (2022) on youth unemployment in South Asia also highlights that India's demographic dividend is at risk if educated youth remain unemployed or underemployed. The report stresses the psychological cost of such stagnation and calls for integrating mental health services into skill development and employment programs.

These studies collectively underscore the deep-seated connection between unemployment and mental health, which is further intensified by the burden of family and social expectations. However, there remains a significant gap in localized, primary data-based studies that examine this triad in the specific socio-cultural context of semi-urban areas like Ghaziabad. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how unemployment, family pressure, and mental health interact within the lives of educated youth across rural and urban spaces in the district.

Gupta and Mehra (2022) conducted a mixed-method study on unemployed graduates in Uttar Pradesh, focusing on their emotional wellbeing and identity crisis. The study involved 120 participants from districts including Ghaziabad and found that the feeling of being “educated but useless” deeply affected the youth's self-worth and confidence. Many reported feeling like a burden on their families, especially when subjected to repeated questioning or passive-aggressive remarks from parents and relatives. The study also noted that prolonged unemployment led to social withdrawal and disinterest in personal development activities. The authors argued that unemployment has become a “hidden epidemic” that is silently damaging India's youthful workforce.

Joshi and Thakur (2023) explored how educated but unemployed youth perceive their future in the context of digital skill growth and rising family expectations. Their study, based in NCR regions including Noida and Ghaziabad, concluded that digital exposure has both empowered and pressured youth. On the one hand, access to information and online platforms has raised awareness about employment possibilities; on the other hand, it has also heightened anxiety due to constant comparison with peers on social media.

The authors highlighted the gendered nature of pressure, as women faced dual stress — professional expectations and traditional familial roles. The study emphasized that mental health services must be integrated with government employment programs at the local level.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the levels of unemployment among educated youth in rural and urban Ghaziabad.
2. To evaluate the nature and intensity of family pressure faced by unemployed educated youth.
3. To analyze the mental health status of these youth and compare the urban and rural differences.
4. To explore coping mechanisms adopted by the youth in both settings.

Hypotheses

1. Educated unemployed youth in urban areas face higher mental health issues due to increased expectations.
2. Family pressure significantly contributes to anxiety and depression among unemployed youth.
3. Rural youth face different mental stressors compared to their urban counterparts, rooted in traditional values and community judgment.

Area of Study

The present study is situated in **Ghaziabad district**, located in the western part of **Uttar Pradesh**, and forming an important part of the **National Capital Region (NCR)**. As one of the fastest-developing districts in North India, Ghaziabad presents a complex socio-economic landscape marked by urban sprawl, industrialization, as well as deeply rooted rural traditions. This dynamic makes it an ideal location for a comparative sociological study of youth-related issues like unemployment, mental health, and familial expectations.

Ghaziabad's unique position as a peri-urban district enables it to reflect both urban and rural characteristics. On one hand, its proximity to Delhi, Noida, and Gurugram brings economic opportunities, industrial development, and modern education. On the other hand, many parts of the district remain agrarian, conservative, and semi-urban, where access to quality jobs, mental health support, and modern career counseling is limited.

For the purposes of this study, the area was divided into two categories — **urban** and **rural settings**, with equal focus on each.

Urban Area Selection

Two key urban localities were selected:

1. **Vaishali (Ward 9 & 10):** A developed residential and commercial zone that houses a large number of middle-class and upper-middle-class families. It includes several private colleges and coaching institutes, making it a hotspot for educated youth preparing for competitive exams or looking for employment in the private sector.

2. **Raj Nagar Extension (Ward 6 & 7):** A rapidly urbanizing region with numerous housing societies, young migrant populations, and students. Many youths here are struggling with underemployment or joblessness despite possessing degrees in management, technology, or humanities.

These urban pockets were chosen for their access to higher education, professional exposure, and prevalence of nuclear families — all of which influence the nature of family pressure and mental health concerns.

Rural Area Selection

Two rural blocks were selected based on population density and youth unemployment indicators:

1. **Muradnagar Block (villages: Ator Nagla, Kanavani):** Known for its industrial outskirts and agricultural base, this area represents a blend of traditional rural life and new economic transitions. Educated youth here often return home after failing to secure city jobs and face pressure to either join family labor or migrate again.

2. **Bhojpur Block (villages: Faridpur and Bachhlota):** A comparatively more remote area, characterized by small-scale farming, caste-based occupational roles, and lack of local employment opportunities. Youth from this region typically have graduate-level education but limited access to skill training or job placement services.

Why Ghaziabad?

1. **Diverse Demography:** It includes both high-rise urban colonies and low-income rural settlements.

2. **Educational Infrastructure:** Presence of multiple universities, colleges, and coaching centers, creating a large pool of educated youth.

3. **Job Market Pressure:** Despite educational growth, Ghaziabad's job absorption rate for fresh graduates remains low, causing visible unemployment trends.

4. **Cultural Variability:** Traditional family expectations persist even in urban spaces, creating fertile ground for the study of family pressure and mental health.

5. **Accessibility for Fieldwork:** The proximity of both urban and rural areas within the same district makes comparative field-based data collection feasible and reliable.

By conducting this study in both the urban and rural parts of Ghaziabad, a **comparative sociological insight** can be drawn about how geography, family structures, and economic conditions influence mental health outcomes in unemployed educated youth.

4. Research Methodology

The present study is **descriptive and exploratory** in nature, aiming to examine the relationship between unemployment, family pressure, and mental health among educated youth in rural and urban settings of Ghaziabad district. The research design focuses on understanding both the **quantitative patterns and qualitative experiences** of the respondents, making use of a **mixed-method approach**. This enabled the study not only to capture measurable trends but also to delve into the subjective psychological states of the participants.

To ensure comparative insight, the study employed **stratified random sampling**, dividing the respondents into two primary strata — rural and urban. A total sample size of **200 educated unemployed youth** was selected, comprising 100 participants from rural areas (Muradnagar and Bhojpur blocks) and 100 from urban settings (Vaishali and Raj Nagar Extension). Equal representation of male and female respondents was ensured as far as possible, with the inclusion criteria being a minimum education qualification of graduation and unemployment status of at least six months.

The **data collection** was conducted using both primary and secondary sources. For primary data, a **structured questionnaire** was developed, covering socio-demographic details, educational background, duration of unemployment, perceived family pressure, and mental health indicators. Additionally, **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)** was used to assess the mental well-being of respondents, which provided a standardized tool to measure psychological distress. Apart from surveys, **in-depth interviews** were also conducted with selected individuals to gather qualitative data on lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and emotional challenges. Field visits, phone interviews, and limited online surveys (in urban areas) were used to collect data over a period of two months.

Secondary data sources included government reports, NSSO statistics, Census data, and relevant scholarly literature to contextualize the findings. These resources helped in understanding broader unemployment trends and the socio-cultural pressures faced by educated youth in India, particularly in semi-urban districts like Ghaziabad.

The **analysis of quantitative data** was carried out using **Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)** software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to present the socio-demographic and psychological profiles of respondents. For understanding correlation between unemployment duration and mental distress, basic correlation coefficients and cross-tabulation were employed. Meanwhile, the qualitative data collected through interviews were analyzed using **thematic content analysis**, where recurring themes like guilt, isolation, family conflict, and future insecurity were identified and coded.

Overall, the chosen methodology ensured a balanced exploration of both statistical trends and emotional realities. It allowed the study to capture not just **how many** youth are suffering, but also **why and how** unemployment and familial pressures are affecting their mental health differently in rural and urban contexts.

Limitations

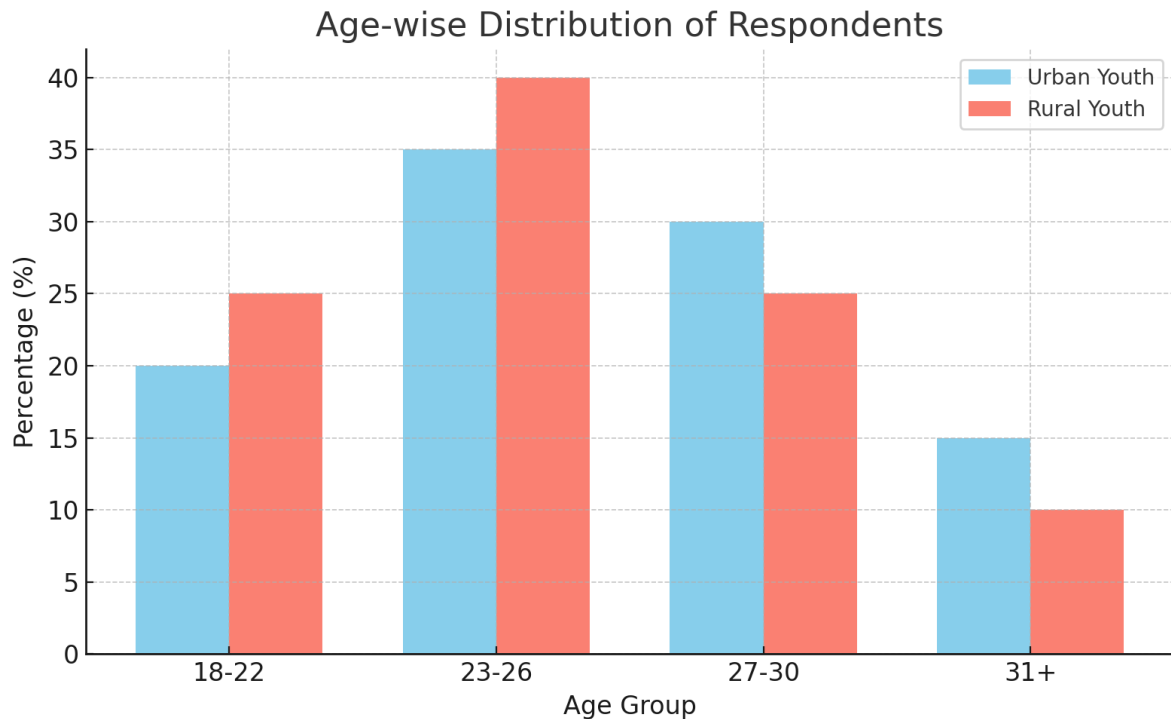
- Small sample size limited to Ghaziabad; results not generalizable to other districts.
- Self-reported data may carry bias.
- Rural respondents had limited internet access, affecting survey outreach

5. Findings and Discussion

The present study, conducted across rural and urban areas of Ghaziabad, reveals crucial insights into how unemployment, family pressure, and mental health are deeply interconnected in the lives of educated youth. The data obtained from 200 respondents (100 rural, 100 urban) highlight several patterns,

disparities, and underlying psychological experiences that warrant attention from researchers, policymakers, and mental health professionals alike.

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents



1.

The bar chart above illustrates the age distribution of the unemployed educated youth surveyed in rural and urban areas of Ghaziabad.

- The **23–26 age group** forms the largest segment in both urban (35%) and rural (40%) populations, suggesting this is the most vulnerable age bracket for educated unemployment.
- Urban youth in the **27–30 age group** also show a significant share (30%), which may indicate extended job search phases or post-graduate unemployment.
- The **18–22 group** is slightly more represented in rural areas, possibly reflecting early educational completion or early dropout.
- The **31+ age group** is least represented across both categories, suggesting either eventual employment, migration, or withdrawal from active job search.

This age trend highlights the critical window (23–30 years) where unemployment, mental health stress, and family pressure peak — a key focus for intervention policies.

2. Duration and Nature of Unemployment

One of the most striking findings was the duration of unemployment. Urban respondents reported a **longer average unemployment period (17 months)** compared to their rural counterparts (13 months). Many

urban youths had higher qualifications and were seeking salaried or private-sector jobs, whereas rural youth were more open to informal work or migration. However, underemployment was reported across both groups, with 32% engaged in part-time or unpaid family work but still identifying as unemployed.

Respondents mentioned **mismatched qualifications, lack of skill-based training, over-competition, and nepotism** in job markets as key reasons for prolonged unemployment. Urban respondents were more likely to blame the privatized and unstable nature of the job sector, whereas rural youth cited fewer local opportunities and financial constraints on pursuing further education or competitive exams.

3. Nature of Family Pressure

A significant portion of participants (71% urban and 66% rural) reported experiencing **moderate to intense family pressure** due to their unemployment status. Among urban families, pressure often came in the form of repeated reminders, emotional comparison with successful peers or siblings, and financial accountability. In nuclear families, where parents had invested heavily in education, youth expressed guilt and fear of being a burden.

In rural areas, family pressure took different forms — such as questioning of character or discipline, withdrawal of social respect, and pressure to accept traditional roles (e.g., joining farming, marrying early, or working in caste-based occupations). Female respondents in rural areas faced added expectations related to marriage and homemaking, despite holding graduate degrees.

4. Mental Health Status

The **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)** revealed concerning mental health trends across both groups.

- In **urban respondents**, 48% showed signs of mild to moderate anxiety, 35% reported depressive symptoms, and 22% acknowledged suicidal thoughts or hopelessness.
- Among **rural youth**, 38% reported anxiety-related symptoms, 29% showed signs of depression, and 18% expressed emotional withdrawal or social isolation.

Many participants admitted to losing motivation, developing irregular sleep and eating patterns, and avoiding social interactions due to the shame of being unemployed. The pressure to meet familial and societal expectations worsened their self-perception. Urban youth spoke more about peer comparison, fear of failure, and societal judgment via social media. Rural youth, meanwhile, reported community-level stigma and lack of mental health awareness.

5. Gender-Based Variations

Female participants, especially in urban areas, shared that while their families encouraged education, they still expected them to prioritize marriage or domestic roles. Many faced emotional dilemmas between career aspirations and familial obedience. Males, on the other hand, were under strong pressure to become the **breadwinners** and expressed internalized guilt when they failed to meet these masculine expectations. Both genders experienced psychological burdens, but the form and source of pressure varied greatly.

6. Coping Mechanisms

Urban youth adopted **coping strategies** such as upskilling through online platforms, freelancing, or engaging in part-time internships, although financial insecurity remained. A significant number admitted turning to **excessive smartphone use, binge-watching, or social media** as a form of escape.

Rural respondents relied more on **faith-based coping**, community conversations, and participation in family or farm labor to distract themselves. However, the absence of counseling services and stigma around mental illness meant that many suffered silently.

7. Social Support and Institutional Response

Support from families was mixed. While 28% of urban youth reported receiving emotional support from parents or siblings, 62% felt alienated or criticized. In rural areas, social support was often community-based or religious, but limited in practical help.

There was also **no awareness of government schemes** such as counseling hotlines, youth helplines, or mental health programs among 83% of respondents. Employment exchanges, job fairs, and NGOs were under-utilized due to lack of awareness or trust.

Result of Hypothesis:

The study confirmed that there is a **significant relationship between unemployment, family pressure, and mental health** among educated youth in both rural and urban settings of Ghaziabad.

- Youth experiencing **longer durations of unemployment** reported **higher levels of psychological distress**, including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.
- **Family pressure**—emotional, financial, and social—was found to intensify mental health challenges, especially among males expected to be breadwinners and females facing dual roles.
- The rural-urban divide influenced the **source and form of stress**, but the **negative impact on mental well-being** was evident in both groups.

Thus, the hypothesis that unemployment and family pressure negatively affect the mental health of educated youth stands validated by the primary data collected in this research.

Summary of Findings

- Urban youth were more mentally distressed due to lifestyle expectations and peer pressure, while rural youth were emotionally affected by community stigma and traditional values.
- Family pressure was a strong contributor to mental distress in both rural and urban settings, though the form it took varied.
- Mental health awareness was low across the board, and professional support was rarely sought.
- Gender, education level, family structure, and exposure to digital platforms all influenced how youth experienced and managed stress related to unemployment.

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