



Mental Health Challenges among Educated Unemployed Women of West Bengal: A Study of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

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Abstract

This study explores the current mental health status among educated women who are unemployed. This paper also examines the relationship between mental health and demographic factors such as age, marital status, and educational qualification among these women. This study aims to explore as its objectives the varied conditions of mental health issues (Depression, Anxiety and Stress) and their prevalence in women who are unemployed. The condition of their unemployment, however, is to be assessed in terms of their age, marital status and academic qualifications. A cross-sectional survey methodology was used in the quantitative investigation. A total of 312 unemployed educated women in the age group of 28-45 years were selected using convenient sampling techniques from Jadavpur University, University of North Bengal and The University of Burdwan of West Bengal, India. This study employed a structured personal information sheet and 'The 21-item Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21)' developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), covering three following sub-factors: Depression, Anxiety and Stress. The collected data were analyzed using mean, SD and ANOVA through statistical package for social science (SPSS). The outcomes of the specific study demonstrated significance difference in overall mental health as per age, marital status and educational qualification of these women. On analyzing dimension-wise mental health, a significance difference was found in depression, anxiety or stress of such women with regards to their age, marital status and educational qualification.

Keywords

Mental Health, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Unemployed, Women

Introduction

Mental health denotes a person's state of mental and physical well-being consisting of mental reactions such as thoughts, emotions, and promptness (Van der Meer, 2012). Optimum mental health suggests that an individual is free from different stressors i.e. stress, anxiety, and depression. So, the individual can better handle psychological pressures that govern his/her well-being. Our sense of achievement, loss, joy, or pain is intrinsically linked to our mental capacity to accept or deny a situation (Paul, & Moser, 2009). In this paper, the researcher aims to explore how the issue of employment affects the mental health of an individual, especially an educated woman in society. Currently, mental health has been widely acknowledged to be a determining factor in a person's wellness and success. Across the globe, a wide range of the population is affected by mental health conditions that include depression, anxiety, and stress. (Ensminger, & Celentano, 1990).

Educated, unemployed women are one of the larger demographic groups that are susceptible to various challenges affecting their mental health (Paul, & Moser, 2009). Education and employment are intrinsically related to an individual's improved quality of life and social assimilation. To seek better career opportunities and become financially independent, women strive to attain higher education. They are often faced with difficulties because of unemployment resulting in deep mental distress. (Brown et al., 2003). The absence of employment causes them to feel helpless and desperate (Arena et al., 2022). Employment ensures that a person is healthy and able to also serve the society. On the other hand, an unemployed person can engage in self-damaging habits that not only destroy the person's own life but also destabilize society (Momayyezi et al., 2018).

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), depression is symptomatic of constant morbidity, and absence of eagerness or happiness in any work, which can be quite distressing. Anxiety is known for its typical characteristics of heightened tension and fear, which can affect everyday activities deeply. (National Institute of Mental Health, 2018). Stress is mostly born of ongoing pressures and life's expectations, which can immensely impact mental and physical health. (American Psychological Association, 2019). Mental health issues and unemployment among educated women require serious thoughts and interventions. (Paul & Moser, 2009).

Across the globe, developed and developing nations are confronting the soaring issue of unemployment. According to Bhat and Joshi (2020), India battles unemployment and underemployment even though several policies and programmes have been implemented to redress the issue. Sometimes, unemployment is severe when even the options for self-employment are limited. In addition to the official registered unemployment, only in women exists a substantial hidden unemployment (Hultman et al., 2006). In most cases, the available job options including self-employment are not well suitable for women. Due to the lack of industries in India private job options are also limited. There are so many reasons for women's limited scope of work even though they are educated. Nowadays, women's participation in society has increased. Despite having a lot of responsibilities at home such as parenting and housekeeping, they work outside the home. Women's mental health is associated with their ability to take responsibility. Financial independence attained through educational qualification and employment can be key factors in the way a person perceives one's quality of life.

India is a country where the women's contribution to a family structure or society is under-represented, especially in rural regions where the males are entrusted with the task of feeding the family and women are tasked to do household chores (Agnihotri, 2022). This is underrepresented because it is not seen as financially contributory (unpaid work). The working women ratio is too low in India, around 74% of women are unemployed (Dhingra, 2020). Women constitute one of the most sensitive groups that experience mental health issues which is higher than the level that men experience (Momayyezi et al., 2018). Now although women from rural regions are moving toward quality education, work options remain unsuited to their learning in those regions and they have a tough battle to fight with the urban competitors in the line who have relatively better access to resources or information regarding jobs. Most regions in India are rural and the family structures are more or less oppressive, and dismissive for an educated unemployed woman. Society does not see it kindly if a woman possesses a good education but no jobs. It is a matter of continuously being juggled by both the family and society, which disrupts the mental health of such a job-aspiring woman. Sivakumar and Ramachandran, (2022) claimed that marital status significantly impacts the mental health of women in India. Studies reveal that common mental disorders are prevalent among ever-married women, with risk factors including being widowed/divorced/separated. Hence the frustration is increasing, leading to various bouts of mental illness, especially depression, stress and anxiety. Non-working women are a special

case here. Their tendency to try and alleviate domestic stress by getting a job is a frequent example of their mental discomfiture.

Significance of the Study

The study examined the rate of prevalence of mental health problem of educated unemployed women within the age group of 28-45 years. This study also revealed the relation or amount of influence of different independent variables of mental health with various dimensions i.e., depression, anxiety and stress.

Mental health has always been seen as a big phenomenon worldwide, even in the most developed countries. Post-pandemic era has put individuals in harsh economic conditions besides bringing a barrage of mental health issues. Sociological studies made at this point have shown steep spike in psychological disorders and suicidal tendencies in people, especially those who have no jobs or have gone jobless. A greater risk in current situation is that the options for self-employment are scarce, and unemployed educated women have very little options. The research seeks to prioritize looking into the mental health problems including stress, depression and anxiety in educated unemployed women. Although most of the job options are not made available as suitable for women, there is a more complex pattern in the mental health issues in women when compared to men when it comes to unemployment.

In most cases, families remain ignorant of the mental health issue of the individual until something critical happens and endangers the overall health. The findings of this study will help in understanding and thereby creating awareness of the situation amongst various sects of society. People from the administration may be prompted to look at the situation from fresh perspectives and initiate changes to policies to prevent mental health issues, raise more awareness, and introduce properly informed education structures for facilitating the redressal of mental health issues.

Objectives of the Study

1. To draw comparisons of the mental health issues for educated unemployed women of West Bengal with regards to Age, Marital Status, and Educational Qualification.
2. To compare the dimensions (i.e., Depression, Anxiety and Stress) of mental health problems of educated unemployed women of West Bengal with regards to Age, Marital Status, and Educational Qualification.
3. To observe and evaluate the relationship between age and mental health of educated unemployed women concerning depression, anxiety and stress.

Null Hypothesis

H₀₁: Mental health is not significantly affected by demographic variable of age group and its dimensions among educated unemployed women.

H₀₂: Mental health status does not vary significantly for the demographic variable of marital status and its dimensions among educated unemployed women.

H₀₃: Mental health is not significantly influenced by demographic variable of educational qualification and its dimensions among educated unemployed women.

H₀₄: There is no significant correlation between age group and mental health status with respect to depression, anxiety, and stress.

Methodology of the Study

Sample and Sampling Techniques

This current study was undertaken on 312 educated unemployed women (N=312) within the age group of 28-45 years with minimum qualification of graduation. They were selected using convenient sampling techniques from Jadavpur University, University of North Bengal and The University of Burdwan of West Bengal.

Table 1. Represents Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N= 312)

Demographic Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	28-34 Years	184	59%
	35-39 Years	83	27%
	40-45 years	45	14%
Marital Status	Single	102	32.7
	Married	192	61.5
	Divorced	18	5.8
Educational Qualification	UG	70	22.4
	PG	171	54.8
	M.PHIL.	53	17.0
	P.HD.	18	5.8

Measures

Tool

To gather data the researcher employed 'The 21-item Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21)' developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) is a self-report measure that aims to assess negative emotional state of depression, anxiety and stress. This tool is for identifying emotional problems in women and thereby the mental health status can be assessed. The DASS-21 scale consists 21 items to assess mental health and it has three sub-scales: Depression, Anxiety and Stress. DASS-21 scale is sufficiently dependable and valid. The reliability test of DASS-21 comes with the standard value of 0.81, 0.89 and 0.78 as the measure of depression, anxiety and stress is referred to Cronbach's alpha value.

Research Method and Data Collection Procedure

The quantitative investigation employed a cross-sectional survey methodology to assess the current status of mental health issues among unemployed women. The researcher administered the DASS-21 scale through Google forms and included the instructions elaborately. In this particular process of gathering information, the researcher communicated with the subjects through phone calls and emails. Afterwards, the researcher provided the questionnaire to the respondents via text messages, emails and Whats App chats. The required data for the research was collected from the subjects during 17th September to 12th November 2024. A total number of 312 online response were collected, using convenient sampling technique.

Techniques used for data analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS software, version 21, a statistical tool for social research. To assess the data for this study used both descriptive and inferential statistics, including the one-way ANOVA, frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation. The data were tested for normality, and since they were found to be near normal, that's why the study used parametric tests.

Findings

An analysis of demographic variables, including age, marital status and educational qualification among educated unemployed women, was conducted to explore their mental health with regards depression, anxiety and stress.

Table 2. Show the Variable Wise comparison of Overall Mental Health

Demographic Variable		N	Mean	SD	F(p)
Age Group	28-34 Years	184	39.53	12.955	13.796 (.000)**
	35-39 Years	83	46.28	10.657	
	40-45 Years	45	48.38	12.140	
	Total	312	42.60	12.790	
Marital Status	Single	102	13.977	37.39	13.796 (.000)**
	Married	192	11.793	44.96	
	Divorced	18	4.874	46.89	
	Total	312	12.790	12.790	
Educational Qualification	UG	70	33.90	12.458	16.845 (.000)**
	PG	171	45.85	11.070	
	M.Phil.	53	43.72	13.943	

	Ph.D.	18	42.28	10.986	
	Total	312	42.60	12.790	

*Result is statistically significant at 0.05 level and **at 0.01 level

Overall Mental Health as per Age Group

According to Table 2, 184 women belong to the age group of 28-34 years, 83 to the age group of 35-39 years and 45 to the age group of 40-45 years. Here the mean scores of these categories are 39.53, 46.28 and 48.38 and SD scores are 12.955, 10.657 and 12.140 respectively, indicating initial differences. The analysis utilized one-way ANOVA to examine the mental health status of unemployed women based on their age groups. The findings indicated that the groups differed significantly in overall mental health ($p=.000$).

Overall Mental Health as per Marital Status

Table 2 represents data on 102 women as single, 192 as married and 18 as divorced. Here the single women (13.977) possess higher mean score than the married (11.793) and the divorced women (4.874). ANOVA test was employed to ascertain significant differences among these unemployed women, confirming notable variation ($F=13.796$) in overall mental health problems.

Overall Mental Health as per Educational Qualifications

According to Table 2, 70 women are UG qualified, 171 are from PG, 53 are from M.PHIL. and 18 are from Ph.D. Their mean scores are 33.90, 45.85, 43.72 and 42.28; SD scores are 12.458, 11.070, 13.943 and 10.986 respectively. The one-way ANOVA suggested that there was a significant difference existing ($p=.000<0.05/0.01$) in the overall mental health problem of unemployed women across these different categories.

Table 3. Shows the Age wise N, Mean, SD and F- Test of Depression, Anxiety and Stress

Dimension	Age Group	N	Mean	SD	F(p)
Depression	28-34 Years	184	12.79	5.051	13.258 (.000)**
	35-39 Years	83	15.11	4.214	
	40-45 Years	45	16.18	3.798	
	Total	312	13.90	4.858	
Anxiety	28-34 Years	184	13.24	4.675	9.819 (.000)**
	35-39 Years	83	15.10	3.802	
	40-45 Years	45	16.02	4.367	
	Total	312	14.14	4.539	
Stress	28-34 Years	184	13.49	4.559	13.800 (.000)**
	35-39 Years	83	16.07	3.491	
	40-45 Years	45	16.18	4.773	
	Total	312	14.56	4.510	

*Result is statistically significant at 0.05 level and **at 0.01 level

Depression as per Age

In Table No. 3, the descriptive statistics illustrate levels of depression among women in the age group of 28-34, 35-39 and 40-45 years, with mean values of 12.79, 15.11 and 16.18 respectively, indicating initial distinctions across these categories. ANOVA test was conducted to rigorously assess the presence of statistically significant differences in the levels of depression among educated unemployed women across different age groups and results revealed that the groups differed significantly ($F=13.258$, $p<.05$).

Anxiety as per Age

In Table No. 3, the descriptive statistics exhibit levels of anxiety in women in the age group of 28-34, 35-39 and 40-45 years, with mean values of 13.24, 15.10 and 16.02 respectively. It is to be noted that women in the 40-45 years age group have higher mean scores than the other groups. The one-way ANOVA test was conducted to assess the presence of statistically significant differences in anxiety among educated unemployed women across different age groups and the results revealed that the groups differed significantly ($F=9.819$, $p<.05$).

Stress as per Age

In Table No. 3, the descriptive statistics presents levels of stress in women in the age group of 28-34, 35-39 and 40-45 years. Research found out that women in the 40-45 year of age group (16.18) have higher mean scores than the ones in the 28-34 year age group (13.49) and 35-39 years (16.07) age group. To investigate

further, ANOVA test was conducted and the result indicated that there was a significant difference ($F=13.800$, $p<0.05$) in anxiety of unemployed women among these different categories.

Table 4. Show the Marital Status wise N, Mean, SD and F-Test of Depression, Anxiety and stress

Dimension	Marital Status	N	Mean	SD	F(p)
Depression	Single	102	12.01	5.367	12.410 (.000)**
	Married	192	14.86	4.462	
	Divorced	18	14.28	2.191	
	Total	312	13.90	4.858	
Anxiety	Single	102	12.63	5.097	8.824 (.000)**
	Married	192	14.89	4.165	
	Divorced	18	14.72	2.697	
	Total	312	14.14	4.539	
Stress	Single	102	12.75	4.940	16.606 (.000)**
	Married	192	15.21	4.082	
	Divorced	18	17.89	1.937	
	Total	312	14.56	4.510	

*Result is statistically significant at 0.05 level and **at 0.01 level

Depression as per Marital Status

Table No. 4 displays the descriptive statistics which illustrate ranges of depression based on marital status. Here, single, married and divorced women have their mean values of 12.01, 14.86 and 14.28 respectively. Married women are with higher mean scores than others, and as per ANOVA results, the groups revealed statistically significant differences ($p=.000<0.05/0.01$) in depression of educated unemployed women.

Anxiety as per Marital Status

In Table No. 4, the descriptive statistics illustrate ranges of anxiety based on marital status. Here, single, married and divorced women have their mean values of 12.63, 14.89 and 14.72. respectively, indicating initial distinctions across these categories. ANOVA test was conducted and results indicated statistically significant differences ($p=.000<0.05/0.01$) in anxiety among educated unemployed women across different marital status.

Stress as per Marital Status

In Table No. 4, the descriptive statistics exhibits ranges of stress based on marital status. Here, single, married and divorced women have their mean values of 12.63, 14.89 and 14.72. respectively. An ANOVA test was conducted to observe statistically significant differences in stress among unemployed women across different marital status and the results revealed that the groups differed significantly ($p=.000<0.05/0.01$).

Table 5. Show the Educational Qualification wise N, Mean, SD and F-Test of Depression, Anxiety and Stress

Dimension	Educational Qualification	N	Mean	SD	F(p)
Depression	UG	70	10.79	4.869	15.319 (.000)**
	PG	171	15.12	4.293	
	M.Phil.	53	14.30	5.154	
	Ph.D.	18	13.17	3.730	
	Total	312	13.90	4.858	
Anxiety	UG	70	11.46	4.745	12.501 (.000)**
	PG	171	15.15	3.901	
	M.Phil.	53	14.62	4.801	
	Ph.D.	18	13.56	4.681	
	Total	312	14.14	4.539	
Stress	UG	70	11.66	5.102	14.614 (.000)**
	PG	171	15.58	3.721	
	M.Phil.	53	14.79	4.667	
	Ph.D.	18	15.56	3.869	
	Total	312	14.56	4.510	

	Total	312	14.56	4.510	
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*Result is statistically significant at 0.05 level and **at 0.01 level

Depression as per Educational Qualifications

In Table No. 5, the descriptive statistics showed levels of depression based on educational qualifications such as UG, PG, M.PHIL. and Ph.D. with mean values of 10.79, 15.12, 14.30 and 13.17 respectively. To investigate further, an ANOVA test was conducted and results revealed statistically significant differences ($F=15.319$, $p<0.05$) in depression of unemployed women among these categories.

Anxiety as per Educational Qualifications

In Table No. 5, the descriptive statistics showed levels of anxiety among the educational qualifications with mean values of UG (11.46), PG (15.15), M.PHIL. (14.62) and Ph.D. (13.56). As per the research, PG category women have highest mean scores than the others. To investigate further, an ANOVA test was conducted and results revealed statistically significant differences ($F=12.501$, $p<0.05$) in anxiety of unemployed women across the categories.

Stress as per Educational Qualifications

In Table No. 5, the descriptive statistics showed levels of stress among the educational qualifications with the following mean values: UG (11.46), PG (15.15), M.PHIL. (14.62) and Ph.D. (13.56). Interestingly, PG category women have highest mean scores than the others. To investigate further, an ANOVA test was conducted and results revealed statistically significant differences ($F=14.614$, $p<0.05$) in stress of unemployed women across the categories.

Table 6. Show the co-efficient of correlation between age group and mental health status with respect to the dimension of depression, anxiety and stress

Pearson Correlation	Age Group	Mental Health Status	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Age	1	.329** (.000)	.310** (.000)	.291** (.000)	.305** (.000)
Mental Health Status	.329** (.000)	1	.932** (.000)	.905** (.000)	.921** (.000)
Depression	.310** (.000)	.932** (.000)	1	.759** (.000)	.803** (.000)
Anxiety	.291** (.000)	.905** (.000)	.759** (.000)	1	.742** (.000)
Stress	.305** (.000)	.921** (.000)	.803** (.000)	.742** (.000)	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table No. 6, the analysis of Pearson correlation displayed a moderate positive linear relationship between age and mental health, which was statistically significant ($r=.329$) at .05 level. Relationship between age and depression indicated a moderate positive linear relationship as the co-efficient correlation was $r=.310$. The correlation between age and anxiety indicated a weak positive linear relationship as the co-efficient correlation was $r=.291$. On the other hand, the relationship between age and stress indicated a moderate positive linear relationship as the co-efficient correlation was $r=.305$. It means both were statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Discussion

The study delves into analysing how demographic factors have a great role in determining the mental health of educated but unemployed women. The experiences of mental health problems vary as per their age, marital status and educational qualifications and therefore there is a requirement for a focused intervention into mental health. Due to older age, marriage issues and higher educational qualifications, individual can have increased mental health problems, which calls for prioritizing mental health support, guidance, resources and remedies. Consistent with prior research by Momayyezi et al. (2015), Murray et al. (2008), Herbig, (2013), Hall and Johnson (1998), Jefferis et al. (2011), Graetz (1993), Cordoba-Dona et al. (2016) and Linn et al. (2011), employed women displayed lower depression and anxiety levels compared to unemployed women, which is consistent with our study. Also, Mihai et al. (2014), Dhingra (2020) and Zuelke et al. (2018), found significant difference between depression and unemployed women. Thabassum (2015) noted that educated unemployed women were prone to moderate to severe levels of anxiety and depression whereas the stress level was indicated at the rate of mild to moderate. These results are consistent with the findings of Omoniyi and Osakinle (2011), Audhoe et al. (2018), and Glynn (2009).

Moreover, the study pinpoints the intricate relationship between mental health and demographic variables like age. By aligning with previous research by Strandh et al. (2014), Mihai et al. (2014) and Houssemand et al. (2020), noted a significant relation between age and mental health and stated that older unemployed women tended to have more negative impact on mental health than younger women, which is similarly indicated in our findings. In this research, the overall mental health and its three dimensions exhibited a significant relation with the age group of unemployed women. Earlier study by Buffel (2015) demonstrated significant relation between depression and unemployed women with the age group of 35-49. With similarity in our research, women with the age group of 40-45 years pose higher scores in depression than other women who belong to 28-34- and 35-39-years age group.

In the study conducted by Lawal et al. (2020), Glynn (2009) and Khaledian et al. (2013), significant relation is shown between mental health and marital status. The dimensions of mental health such as Depression, Anxiety and Stress, have shown notable differences based on marital status of women. For example, Momayyezi et al. (2015), Khaledian et al (2013), and Mirzaei et al. (2019) discovered a significant relation between depression, anxiety and marital status of unemployed women, supported our findings. Divorced women exhibited higher rates of depression and anxiety by Momayyezi et al. (2015) and Mihai et al. (2014), which is contradicted in our result. As per previous research by Dennerstein, (1995), married women are more risk of mental health than single women. Conversely, Artazcoz et al. (2004) reported contrasting results, highlighting the case of single women with rates of poor mental health that were much higher than employed women who were married.

Women who had higher academic qualifications (PG and above) experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress as compared to those who had lower academic qualifications. In examining the mental health of women on the basis of educational qualification a noteworthy discovery emerged – a meaningful relation exists between educational qualification and mental health and also similar relationship prevails in the dimension of educational qualification and mental health. And, the study by Banu et al. (2021) found considerable difference between mental health and educational qualification. Islam et al. (2016) contradicted these findings, in case of married unemployed women with lower education associated with higher level of depression than married women with higher education.

Conclusion

Relying on the outcomes and discussions, this study explores the mental health status of educated unemployed women aged 28-45 in West Bengal, India, with a focus on depression, anxiety, and stress. The findings highlighted significant differences in mental health based on age, marital status, and educational qualification. Educated unemployed women in the older age groups (35-45) reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to those in the younger age group (28-34). Marital status also played a crucial role, with married and divorced women experiencing higher levels of mental health issues than single women. Additionally, educational qualifications affected mental health, with women holding postgraduate degrees exhibiting higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to those with undergraduate degrees. The study underscores the critical need for targeted mental health interventions and support systems for educated unemployed women, considering their demographic factors. Addressing these mental health challenges is essential for improving their overall well-being and enhancing their capacity to cope with unemployment-related stressors.

Limitations

- 1.The present study data has been collected from three universities i.e., Jadavpur University, the university of North Bengal and the University of Burdwan in the state where these women studied. We could not cover the other universities in West Bengal.
- 2.The present study could not cover large number of sample size. The result may not be generalised for all women.
- 3.The researcher could not study more than three independent variables and one dependent variable.

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