



Unemployment Anxiety among University Students in Bangladesh: A Study on Students of Development Studies, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University

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ABSTRACT

Unemployment anxiety refers to the fear and tension due to the possibility of future unemployment. The research tried to investigate core issues associated with unemployment anxiety among university students in Bangladesh. The research is conducted in a small scale, for this reason, students from a single department of a university have been chosen as respondents to find out realities of unemployment anxiety. The researcher believes that the realities are similar for rest of the university students in Bangladesh to a large extent. The research incorporated in depth interviews of students, academicians and practitioners in order to find out influencing factors behind unemployment anxiety, impact of anxiety on students and to suggest way forwards. The research has found that a large portion of the students are suffering from unemployment anxiety. Degree of anxiety is different for different students although. According to the findings highly competitive job market, lack of necessary skills of students, not knowing about future employment scopes and opportunities, inappropriate university environment, lack of career counseling facilities, peer pressure and lack of motivation are some of the major influencing factors behind unemployment anxiety. Sleeplessness, loss of appetite, tendency of avoiding social interaction and misbehavior with closed ones are observed as major impacts of unemployment anxiety among students. Academicians and practitioners suggested focusing on skill development, involving in extracurricular activities, career counseling from departments, etc as ways to deal with unemployment anxiety. University students are among the most valuable assets of Bangladesh. An anxiety free, peaceful state of mind is necessary for them to flourish up to their maximum potential.

Large scale research on this issue along with effective initiatives from university, society and state are necessary to save university student suffering from unemployment anxiety.

KEY WORDS: Unemployment, Anxiety, Stress, Skill development

I. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment has been an issue for Bangladesh for a long period time. Mismatch between demand and supply of labor force, lack of skilled manpower, limited job opportunity in formal job sector, lack of investment, limited scope for entrepreneurship development and so many reasons are often discussed as responsible for the unemployment issue. Tertiary educational institutes like universities and technical colleges play a vital role in providing quality work force for industries. Many universities and technical institutes are established by government and private sectors to serve the need for skilled manpower. Government and private sector invest huge amount of money to train and educate youths of the society so that they can transform into human asset for the nation. The problem is, a huge number of university graduates remain unemployed after years from their graduation. According to the research conducted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) published in 2019, 33.19% of the educated youth who has a bachelor degree are unemployed. The data shows how severe the unemployment situation is among university graduates. It indicates that the huge investment in tertiary education is not providing expected outcome. On the other side, traditionally, families of Bangladesh expect that their children to take financial responsibilities after their graduation. Expectation from university students is very high from both national and family



perspectives. Besides most of the students have their own career plan and goals to accomplish. Dealing with all these expectation must have an impact on the lives of students. According to literatures this kind of pressurized situation often creates anxiety among people. It is necessary to investigate what kind of anxiety these expectations are creating in their life. The findings will disclose the sufferings of students due unemployment anxiety and areas where correction is necessary to overcome the issue. To deeply investigate the issue, this research tries to find out core reasons behind stress and anxieties of students, kinds of impacts they have on the lives of students and possible solution to dissolve the issue. The research therefore incorporated interview regarding employability anxiety from university students. To conduct the research in a small scale, students from a single department of a university have been chosen for the research. The researcher suggests large scale research on this issue to better understand the problem and for better solutions. Inputs from academicians and practitioners have also been incorporated to prescribe solution for the existing problem of employability anxiety.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The research has three objectives

- I. To find out the factors influencing unemployment anxiety
- II. To see the impacts of unemployment anxiety on students
- III. To find out ways to mitigate students unemployment in Bangladesh

III. METHODOLOGY

The research is a qualitative one that means it tries to explore the meaning and understanding individuals perceive on any phenomenon. The researcher asked open ended questions to participants in order to get in depth explanation or description on any issue from them and analyzed the collected information based on logical ground, facts, and evidences. In order to conduct this research, the researcher interviewed twenty four students from Department of Development Studies, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University. Apart from that four academicians who are university teachers from different universities and four practitioners who are graduates of development studies and currently working at governmental and nongovernmental organizations were interviewed. That means a total of thirty two persons were interviewed for the research. The students were selected through cluster sampling because equal number of male and female students

was interviewed. The academicians and practitioners were selected through purposive sampling that means they were purposively selected according to the objectives of the research. The data collection tool was mainly telephone interview because of the lockdown situation due to COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, secondary data were collected from websites, journals, books, etc. Data analysis process included summarizing, describing and interpreting the data.

IV. DEFINING “UNEMPLOYMENT ANXIETY”

Unemployment can be defined as a situation where a person actively searching for employment but unable to find job. There are types of unemployment; cyclical unemployment arises when unemployment occurs due to recession of an economy, structural unemployment occurs when new technology eradicates employees from any organization, institutional unemployment on the other hand is a type of unemployment that arises due to government policies such as increase minimum wage of labors. Karl Marx argued that, unemployment is an obvious output of capitalism because capitalists require a large number of unemployed people in the market to keep wage minimum (*Unemployment* n.d.)

American Psychological Association defined anxiety as; “Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension; worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness or a rapid heartbeat.” (*Anxiety* n.d.)

According to the Mental Health Foundation of United Kingdom, “Anxiety is a type of fear usually associated with a perceived threat or something going wrong in the future, but it can also arise from something happening right now”. They also suggested that, everyone experience anxiety at some point of their life. A low level of anxiety is normal and it helps people by motivating them in accomplishing tasks. A high level of anxiety however creates serious mental health problems (*A guide to living with anxiety*, 2014).

From the above discussion “Unemployment Anxiety” can be described as a state of mind with fear and stress due to the possibility of remaining unemployed in the future. The above researches suggest that, low level of anxiety is normal and desirable as it helps people to



work for betterment but excessive anxiety is harmful for mental health.

V. LEVEL OF ANXIETY AMONG RESPONDENTS

The research incorporated interview of twenty four students. It is necessary to clarify that, this is not a scientific research to measure level of anxiety of students rather this research actually tried to measure level of anxiety from the perspective of students' expression, feelings and experiences. Among twenty four students, five students expressed that they never feel anything like unemployment anxiety. The reason of that can be, they are still students and have not experienced unemployment in real life. Rest of the nineteen students experienced unemployment anxiety at different situations in their life. The impact of unemployment anxiety however not similar for everyone, some suffered a lot more than the others, some students experienced visible symptoms of anxiety while for some student no visible symptoms were reported. Students, who came from economically solvent families, having working parents and having elder siblings who can take share of financial responsibilities for the families are found as less vulnerable to unemployment anxiety. On the hand students, who came from underprivileged families, brought up in rural and marginalized places of the country and student who are the only or eldest child of their parents are found more sufferer from unemployment anxiety.

VI. CAUSES OF ANXIETY AMONG STUDENTS

From the interviews, following reasons have been identified as causes of anxiety for the students

- **Competitive job market**

Almost all the students believe that the job market is becoming more competitive day by day in Bangladesh. Employers are asking for a lot more things as job requirements than they used to ask before. A commendable academic result often failing to provide employment, students at these days are involving in extracurricular and skill development activities to stay in the competition. After doing so many things and giving extra effort, they get frustrated when they see someone around them doing much more than they are doing in academic and extracurricular activities. Increasing demand for academic excellences and practical skills by job providers are creating enormous pressure on students' mind that keep them anxious and stressed.

- **Lack of specialized job sector**

Students opined that there is scarcity of specialized job for students of social sciences. According to them, students of engineering, agriculture, medical science, etc. have specialized job sectors, as a result, they can pursue their career in those specialized sectors or they can enter into general job sectors but for students of social sciences, number of specialized jobs are limited that makes students of social science more vulnerable than other branches in case of unemployment and this reality increases their unemployment anxiety.

- **Lack of extracurricular skills**

A significant number of students believe that they do not have all the skills necessary to get employed in a demanding job sector that provides quality incentives along with job security. This sense of inferiority increases unemployment anxiety among them. Students from poor families have to earn their living and educational expenses by doing part time jobs. They rarely get time to focus on skill development and extracurricular activities because of their busy schedule. They think they are lagging behind their batch mates and it creates stress and anxiety among those students.

- **Lack of information regarding scopes of the discipline**

From the interviews, it has been identified that most of the students do not have adequate information regarding the job market. Most of the students do not know much about the future scopes of the discipline they are currently studying. Because of not knowing about the opportunities, most of them have a narrow view regarding career options and they cannot think beyond that. For instance most of the students have chosen first class government job as their primary career goal but there are lots of good career alternatives like working with international organizations, multinational organization, research organizations, private financial institutions, etc. these options are ignored by most of the students because of lack of awareness and lack of information regarding those options. As most of the students are unaware about the career opportunities, they suffer from unemployment anxiety thinking that there are very less career opportunities for them.

- **Faulty environment of the university**

Almost all the students opined that the overall environment of the university is not favoring students in preparing for future career rather it is failing to provide some basic prerequisites as well as creates barrier for the students in pursuing their goals. Environment of the university has become a source of anxiety for the students. There are issues like student politics, teachers' politics, poor



accommodation system, insufficient infrastructure for lab, library, class room, etc., because of all these issues, students have to suffer a lot. A large portion of their potential is wasted because of the faulty environment of universities. Many of them join student politics and become irregular in studies as a result they fail to focus on career preparation and ended up being frustrated and stressed at one point. A large number of students start to take drugs because of frustration. Drugs are also available and affordable at university campus.

- **Lack of career counseling facilities in the university**

All of the students suggested that, an effective career counseling arrangement is needed for the students to guide them towards a better career. Students demanded that faculty members should play the role of career counselors for the students. According to them, in class rooms, there is no opportunity to discuss individual issues of students with faculty members; if a dedicated career counselor is appointed from faculty members then the students can easily interact with that person regarding their personal issues associated with career planning. Besides, all members of the faculty should take career counseling as their primary responsibility for the sake of the welfare of their students. Students argued that because of not having proper career counseling, they suffer due to indecisions and stresses.

- **Peer pressure**

Seventeen out of twenty four students stated that, they get pressurized from peer groups like friends, relatives, neighbors regarding employability issues. They expressed that, a number of their relatives, neighbors and friends discourage them saying “there is no fair selection in current job market, only people who have lobbying with influential people and have the ability to give bribe can manage job, for rest of the students, studying in universities is more like a waste of time”. This kind of statements from closed ones kills their enthusiasm. Apart from that, students admitted that, they are often compared with relatives who are doing better in studies and are successful in career, according to them, this kind of comparison and competition keep them stressed and anxious.

- **Financial responsibility**

Fifteen out of twenty four students stated that they have to take financial responsibilities of their families after graduation; this responsibility puts extra burden on them and increases level of anxiety. Specially, students from poor families, students who are the only child of their parents or eldest child among siblings are mostly victim of this harsh

reality. The overall socio economic condition plays a vital role here; traditionally parents wait for their children to grow up and to take financial responsibility of the family. Very few can manage this pressure at this early age and it increases level of anxiety for them.

- **Lack of motivation for becoming an entrepreneur**

A few students expressed their interest in entrepreneurship but according their opinion, it is very difficult to become an entrepreneur as there is lack of loan and training facilities for small entrepreneurs also people around them do not recognize small scale businesses as a good career option. People who are trying to establish a new business are often neglected by relatives and neighbors. Besides there exist high risk of losing capital and being a loan defaulter in entrepreneurship rather it is a safe option to search for a job, especially a government job and live a relaxed life. This behavior of the society towards entrepreneurs and narrow view on entrepreneurship discouraging young people to start their own business, as a result, competition for jobs in formal sector increases. Lack of motivation to be an entrepreneur and pressure to join in formal job sectors at the same time are hampering mental peace of students and increasing unemployment anxiety.

- **Having low CGPA or grade**

Few students alleged their low GPA (Grade Point Average) as an influencing factor of unemployment anxiety. According to them, it is a conventional thought that high CGPA benefits job seekers to a large extent in getting a good job. Students with low CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) feel they are out of the race already. Because of this conventional mind set, students lose their motivation in job preparation. Some students opined that, CGPA create discrimination among students as low GPA holders often neglected by class mates, faculties and surrounding people. Students with low GPA suffer from inferiority complex and think themselves less potential to have a good career. This traditional mind set and behavior increases anxiety about future career for the students.

- **Session jam**

A large number of students alleged session jam as one of the main reasons for employability anxiety. Session jam is a common feature of public universities in Bangladesh. Because of session jam, students cannot complete their degrees in due time as a result they get less time to apply for job opportunities. According to students, in Bangladesh, age limit to apply for government and non government jobs is thirty years but because of



session jam, it takes twenty six to twenty seven years of age for them to graduate from universities. Students opined that due to session jam, minimum two valuable years will be lost from their life. Students suffer from unemployment anxiety due to this session jam.

- **Academic loss due to COVID-19**

The world wide pandemic named COVID-19 has brought many new realities into the world. According to the students, they are the worst sufferer of COVID-19. Because of COVID-19, educational institutes of Bangladesh remained closed for more than a year. Students opined that, the online teaching system which was brought as a proxy system of in person teaching learning, failing to provide expected outcome. Most of the students cannot join online classes because of not having logistics like laptop, smart phone, internet facilities, etc. Students argued that, this academic loss due to COVID-19 will make them sufferer of session jam at the same time they are depriving from quality education and training necessary for future employment. The pandemic is influencing to increase employability anxiety among students.

VII. IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ANXIETY ON STUDENTS

From the interviews, following impacts of unemployment anxiety on students have been identified

- **Sleeplessness duo to stress**

Two out of twenty four students expressed that, they suffer from sleeplessness due to unemployment anxiety. Lack of sleep hampers their daily activities to a large extent. At the same time both of them expressed that, this sleeplessness issue is not a permanent or long term problem for them rather it stays for few days and everything becomes normal whenever they engage in any skill development or other productive activities.

- **Addiction to social media**

Four out of twenty four students expressed that whenever they become stressed thinking about their future, they use to scroll smart phone and try to observe the activity of other people, funny videos, etc. to get rid of stress. They expressed that, wasting time in social media and smart phones do not help them to get rid of stress but it wastes their time and they suffer from more stress and anxiety afterward.

- **Loss of appetite**

Two out of twenty four students reported that, they suffered from loss of appetite due to stress and anxiety about future career. A student stated that, she has experienced loss of appetite or lack of

hunger several times during the pandemic situation. Unemployment anxiety causing health issues for the students, the findings suggest.

- **Avoiding social interaction**

About half of the students expressed that they avoid social interaction especially with people who use to compare them with other students, say discouraging words regarding studies and career and kill their enthusiasm to do something new or creative. A student stated that avoiding social interaction has become a habit for him and stress and anxiety about future career was the most influential factor behind this habit.

- **Less concentration in studies**

A large portion of the students opined that employability anxiety decreases their motivation of study. Most of them think a good career or job is the ultimate destination of academic studies, if academic degrees cannot ensure a job, then there is no reason to spend so much time in studies. Unemployment anxiety is responsible to a large extent behind this mind set.

- **Physical and mental distance with family members**

A few students confessed that, because of unemployment anxiety, they use to avoid interaction with family members. Few students who live in student halls or dormitories do not wish to visit their home or family members to avoid questions related to studies or jobs.

- **Misbehavior with closed ones**

Two students confessed that, they conducted unnecessary misbehavior with their closed ones like friends, family members, etc., because of stress and anxiety. Employability anxiety is hampering their relationship with surrounded people.

VIII. WAYS TO ASSURE GREATER EMPLOYABILITY

Based on the interviews with academicians and practitioners, following initiatives are necessary to assure greater employment opportunity for students:

- **Focusing on skill development**

Academicians and practitioners suggested students to spend time on skill development activities. According to them, only good result or certificates are not enough in acquiring jobs considering the current competitive job markets. Students equipped with skills will get advantage in getting jobs. They suggested investing time on acquiring software skills, English language proficiency, communication skill, etc. for better opportunities.

- **Involving with extracurricular activities**



Extracurricular activities like debating, involving with student organizations, participating in cultural programs, etc help students to boost their confidence and can help them to get rid of all sorts of negativity, stress and anxiety. Practitioners and academicians suggested students to involve with extracurricular activities from the very beginning of their journey with universities.

- **Career counseling from department**

Both students and practitioners suggested initiating career counseling seriously from the departments or institutes. Career counseling is amongst the primary responsibilities of faculty members also. A student should be guided by the faculties so that he or she can decide the best career path among many options, can be informed about scopes, opportunities and prerequisites for any career. By this way, a strong bonding with faculties and department can be established that will help students get rid of stress and anxiety and it will protect them from suffering silently.

- **Making academic syllabus more job oriented**

Practitioners from their personal experience, opined that academic syllabuses are often found less job oriented, a large portion of the learning from class rooms are not job oriented that means those learning do not help them much in future career. Therefore they suggested to revise academic syllabus and incorporate job oriented skills and learning for better employment opportunity.

- **Practical training for students**

Academicians and practitioners stressed upon practical training for making students better prepared for the job market. According to them, students should get the opportunity to participate in field works, field visits and trainings to see how things are done in reality. The experience from practical training will help them to reshape their understandings on academic issues.

- **Industry, institution linkage**

Practitioners stressed that there is very little connection between industries and educational institutions and this is one the main reasons behind unemployment of university graduates. Lack of connection with industries is causing universities remain unaware about the demand of current job market. The employers do not know what kind products are being produced by different universities, therefore a mismatch between demand and supply is happening in the job market. To solve this issue, more collaborative works are required between universities and industries. Providing internship opportunities for university students, training facilities for professionals, organizing job

fairs in university campuses, etc can be done to overcome the gaps.

- **Focusing on entrepreneurship development**

Academicians and practitioners suggested students to develop entrepreneurship. According to them, it is impossible to absorb all the university students in formal job sectors. Through entrepreneurship development, students can make their living as well as can help the unemployed population by providing jobs. In this way entrepreneurs can better serve the society than their service holder friends. There is a lot to do from the government also; easy loan for small and medium entrepreneurs and business friendly environment is needed according to the respondents.

- **Getting rid of the craze for government job**

Practitioners and academicians suggested students to get rid of government job craze, according to them there are so many good opportunities in private sector. Private sector can give rapid growth and financial stability to an employee who has skill and dedication. All the graduates should not compete for government jobs those are very few in numbers rather they should look for opportunities in private and nongovernmental organization, suggested by the experts.

- **Studying abroad as a career alternative**

Practitioners suggested students to look for opportunities in abroad. According to them graduates who have interest in research may apply foreign universities for higher studies. Studying abroad may not be a perfect alternative of jobs but it will help the graduates settle in foreign countries afterwards or they can come back home with a foreign degree and can avail better opportunities. In this way, level of unemployment can be reduced to an extent.

IX. CONCLUSION

Bangladesh is enjoying demographic dividend that means most of its population are youth and among them, a large portion of intelligent, potential and capable youth get themselves admitted into universities. The future Bangladesh will build upon the contribution of those youth. Education in public universities is very inexpensive in Bangladesh because of the subsidy provided by the government. The nation is investing a lot on their health, education, etc. based on the expectation that, they will pay back a lot more to the nation after graduating from universities. Because of unemployment, the nation is depriving from the service of its youth and heavy investment on their



education is wasted. To reap the best possible benefit of demographic dividend and to provide opportunity to all the youth, unemployment issue should be taken under serious consideration. Job creation in public and private sector is necessary. Entrepreneurship development should be encouraged. University environment and culture should be students friendly. Students should be able to flourish their potentials in universities without any anxiety and stress. A peaceful state of mind of the students will ensure reaping best benefit from them in near future. More research works are required on this field to explore the problems associated with unemployment anxiety and to find out ways to solve them. Every student is an asset of our nation; we should provide them best possible facilities to get best service from them in near future.

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