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Lost Dreams, Broken Paths: The Silent Crisis of Youth Unemployment in Rural Bangladesh

Md. Reazul Islam [1] Saiful Islam[2] Ahsanul Haque Rifat[3]

Corresponding Author Email: saifuldusoc8@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh has become a pivotal issue, as well as emerging as a critical challenge to the overall economic and social growth of the country. Despite some progress in reducing poverty, the unemployment problem remains and is intensified by structural and systematic factors. This study investigates the silent crisis of youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh through a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. It explores the socio-economic and psychological impacts of joblessness among unemployed male youth of the Mymensingh division in Bangladesh, particularly in Trishal and Fulbaria upazila. In addition, for the qualitative data, 10 case studies, and for quantitative data, 384 surveys were carried out to reveal the deeper scenarios of unemployment. However, the findings of the study revealed that youth unemployment is a multifaceted issue, which is driven by various factors such as limited job opportunities (39.1%), skill mismatches (26%), and systemic barriers like corruption (19.5%) and discrimination (17.4%). These difficulties vitally affect youth aged 25–29 (47.9%) and those with higher educational qualifications, highlighting critical gaps between aspirations and market demands. Besides, unemployment not only leads to financial instability and restricted access to basic necessities, with 18.2% reporting significant declines, but also executes severe psychological impacts, which include depression (26% frequently, 39% occasionally), anxiety (23.4% frequently, 33.9% occasionally), and reduced self-worth. Social isolation (22.1%), stigma (24.2%), and dependence on family (24.5%) further worsen the difficulty of unemployed youth. This study also suggests valuable interventions, like, skill development programs, job creation initiatives, and mental health support programs. This study of youth unemployment in rural contexts provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders.

Keywords: Youth Unemployment, Rural Bangladesh, Socio-economic Impact, Psychological Well-being, Employment Barriers.

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[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh-2224, Bangladesh.

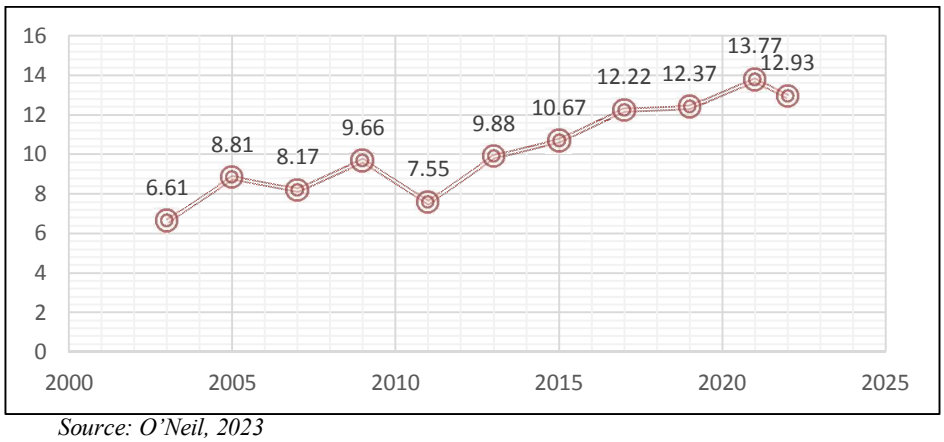
[2] Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh-2224, Bangladesh.

[3] Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh- 2224, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is a critical socioeconomic issue globally and serves as a key indicator of a country's economic health and development. In Bangladesh, it poses a significant threat to national growth. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that over 73 million youth worldwide are unemployed, with youth impacted disproportionately (Dewan et al. 2022). In 2021, the global youth unemployment rate was 14.9%, more than three times the adult rate of 4.4% (World Bank 2021). Macroeconomic factors such as GDP growth rate, inflation rate, and foreign direct investment significantly affect Bangladesh's unemployment rate in both the short and long term (Sultana, 2020). An increase in GDP growth reduces unemployment in the short term (Mukit & Abdel-Razzaq 2021). Conversely, inflation positively impacts unemployment, while GDP growth and exchange rates negatively influence it (Chowdhury & Hossain 2014; Akter 2018).

FIGURE 01: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN BANGLADESH



Source: O'Neil, 2023

Youth unemployment rates in Bangladesh fluctuated from 2003 to 2022, starting at 6.61% and rising to 12.93% by 2022. This increase highlights significant challenges in the job market. Notably, the rate peaked at 13.77% in 2021, with substantial rises observed in 2009, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2021, indicating possible economic or societal changes. According to the Dhaka Tribune (2022), the youth unemployment rate reached 10.6%, more than double the national average of 4.2%. Besides, 7.2% of the youth labor force in Mymensingh district (ages 15-29) are unemployed, with rural males disproportionately affected (9.8% unemployment rate) (The Business Standard, 2024).

Prolonged unemployment during youth can lead to severe consequences. Individually, it is linked to financial strain, poverty, skill deterioration, and physical and mental health issues, resulting in marginalization and social exclusion (Strandh et al. 2014). Societally, high youth unemployment leads to lost economic output, increased welfare costs, and risks to social and political stability (O'higgins 2001). Unemployment trends and risk factors vary by region and nation (Dhar, 2021). In Bangladesh, key risk factors include skill and education mismatches, limited job search assistance, labor market discrimination, and inadequate decent job opportunities in rural areas (Mamun et al. 2020; Osmani 2021).

Mymensingh, an agricultural district, has over 70% of its labor force engaged in farming (BBS 2022). It also functions as a local hub for trade, healthcare, and education, leading to different unemployment trends compared to larger cities like Dhaka. Rural areas face a variety of different challenges compared to urban settings, including limited access to health care, education, employment opportunities, transportation, and infrastructure. Additionally, rural areas may experience higher poverty and unemployment compared to urban areas (Taylor 2024). According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 80.7% of unemployed youth nationally presented in rural areas, compared to 75.1% in urban settings. In addition, 69.1% of unemployed youth live in rural areas of Mymensingh district, where opportunities are limited and education often fails to meet job and labor demand (The Business Standard 2024). Similarly, unemployed youth in rural Bangladesh face significant vulnerability due to poverty, limited access to social safety nets, and fewer job opportunities (Begum et al. 2021). This study examines the socioeconomic consequences of youth unemployment through primary survey data and interviews. While many studies focus on urban youth unemployment, there is a notable gap in research on this issue in rural areas. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring the effects of unemployment on the youth in Trishal and Fulbaria upazila, Mymensingh district. The findings of the study offer worthy insights into the causes, effects, and experiences of unemployed youth in rural Bangladesh. These insights can guide policymakers and workforce development programs in addressing the youth unemployment crisis. Additionally, this study seeks to enhance understanding of the connections between unemployment, poverty, inequality, social exclusion, and the challenges faced by the unemployed population in rural Bangladesh.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General Objective

To investigate the fundamental causes as well as consequences of youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh, focusing on its socio-economic and psychological impacts on young individuals.

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the socio-demographic features of the respondents.
2. To identify the primary causal factors of youth unemployment.
3. To assess the socio-economic and psychological impacts of unemployment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

1. What are the socio-demographic features of unemployed youth in rural Bangladesh?
2. What are the primary causal factors of youth unemployment in rural areas?
3. What specific psychological issues are most prevalent?
4. How do unemployed youth cope with mental health challenges?

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study is crucial in tackling the urgent issue of youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh, especially in Trishal and Fulbaria Upazila. By examining the socioeconomic and psychological effects on unemployed male youth, the findings aim to guide

policymakers, educators, and community leaders in addressing the key challenges faced by this group. Recognizing the complex impacts of unemployment is vital for creating targeted interventions that enhance job opportunities and support young people. The research underscores the need for skills development, job creation, and mental health resources to build a more resilient youth population. The issue of unemployment is crucial for contemporary Bangladesh, especially as the country has recently encountered some significant crises, such as the quota reform movement, which is deeply related to the focus of the study. This topic was chosen due to its relevance to national development, societal progress, and overall advancement. While existing research, such as Khatun (2019) and Mamun et al. (2020), mainly focuses on urban settings or reveals national data, they often overlook the localized realities of rural youth. For instance, studies like Musleh et al. (2015) highlight policy contexts but fail to capture ground-level challenges and difficulties such as agricultural dependency, limited access to vocational training, and cultural norms, career progression mainly in rural areas. Similarly, Osmani (2021) discusses labor market discrimination and inequality but does not explore how systemic corruption in rural hiring practices worsens the process of unemployment. In addition, previous research also depends heavily on secondary quantitative data, as seen in Sultana (2020), which covers the lived experiences of rural youth. For example, national surveys often explore urban and rural unemployment rates but ignore critical factors like geographic isolation, poor infrastructure, and the mismatch between rural education systems and local job markets. This study aims to fill these gaps with more exploration by employing a mixed-methods approach to directly engage with unemployed male youth in Trishal and Fulbaria, as well as capturing both statistical trends and personal narratives, perceptions, and thinking. Very little research has been done on the unemployment problem in Bangladesh, but no study has been conducted in this selected area (Mymensingh district, especially in Trishal and Fulbaria upazilas). Moreover, the insights contribute to the existing literature on youth unemployment, offering a localized perspective often overlooked in national studies. This approach can inform similar rural contexts in Bangladesh and elsewhere, shaping youth-focused social welfare and economic policies. In summary, the study emphasizes the necessity for robust support systems for unemployed youth and encourages collaboration among stakeholders to sustainably address these challenges, ultimately improving the quality of life for young people in rural communities and fostering economic growth in Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Youth Unemployment in Bangladesh

Youth unemployment in Bangladesh has emerged as a demanding issue in the contemporary period, particularly in rural areas where economic opportunities are limited in many sectors. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh was 15.7% in 2023, significantly higher than the national average of approximately 3.5% (Mazumdaru 2024; Zaman 2024a). Unemployment occurs in various forms, significantly affecting both society and individuals. It is defined as the proportion of the labor force that is jobless yet actively seeking work (Englama 2001). Accurate measurement and definition of unemployment are crucial for formulating economic policy, with standard metrics such as employment rates allowing for comparisons across different

contexts (Brandolini 2018). However, evolving labor markets and policy frameworks complicate these definitions, blurring the lines between different employment statuses and highlighting the variability in individual experiences (Sengupta 2009). Measures of unemployment have been proposed that account for distributional issues (Shorrocks 2009), and the permeability of the unemployed and marginally attached groups indicates the need for broader assessments (Paul 1991). In Bangladesh, the situation is worsened by a lack of decent-paying jobs and a mismatch between educational outcomes, social implications to market demands, and labor market requirements. Additionally, many graduates find themselves ill-equipped for available positions due to the poor quality of institutional education, economic constraints, and inadequate skill development programs (Khatun 2019; Kabir & Ahsan 2023; Liller 2024; Alam 2024).

Causes and Forms of Youth Unemployment

Asatryan (2017) noted that unemployment is diverse in origin and unevenly distributed among social classes influenced by region, industry, gender, and education. Hall and Kudlyak (2022) categorized unemployment into temporary-layoff and jobless unemployment types, noting that while layoffs have receded post-pandemic, jobless unemployment remains elevated. Hall (1978) identified various unemployment categories, including those transitioning between jobs and those considering work as a secondary option to other commitments. Despite growth in job opportunities, particularly in NGOs, persistent issues such as high turnover and skills mismatches continue to hinder unemployment resolution (Murata & Nishimura 2016). Rural unemployment (1.81%) is higher than the urban rate (0.70%), partly as a result of inadequate access to quality education and skills programs. Training centers in rural areas are scarce, and digital platforms for distance learning are rarely used (Dewan & Hossain 2024). Musleh, Hassan, and Reza (2015) found substantial mismatches between the skills youth possess and those demanded by employers, complicating their ability to secure employment. The youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh decreased by 0.8 percentage points in 2022 compared to the previous year (O'Neil 2023). Khatun et al. (2020) highlighted that a high unemployment rate among graduates poses significant obstacles to national development, particularly affecting young women and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Miah, 2021). Iduseri et al. (2022) emphasized that youth unemployment is a critical global issue with profound economic and social implications, primarily driven by inequality and a lack of education and skills. Riniati et al. (2020) identified both positive and negative impacts of economic globalization on youth unemployment, while Başol et al. (2023) noted that digitalization has been instrumental in reducing youth unemployment in European nations. Walsh (2010) attributed persistent youth unemployment across multiple countries to factors such as lack of experience and skill mismatches. Sharma (2015) projected the global youth unemployment rate to affect approximately 73.4 million young people, with current estimates at 12.6% and a possible increase to 12.8% by 2018. Research indicates that young people who experience prolonged unemployment often earn lower wages throughout their lives due to lost opportunities for skill development and work experience (Mahmud 2024). With around 21.46 lakh (2.1 million) unemployed individuals aged between 15 to 29, the country faces substantial economic burdens (Zaman 2024a).

Socio-economic and Psychological Impacts of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment carries substantial socioeconomic repercussions, leading to issues like poverty, crime, and health problems (Samuel 2023). Kanjere and Choenyane (2021) found that unemployment stifles economic growth and exacerbates inequalities. In South Africa, youth unemployment correlates with increased rates of substance abuse and crime. Paul (2022) and Serifat (2020) outlined the detrimental effects of unemployment in Nigeria, linking it to youth involvement in anti-social activities and political destabilization. The psychological impacts of youth unemployment are significant. Amissah and Nyarko (2017) found that unemployed youth exhibit poorer mental health compared to their employed peers, facing elevated levels of depression and lower self-esteem. Research indicates that prolonged unemployment can lead to mental health disorders later in life (Lee et al. 2019) and long-term "scarring effects" on psychological well-being (Petros et al. 2015). In Bangladesh, high rates of joblessness contribute to feelings of frustration and hopelessness among the young youth population, which can lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Krahn & Chow 2016; Rashid & Islam 2020). The phenomenon of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is particularly alarming; approximately 22% of young people fall into this category, with women disproportionately affected at 27.1% compared to men at 16.2% (International Labour Organization 2024). The World Bank estimates that around 2.1 million new entrants join the workforce annually, while job creation lags behind by approximately 800,000 jobs each year (Kamruzzaman 2022). Moreover, social stigma and negative attitudes toward certain occupations such as vocational education or informal labor, also obstruct the youth from seeking the existing opportunities, for example, technical work or blue-collar jobs are often seen as inferior to white-collar roles, which leads to a mismatch between of the youth inspirations and the reality of the labor market (Williams et al. 2013; Khatun & Saadat 2018)

Skill Mismatch and Educational Challenges

A study by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in 2021 found that 46% of employers reported a lack of skills, specifying that it is due to the outdated curriculum and insufficient practice in tertiary education. Graduates tend to lack digital, technical skills, and soft skills (such as communication, and critical thinking) that modern industry needs (Chowdhury 2022; Khatun 2022). Despite the demand for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) around the world, 60% of Bangladeshi students pursue arts and social sciences, while only 12% are enrolled in STEM fields. This incompatibility and mismatch limit opportunities to join science and technology-related sectors (The Daily Star 2024). A study by Rifat & Sony (2025) reveals that the majority of students (64%) at the university level feel that their degree programs do not provide the appropriate and sufficient career skills for the future job market demands.

Policy Recommendations and Interventions

Iduseri et al. (2022) recommend implementing government-driven skill acquisition programs for youths and providing soft loans to promote entrepreneurship. De Jongh (2019) emphasized the need for improved educational systems and job opportunities. Additionally, NGOs like BRAC play a crucial role in combating unemployment in rural areas (Hassan &

Forhad 2013). Gebisa & Etana (2019) urged coordinated efforts among various stakeholders to tackle graduate youth unemployment.

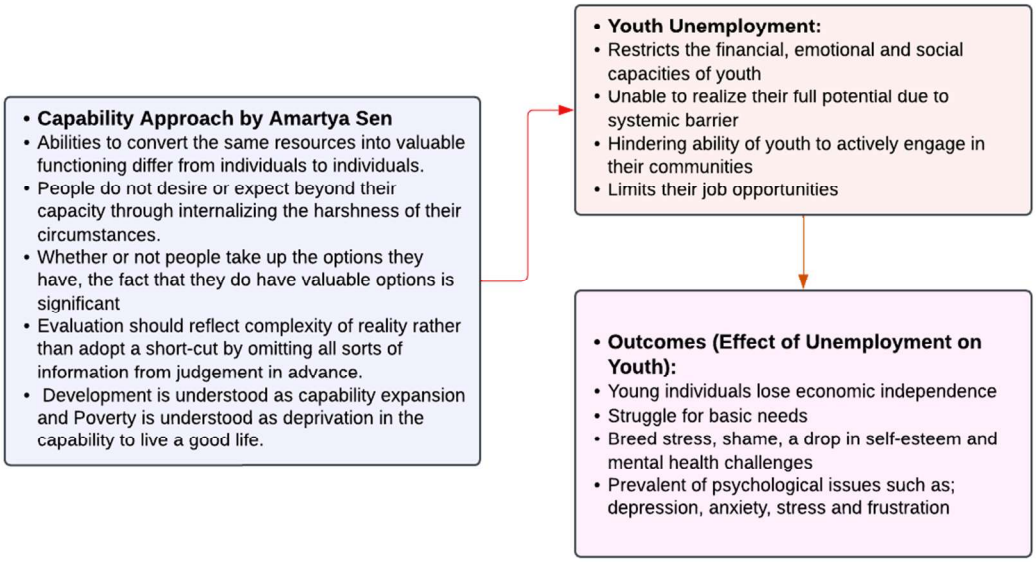
Despite these wide-ranging studies, examining youth unemployment from macro perspectives in Bangladesh, significant gaps remain in understanding localized realities. Many studies utilize secondary quantitative data, overlooking the nuanced lived experiences of affected individuals, particularly in these regional and rural contexts. This study aims to fill these gaps by employing mixed methods to explore the socioeconomic, psychological, and mental dimensions of youth, unemployment in Trishal Upazila and Fulbaria Upazila, ultimately informing youth-centric policy actions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study correlates the Capability Approach (CA) developed by Amartya Sen to explore the effects of unemployment on young men in society (Sen 2000). At its core, this approach focuses on understanding well-being through the lens of what individuals can achieve to lead fulfilling lives (Robeyns 2017). In essence, development is about enhancing human capabilities, allowing people the freedom to pursue paths that hold personal value. Unemployment severely restricts the financial, emotional, and social capacities of youth, hindering their ability to actively engage in their communities. Without access to decent work, young individuals lose economic independence and struggle for basic needs, leading to a decline in overall well-being. This situation breeds stress, shame, a drop in self-esteem, and mental health challenges, further isolating them from social activities. Consequently, young people often find themselves unable to realize their full potential due to systemic barriers that limit their job opportunities. Evidence from this study highlights the significant deprivation of capabilities that define a balanced, fulfilling life.

Fundamentally, unemployment destroys economic agencies by unlocking the financial freedom of young people, causing them to be stuck in the cycles of poverty and dependency. If there is no stable income, they are not able to invest in education, health care, or being an entrepreneur, which is forced to rely on unofficial or exploitative labor. Socially, unemployment separates youth from community life because the social stigma and negative attitude towards them identify them as 'failures', isolating them from the market, marriage, civic activities, and decision-making roles, thereby reducing their sense of belonging and identity. Psychologically, prolonged joblessness creates mental health challenges. Studies reveal that almost half of the unemployed graduates in Bangladesh have to face depression, anxiety, and self-esteem, which is more intense from social pressure and a “scarring effect” that destroys employment dreams in the future. The struggle of each person, combined with the systematic inequality, and the outdated educational curriculum failed to prepare the skills related to the market for youth, such as digital literacy. At the same time, geographic marginalization limits access to job hubs of urban settings and new emerging IT-related sectors. To restore the capabilities, policies must be developed in line with Sen's vision of equitable development by providing the importance of digital skills, expanding small and consulting for entrepreneurs, integrating mental health services with community networks, and distributing opportunities through rural infrastructure.

FIGURE 02: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT



Source: Author's Construct, 2024

Many respondents reported substantial income loss and struggle to afford necessities, reflecting serious economic hardships. Psychological issues such as anxiety and depression were prevalent, underscoring the social disconnection felt by many, which hinders their sense of identity and belonging. To address these challenges, policy reforms must focus on enhancing skills, creating supportive career environments, and ensuring access to decent jobs. This aligns with Sen's vision of promoting freedom and equity in social participation. In conclusion, unemployment not only undermines various life functions but also perpetuates inequalities, contradicting the principles of just institutions. Sen's Capability Approach offers a valuable framework for understanding the realities faced by unemployed youth. By promoting equal opportunities and removing barriers, we can work towards a more inclusive society where individuals can shape their own futures. This study's focus on young unemployed individuals resonates deeply with Sen's theoretical insights.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to thoroughly reveal the complex impacts of unemployment on youth in Trishal upazila, and Fulbaria upazila under Mymensingh District, Bangladesh. This area has been chosen for its youth population and diverse socio-economic context. The study sample of this study is unemployed male youth aged 18 to 35, who are not now engaged in any form of work. To determine the sample size, a formula for unknown populations ($n= z^2. [p*q]/d^2$) is used, which results in an estimate of approximately 384 respondents (225 respondents from Trishal upazila, 159 from Fulbaria upazila) to ensure satisfactory representation. Participants in this study are collected through convenience sampling for quantitative data, and for the qualitative data this study conducted 10 in-depth case interviews by applying snowball sampling with respondents who have been

unemployed for several months and have been significantly impacted by the negative cycle of unemployment, and for the quantitative data, 384 surveys were conducted from Trishal (225) and Fulbaria (159) upazila, using a semi-structured questionnaire. In addition, customized instruments were developed based on a review of existing literature, and also conducted pilot testing (pre-test) to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. In terms of qualitative data analysis techniques, Verbatim analysis has been used to preserve participants' original expressions, while quantitative data are examined using descriptive statistics. For the quantitative data analysis and graphical representations, the SPSS-25, MS Excel Sheet, and other necessary software have been used. Moreover, the study followed ethical guidelines, securing permissions, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring the privacy of participants. However, this study also recognized certain limitations such as time constraints, funding limits, and the potential lack of generalizability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section of the study reveals the major perceptions and results from the survey of youth unemployment in Trishal and Fulbaria Upazila. The pivotal visions, collected from the study disclose the various experiences of unemployed young men, which reveal the socio-demographic characteristics, emotional and socioeconomic consequences, as well as the challenges without work. By understanding these types of realities, can better appreciate the urgency of addressing the difficulties that hamper meaningful employment for this vulnerable group.

Findings of the Study

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Study

Initially, gaining a clear understanding of the socio-demographic traits of the respondents in this study is essential for including youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh into perspective. Also, by exploring these characteristics, the study can gain a deeper appreciation for the varied backgrounds of these individuals and see how these elements shape their unique experiences and difficulties with unemployment.

TABLE 01: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Category	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Percentage (%)
Age Group				
18-24	102	65	167	36.5
25-29	108	76	184	47.9
30-35	15	45	60	15.6
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Religion				
Islam	182	128	310	80.7
Hindu	43	31	74	19.3

Category	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Percentage (%)
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Marital Status				
Unmarried	146	104	250	65.1
Married	70	50	120	31.3
Divorced	9	5	14	3.6
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Education Level				
Primary Education	17	13	30	7.8
Secondary Education	39	27	66	17.2
Higher Secondary	52	38	90	23.4
Undergraduate	74	54	128	33.3
Graduate	43	27	70	18.3
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Family Size				
Less than 4 Members	143	102	245	63.8
4-6 Members	64	46	110	28.6
More than 6 Members	18	11	29	7.6
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Family Type				
Nuclear Family	200	140	340	88.5
Extended Family	18	12	30	7.8
Joint Family	07	07	14	3.7
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 01, explores that most participants were between 25-29 years old (47.9%), and the other includes in the range of 18-24 years (36.5%), and a smaller group aged 30-35 years (15.6%). A significant majority of the respondents identified as Muslim (80.7%), which reflects the religious composition of these two regions, while Hindus made up a smaller portion (19.3%). Unemployment appeared to primarily affect unmarried individuals (65.1%), which broadly highlights its link with delayed life indicators like marriage, while married (31.3%) and divorced individuals (3.6%) were less signified in the above table. Moreover, educational qualifications varied, with the highest proportion of them having completed undergraduate education (33.3%), and others gaining higher secondary qualifications (23.4%). However, a smaller percentage of respondents had only primary education (7.8%), which emphasizes imbalance and proper facilities in educational access.

Most respondents came from nuclear families (88.5%) with fewer than four members (63.8%), while families with 4-6 members (28.6%) or more than six members (7.6%) were less common.

Unemployment Characteristics of the Respondents

Observing the unemployment characteristics of the respondents is crucial for the view of the broader context of their challenges and experiences. By examining these elements, the study can gain profound insights into the problems faced by youths. Their stories reflect not only individual struggles and difficulties but also the collective obstacles within the economic landscape they navigate daily in their life.

TABLE 02: OVERVIEW OF UNEMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS, JOB SEARCH ACTIVITY, AND JOB APPLICATION PREFERENCES OF RESPONDENTS

Category	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Percentage (%)
Unemployment Duration				
10-12 months	90	65	155	40.4
1-2 years	80	50	130	33.9
Over 2-3 years	55	44	99	25.8
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Job Search Activity				
Actively searched	145	100	245	63.8
Not actively searched	80	59	139	36.2
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Types of Jobs Applied For				
Government job	70	40	110	28.6
Private or non-governmental job	50	30	80	20.8
Office work	45	35	80	20.8
Manual labor	30	25	55	14.3
Skilled labor	20	20	40	10.4
Other	10	9	19	4.9
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 02 shows that less than half of the respondents (40.4%) experienced unemployment for 10 to 12 months, while 25.8% were jobless for over 2 to 3 years. The scenario of unemployment duration has been reflected in the case of this study as follows:

> *"I have completed my post-graduation at the beginning of 2023 from a public university. But still, now I am unemployed. Every rejection feels like a blow to*

> *my confidence. It's been over a year, and I still don't know how to break out of this cycle. It's exhausting and demoralizing." —24-year-old graduate students from Fulbaria.*

A majority of them (63.8%) actively searched for jobs, yet barriers persevered, as evidenced by the variety of job types applied for. The most commonly sought jobs were government jobs (28.6%), Private or non-governmental jobs (20.8%), and office work (20.8%), which also highlights a broad spectrum of job preferences and a significant gap between aspirations and opportunities.

TABLE 03: PRIMARY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN RURAL AREAS

Factors	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Percentage (%)
Lack of education	85	58	143	37.2
Lack of job opportunities	90	60	150	39.1
Lack of skills	60	40	100	26.0
Lack of experience	50	34	84	21.9
Inadequate career guidance	55	37	92	24.0
Inequalities and Discriminations	40	27	67	17.4
Corruptions	45	30	75	19.5
Geographic disparities	35	23	58	15.1
Other	30	20	50	13.0

*Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 03 examines the primary causal factors of youth unemployment in rural areas. Lack of job opportunities (39.1%) emerged as the foremost cause, and others include lack of education (37.2%) and lack of skills (26%). Major factors like inadequate career guidance (24%) and labor market discrimination (17.4%) also played significant roles in this sector. Some respondents of the qualitative part of this study claim that they have completed their graduation but still, now they are unemployed. They think that the skills they have don't seem to match what employers want and they don't know how to fix that. On the other hand, some respondents claim that sometimes it feels like only those with connections get jobs. It's not about how skilled or educated you are but who you know. Another causes of youth unemployment have been reflected in the case of this study as follows:

> *"I am a fresher graduate student. After completing my graduation, I applied to numerous private organizations but they rejected my application. Because most of the private companies seek work experience that was absent in my CV. I think it has been creating a barrier to enter into unemployed status to employed status for young people who have recently completed their graduation. If*

employers don't recruit the fresher graduates, how do the fresher graduates obtain experience". —25-year-old job seeker from Trishal

Socioeconomic Consequences of Unemployment of the Respondents

Unemployment is more than just a statistical analysis; it profoundly influences the daily lives of individuals and their families. For the respondents of this study, the struggle for safe employment has led to significant socio-economic challenges that extend beyond financial struggle. By understanding the real-world impacts of unemployment, the study can better appreciate the urgency of addressing this demanding issue.

TABLE 4: SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT ON RESPONDENTS

Category	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Percentage (%)
Impact on Access to Necessities (Such as Food, Clothing, Shelter, etc.)				
Significantly Decreased	40	30	70	18.2
Moderately Decreased	50	35	85	22.1
Slightly Decreased	60	40	100	26.0
No Change	75	54	129	33.7
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Impact on the Financial Level of the Family				
Significant Impact	50	35	85	22.1
Moderate Impact	60	42	102	26.6
Slight Impact	55	38	93	24.2
No Impact	60	44	104	27.1
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Impact on Social Participation				
Restricted Participation (Yes)	70	48	118	30.8
No Impact (No)	155	111	266	69.2
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 04 explores that while 18.2% reported significant decreases in access to necessities like food and shelter, 33.7% saw no change. Financial levels were significantly impacted by 22.1%, with a moderate impact noted by a small percentage of them (26.6%). Unemployment also restricted social participation for 30.8% of respondents, which reflects broader lifestyle and community integration challenges linked to joblessness. The scenario of the Socioeconomic impacts of unemployment has been reflected in the qualitative data of this study. Respondents to the qualitative part stated that access to food, clothing, and shelter

became less because of unemployment. The economic status of the family become also declines because of the unemployment position of family members, especially young family members. Even youth who are unemployed become isolated from their friend circles as well as restrict their participation in different social activities. One of the respondents of the qualitative part claims,

> *"I rely on my father's pension to survive. At my age, I should help my family, not burden them. Sometimes, I skip meals to avoid being an extra expense. In previous times, I lead a standard lifestyle with quality clothing and shelter. As still I am unemployed, now I am starting to live in a mess to reduce my costs. I have restricted my social participation from previous time because of economic crisis and unemployed status of mine" — 26-year-youth from Trishal.*

TABLE 05: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON THE RESPONDENTS

Category	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Percentage (%)
Social Consequences				
Social Stigma	55	38	93	24.2
Isolation from Peer Groups	50	35	85	22.1
Family Tensions or Conflicts	40	28	68	17.7
Postponement of Marriage and Family Formation	30	22	52	13.5
Other	20	15	35	9.1
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**
Economic Consequences				
Difficulty Meeting Basic Needs	60	40	100	26.0
Dependence on Family Support	55	39	94	24.5
Increased Poverty Levels	50	36	86	22.3
Increased Debt	45	31	76	19.8
Inability to Save Money	40	27	67	17.4
Other	25	17	42	10.9
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**	**100.0**

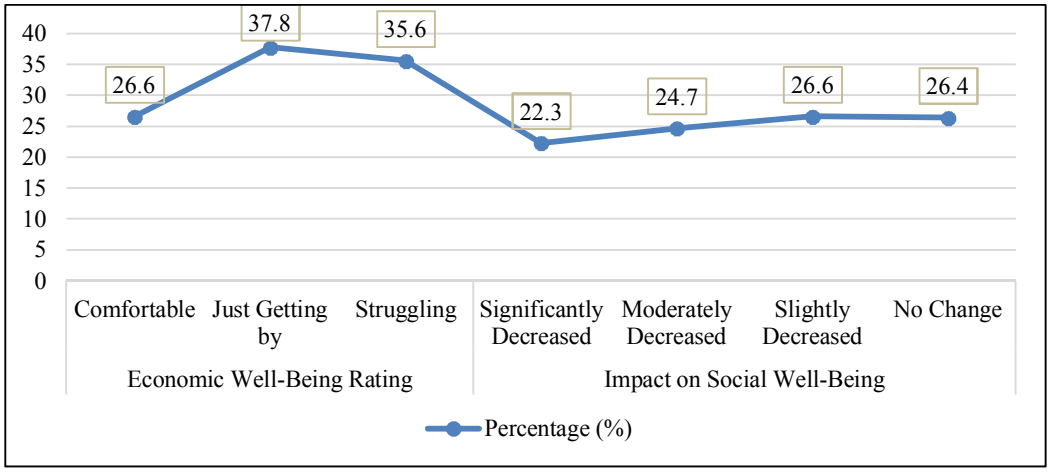
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 05 reveals that unemployment led to stigma (24.2%), isolation (22.1%), and family tensions (17.7%). Economically, it resulted in difficulty meeting basic needs (26%), dependence on family support (24.5%), and increased poverty levels (22.3%), which impacts unemployment on both personal and community well-being. Moreover, unemployment significantly reduces access to necessities, with 18.2% of the participants reporting a noticeable decline and 33.7% of them experiencing no impact.

Qualitative data of this study show that unemployment status creates negative socio-economic consequences for youth. Most of the youth economically depend on their family support. When their family can't afford it, they take a loan from their friends and neighbors. Because of their long-lasting unemployed status, their debt amount becomes increased which leads them to create conflict with family members, friends, and neighbors. One of the respondents of the qualitative part claims,

> *"People treat you differently when you're jobless. Even in our own village, some look down on me as if I'm not trying hard enough. It's humiliating. Even My family and friends keep asking when I will find work, and I have no answers. It feels like I've failed. That's why I keep myself isolated from my friends and sometimes from my family members" — 30-year-old graduate from Fulbaria.*

FIGURE 03: IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 03 shows that economically, 35.6% of respondents reported struggling, while only 26.6% felt financially comfortable. Socially, 22.3% experienced significant decreases in well-being, with only 26.4% reporting no change, which impacts on financial stability and social quality of life.

Psychological and Mental Impacts of the Respondents Due to Unemployment

Unemployment extends beyond mere economic hardship, and as well as deeply influences the mental and emotional well-being of individuals. For many of the respondents in this study, the experience of joblessness brings forth feelings of isolation, anxiety, and diminished self-worth, creating a complex interplay between their social and psychological states. As they navigate the challenges of being unemployed, these young men grapple with the deep effects on their identity and emotional health.

TABLE 06: EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF PERSONAL CHALLENGES

Category	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Percentage (%)
Feelings of Worthlessness and Loss of Self-identity				
Struggle with Purpose	60	45	105	27.3
Isolation from Society	50	36	86	22.3
Identity Crisis	40	30	70	18.2
Reduced Self-valuation	45	32	77	20.1
Feelings of Shame and Social Embarrassment				
Fear of Judgment	55	39	94	24.5
Loss of Social Support	50	35	85	22.1
Hesitation in Seeking Help	60	44	104	27.1
Impact on Self-worth and Self-esteem				
Decreased Confidence in Abilities	70	50	120	31.3
Negative Self-perception	65	46	111	28.9
Reduced Motivation	55	39	94	24.5

*Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 06 highlights the emotional and psychological impacts of unemployment, which include feelings of worthlessness, shame, and social embarrassment. Struggle with purpose (27.3%), isolation from society (22.3%), reduced self-valuation (20.1%), and identity crises (18.2%) were significant outcomes, which explored feelings of worthlessness and loss of self-identity, the qualitative data of this study also reflects the emotional and psychological impacts of respondents. Such as; one of the respondents of the qualitative part claims,

> *"I lie awake at night thinking about how I'll ever make something of my life. The pressure to succeed feels like a weight crushing me, but I can't see a way out. Long-time unemployment status has decreased my confidence in my abilities. When someone asks about my employment status, I feel ashamed to tell about myself and feel about my identity crisis" — 29-year-old -youth from Trishal.*

Additionally, table 06 shows that many respondents (27.1%) hesitated to seek help, as well as it impacts on self-worth and self-esteem which often decreased confidence in abilities (31.3%). Another respondent of this study claims,

> *"When meritorious students complete their graduation from renowned universities, they like feel ashamed for asking help from their relatives as well as from their university seniors. Everyone expects you to just figure things out on your own, but it's hard when even your own confidence is gone." — 25-year-old from Fulbaria.*

TABLE 07: EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES DUE TO UNEMPLOYMENT

Mental Health Issues	Trishal (Frequency)	Fulbaria (Frequency)	Total	Trishal (%)	Fulbaria (%)	Total (%)
Depression						
Never	59	41	100	15.3	10.7	26.0
Sometimes	88	62	150	22.9	16.1	39.0
Frequently	59	41	100	15.3	10.7	26.0
Very Often	20	14	34	5.2	3.6	8.8
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**			**100.0**
Anxiety						
Never	70	50	120	18.2	13.0	31.2
Sometimes	76	54	130	19.8	14.1	33.9
Frequently	53	37	90	13.8	9.6	23.4
Very Often	26	18	44	6.8	4.7	11.5
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**			**100.0**
Stress and Worries						
Never	64	46	110	16.7	12.0	28.7
Sometimes	82	58	140	21.3	15.1	36.4
Frequently	59	41	100	15.3	10.7	26.0
Very Often	20	14	34	5.2	3.6	8.8
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**			**100.0**
Frustration with Career Issues						
Never	53	37	90	13.8	9.6	23.4
Sometimes	59	41	100	15.3	10.7	26.0
Frequently	82	58	140	21.3	15.1	36.4
Very Often	32	22	54	8.3	5.7	14.0
Total	**225**	**159**	**384**			**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 07 highlights that depression is a common struggle; with 39% of respondents experiencing, it occasionally and 26% frequently. For many, the sense of purposelessness and isolation caused by long-time joblessness establishes in frequent low moods and a diminished sense of self-worth. Anxiety also appears large in portion, with 33.9% experiencing it sometimes and 23.4% frequently, as uncertainty about the future and

financial instability impact heavily on their minds. Qualitative data of this study also delineates that unemployment status leads to the creation of anxiety and depression among youth. For example, one of the respondents of the qualitative part of this study argues that,

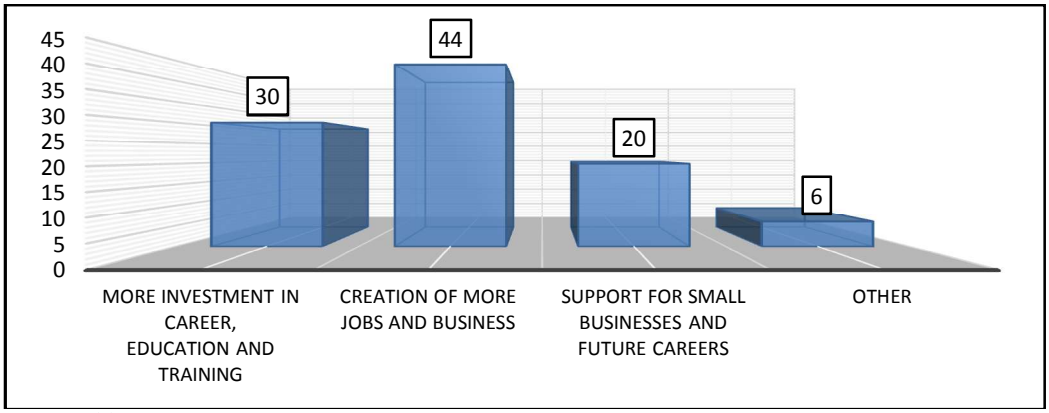
> *"Some days, I can't even get out of bed. The thought of facing another day without hope or purpose drains all my energy. I feel trapped in my own mind."— 28-year-old respondent from Fulbaria.*

Stress and worries are nearly universal, where 36.4% of them reporting stress sometimes and 26% of them facing it frequently. The pressure to meet personal and family expectations, attached to the lack of opportunities, creates a devastating emotional burden. Frustration over career issues is another habitual theme because 36.4% of the respondents frequently feel frustrated and 26% occasionally experience it. Respondents to the qualitative part of this study also argued that they have felt worried about their employment opportunities which in turn lead them to experience stress and frustration with career issues. One of the respondent's claims that,

> *"I constantly worry about my future. Will I ever find a job? How will I take care of my family? These thoughts never leave me, and the stress keeps piling up. The pressure from my family to find work, coupled with my own frustration, is unbearable. I feel like I'm letting everyone down, and the stress is overwhelming."— 30-year-old graduate from Trishal.*

These issues led them to frustration, and it often stems from mismatched skills, lack of opportunities, and repeated rejections in job applications.

FIGURE 04: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESPONDENTS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 04 presents the recommendations stated by respondents for government policies to address youth unemployment. The figure highlights that the largest proportion of respondents (40%) underlined the need for skills enhancement programs, and others (29%)

were concerned with vocational training and job creation initiatives. One of the respondents in the qualitative part of this study states that

> *"If the government provided training in practical skills or entrepreneurship, I believe many of us could find work or start our own businesses. We don't need charity; we need opportunities."— 23-year-old respondent from Fulbaria.*

A smaller percentage (22%) recommended career counseling services to guide youth in their job search and career planning. In addition, this study underscores the importance of developing skills, creating job opportunities, and providing guidance to address the youth unemployment crisis effectively. Respondents of the qualitative part also claim that-

> *"A significant portion of youth cannot apply to private organizations because of lack of experience certificate. To reduce the youth unemployment rate, employers of private organizations can recruit fresher graduates. If fresher graduates are recruited in the private sector without any experience, they will get inspired and try to provide their best. This will also reduce youth prevalence to obtain government job which by turn reduce the youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh." — 31-year-old respondent from Trishal.*

Discussion of the Study

The findings of this study reveal that youth unemployment predominantly affects individuals who are aged between 25–29, representing nearly half of the sample (47.9%). This aligns with Asif et al. (2023), who identified young adults as the demographic most vulnerable to unemployment due to skill and experience mismatches. Additionally, the predominance of unmarried respondents (65.1%) underscores how unemployment delays critical life milestones, which validates the observations by Khatun et al. (2020) on the links between joblessness and life-cycle delays in Bangladesh. Moreover, the educational qualifications of the participants highlight a contradiction; the highest unemployment rates occur among undergraduates (33.3%) and higher secondary graduates (23.4%). This reflects the wider nationwide challenge of a saturated job market for educated youth (Mamun et al. 2020). Furthermore, the prevalence of nuclear families (88.5%) signifies limited extended family support networks, which intensifies the economic and emotional problems of unemployed youth.

In addition, with 25.8% of respondents experiencing unemployment for over a year, the findings underline the persistent and long-lasting nature of this problem. Strandh et al. (2014) related to such long-time unemployment to worsening mental health and social disconnection, which were echoed in observations of higher stress, shame, and social exclusion among participants. Despite active and regular job searches by 63.8%, the mismatch between aspirations and opportunities, fully evidenced by the preference for government jobs (28.6%), reinforces the structural barriers in the rural Bangladesh labor market (Osmani et al. 2021). The survey of this study identified lack of job opportunities (39.1%), education (37.2%), and skills (26.0%) as the dominant factors, which are contributing to youth unemployment in Rural Bangladesh. This agrees with research by Musleh et al. (2015), which highlights skill mismatches as a persistent barrier for

Bangladeshi youth. Additionally, inadequate career guidance (24.0%) and corruption (19.5%) reflect systemic issues that hamper unbiassed access to employment opportunities, a finding supported by Riniati et al. (2020) in similar socio-economic contexts.

Moreover, unemployment significantly reduces access to necessities, with 18.2% of the participants reporting a noticeable decline and 33.7% of them experiencing no impact. Dependence on family support (24.5%) and increased poverty levels (22.3%) were prominent economic consequences. These findings align with Samuel (2023), who highlighted the role of unemployment in prolonging intergenerational poverty cycles. Socially, stigma (24.2%) and isolation (22.1%) emerge as major challenges, which reflects the broader societal perception of unemployment as a personal failure, dependable to findings by Amissah and Nyarko (2017). The psychological impact of unemployment on the male youth is deep and pivotal. Depression was prevalent, with 39% experiencing it occasionally and 26% frequently. Anxiety (33.9%) and frustration with career prospects (36.4%) were also common, which highlights the significant mental health problems associated with joblessness. These findings parallel research by Mokona et al. (2020), which highlights the link between unemployment and worsening mental health in developing nations, like Bangladesh.

As 26% of respondents in the study cited lack of skills as a primary barrier to employment paths. So, it is necessary to expand the vocational programs in digital literacy, renewable energy, and agriculture to align training with market needs, as well as needs partnerships with industries to certify skills and ensure employability. Besides, the shortage of job opportunities in rural areas is a major barrier, with 39.1% of respondents identifying it as the leading cause of unemployment. Launching public-private initiatives to increase rural industries (e.g., agro-processing) and fund youth-led entrepreneurship through easy microloans and mentorship. As well as, systemic corruption is also a significant obstacle for the unemployment issue in Bangladesh, with 19.5% of respondents citing it as a major barrier. To solve this difficulty, transparent recruitment processes, supported by digital platforms and third-party audits are necessary, which will ensure that jobs are awarded based on merit rather than connections. Moreover, 65% of respondents reported experiencing depression and 57.3% reported anxiety. To overcome this issue, integrating counseling into community clinics, training local leaders to identify at-risk youth, and establish peer networks to combat stigma and mental health-related issues. In addition, many young people aspire to government jobs (28.6%), but the reality is that these opportunities are limited. In this regard, organizing career counseling units is needed, to promote vocational careers (e.g., technical roles) and challenge stereotypes about "inferior" jobs. Also, geographic marginalization is a significant barrier for rural youth, with 15.1% of respondents mentioning it as a challenge. To combat this problem, it is necessary to upgrade rural transport and broadband access to connect youth with urban markets and remote work opportunities. However, recommendations by the respondents for government interventions highlight the need for skill development programs (40%) and vocational training (29%), which relates to the study by Iduseri et al. (2022), who supported for youth-centric skill acquisition initiatives to reduce unemployment. Moreover, career counseling services (22%) and job creation schemes were also emphasized, which underscores the urgency for targeted and sustainable policy solutions.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study reveals the complex issue of youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh, specifically in the Trishal and Fulbaria Upazila. For young men in these areas, unemployment has serious socio-economic and psychological impacts, undermining community well-being and individual dreams. It demonstrates that unemployment is not just a statistic; it's a reality that disrupts monetary security, social involvement, and mental health. The findings of this study delineate that the age group most affected is 25 to 29, nearly half (47.9%) of the unemployed, who struggle to achieve key life milestones like marriage and starting a career. Ironically, while education is often seen as a pathway to success, many undergraduates and higher secondary graduates (33.3% undergraduates, 23.4% higher secondary graduates) face high unemployment rates, which reflects a significant gap between their skills and the job market. Where structural barriers, including limited job opportunities (39.1%), skill mismatches (26%), systemic corruption (19.5%), and labor market discrimination (17.4%) lead to the creation of youth unemployment in rural areas of Bangladesh. From the findings of this study, it can be shown that over 25% of respondents faced unemployment for 2–3 years, exacerbating economic and psychological challenges. Additionally, Financial instability is pervasive, with 18.2% reporting significant declines in access to basic necessities. Dependence on family (24.5%), social stigma (24.2%), and isolation (22.1%) further marginalize unemployed youth. Depression (26% frequent, 39% occasional), anxiety (23.4% frequent, 33.9% occasional), and diminished self-worth plague respondents. Prolonged joblessness increases identity crises and social isolation, with 31.3% experiencing reduced confidence in their abilities. The emotional toll is heavy, with many experiencing depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Social stigma and isolation only add to their struggles. Key barriers include a shortage of job opportunities, insufficient skills, and corruption in hiring practices. These challenges underscore the need for immediate, targeted interventions. The strong desire for government jobs among young people highlights the disconnect between their aspirations and the available opportunities, revealing critical flaws in the rural employment systems.

However, the policy implications of this study on youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh reveal the need for wider and inclusive interventions. The findings of the study align with the National Youth Policy (2017) as well as the National Skills Development Policy (2011) of Bangladesh. Policymakers should implement the existing frameworks such as the National Youth Policy (2017), which aims to empower youth through education, employment, health, and governance participation, by focusing on skill development, job creation, and other related initiatives (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2017; Mamun, 2024). The National Skills Development Policy (2011) enhances vocational training associated with industry and market demands (Ministry of Finance 2016), while initiatives like BRAC's Skills Training for Advancing Resources (STAR) offer dual apprenticeships, and internships to promote employment opportunities in Bangladesh (BRAC, 2017). As well as the Micro Credit Program of the Department of Youth Development supports entrepreneurship among youths by providing financial assistance for self-employment projects. Additionally, national institutions like the Youth Training Centres (YTC) offer vocational training, and entrepreneurship facilities across Bangladesh. This study also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic

Growth) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes inclusive employment and equitable skill development (Martin 2023; United Nations 2023). Moreover, this study supports the instant necessity for comprehensive strategies to tackle youth unemployment, which is essential for sustainable community development and for maximizing the potential of Bangladesh's youth. However, to address the pressing and demanding issue of youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. Skill Development and Vocational Training

- Expand both government and non-government programs that focus on technical and vocational education to the specific needs of local job markets.
- Introduce certifications in developing fields such as digital skills, information technology-related skills, renewable energy, entrepreneurship, and agricultural technology to increase employability.

2. Job Creation Initiatives

- Develop partnerships between the public and private sectors to inspire or generate jobs, especially in rural communities of Bangladesh.
- Promote entrepreneurship by contributing of microloans, business development funding, and development centers for young innovators.

3. Career Counseling and Guidance Services

- Establish career counseling centers in educational institutions to assist youth navigate practical career paths and job search approaches.
- Launch awareness campaigns to dismiss myths about vocational jobs and highlight substitute career opportunities.

4. Policy Reforms for Inclusive Employment

- Tackle corruption and ensure transparency in the job recruitment process.
- Implement positive action measures aimed at reducing inequalities and discrimination in the labor force market.

5. Mental Health Support

- Make mental health resources accessible, including counseling and peer support groups, to help manage the psychological impacts of unemployment.
- Train community leaders and educators to identify signs of mental health challenges and provide essential support.

6. Improving Access to Employment Information

- Develop digital platforms for job or work matching to connect rural youth with employers across the nation.

7. Infrastructure Development

- Invest in rural infrastructure such as transportation, communication, and internet connectivity to improve access to urban job markets and remote work opportunities.

This study provides in-depth information about youth unemployment in rural Bangladesh, especially focusing on the young men in Trishal and Fulbaria upazila, which creates a gap in understanding the experiences of women (who face higher NEET rates nationally) and

marginalized groups. However, by revealing the above-mentioned gaps, the researchers suggest that further future research is needed for a wider exploration of unemployment scenarios, both in the urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. By connecting systemic gaps and developing collaboration among policymakers, educators, and community leaders, Bangladesh can transform its youth from a "lost generation" into a catalyst for equitable development. As Amartya Sen's Capability Approach emphasizes, empowering youth with opportunities for work, dignity, and well-being is not merely an economic imperative, it is a moral one.

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