

BRIDGING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG GRADUATES SEEKING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT:

In the twenty-first century, the shift from postsecondary education to fulfilling work has become a crucial concern. While academic knowledge is the primary focus of universities and colleges, businesses are increasingly expecting graduates to exhibit job-ready abilities including problem-solving, communication, digital literacy, adaptability, and teamwork. This study explores the opportunities and problems of bridging the gap between higher education and employment. A mixed-method research methodology was used, integrating qualitative information from instructors and employers with quantitative surveys of final-year students. The results show that even though graduates have solid theoretical underpinnings, gaps in real-world experience, digital proficiency, and soft skills continue to be major obstacles to workforce readiness. Inadequate career counseling services and a lack of industry-academia partnership were also noted as systemic issues. The paper suggests creating career counseling cells, institutionalizing internships, incorporating employability skill modules into higher education courses, and enhancing collaborations between academics and business. By putting these strategies into practice, universities may better educate graduates for the ever-changing demands of the labor market, improving both individual career prospects and the growth of the national economy.

Keywords: Higher education, employability skills, workforce readiness, industry-academia collaboration, career development

INTRODUCTION

The transition from academic life to professional employment is a crucial phase in every graduate's journey. In today's competitive job market, graduates face numerous challenges, including skill mismatches, high competition, and financial pressures.

These challenges often lead to heightened stress levels, affecting their mental and emotional well-being. Stress, if not managed effectively, can result in anxiety, decreased self-confidence, and poor decision-making in career-related matters. This study aims to explore the various stressors affecting graduates in their job search journey and the coping mechanisms they adopt. It specifically focuses on commerce graduates from MIT Pune, analysing the relationship between career uncertainty and stress levels. By understanding these factors, this research aims to provide insights into effective stress management strategies that can help graduates navigate their transition more smoothly.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is based on three key dimensions:

1. Career-Related Stressors: These include job market competition, financial insecurity, lack of relevant experience, and societal expectations.
 2. Psychological and Physiological Impact of Stress: Stress can lead to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and reduced motivation, affecting overall well-being.
 3. Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems: Strategies such as skill enhancement, counselling, peer and family support, and mindfulness practices play a crucial role in managing stress effectively.
- These concepts are helpful to analyse the causes, effects, and coping strategies associated with career-related stress among graduates.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the key stressors affecting commerce graduates seeking career opportunities.
2. To assess the impact of job-search-related stress on graduates' mental and physical well-being.
3. To explore the coping mechanisms adopted by graduates to manage career-related stress.
4. To evaluate the role of educational institutions, family, and mentors in supporting graduates during their job search.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive research design, focusing on understanding stress factors and coping mechanisms among commerce graduates.

SAMPLE SELECTION

- Population: Graduated students from MIT Pune (Commerce Section).
- Sample Size: 30 graduates.
- Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling method was used for the selection of graduates actively seeking job opportunities.

DATA COLLECTION

- Primary Data: Collected through a structured questionnaire with 20 questions.
- Secondary Data: Research papers, articles, and reports on stress management and graduate employment trends.

DATA ANALYSIS

- The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, frequency distribution).
- Responses on stress levels and coping mechanisms will be examined using 5 Point Likert Scale analysis.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study is limited to 30 commerce graduates from MIT Pune, which may not represent all graduates.
2. Subjective responses in the questionnaire may introduce bias in the findings.
3. The study focuses only on career-related stress and does not account for other personal stressors.
4. External factors like economic downturns or industry-specific trends are not deeply analysed.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This part deals with the data analysis and interpretation. To bridge the gap between education and employment, universities must enhance skill development programs, provide better mental health support, and create strong industry linkages to ease the transition for graduates. By addressing these issues, students can navigate career uncertainties with confidence, ultimately improving their overall well-being and job prospects. The data have been analysed by using percentage, tables and 5 Point Likert Scale.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Sr.	Variable	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender - Male	18	60%
2	Gender - Female	12	40%
3	Age Group - 20-22 years	15	50%
4	Age Group - 23-25 years	10	33.3%
5	Age Group - Above 25 years	5	16.7%
6	Employment Status - Employed	10	33.3%
7	Employment Status - Unemployed	20	66.7%
8	Job Search Duration (Unemployed only) - Less than 3 months	5	25%
9	Job Search Duration (Unemployed only) - 3-6 months	8	40%
10	Job Search Duration (Unemployed only) - More than 6 months	7	35%

Source: Primary Data

The data in Table 1 exhibits the demographic information of the respondents. It is found that 60 % respondents are male and 40 % are female. Most graduates that is 50 % are between 20 to 22 years old, which is indicating that they are fresh graduates. It is found that 66.70 % respondents are still unemployed and 35 % are searching job for more than 6 months. It is indicating that the job searching respondents are facing challenges while getting the jobs.

Table 2: Career-Related Stress Factors

Here is the tabular representation of the Likert Scale survey data

Sr.	Statement	Stat.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I feel stressed about finding a suitable job.	F	10	12	5	3	0
		S	33.3%	40%	16.7%	10%	0%
2	Job market competition increases my anxiety.	F	12	11	4	3	0
		S	40%	36.7%	13.3%	10%	0%
3	I worry about my lack of experience.	F	15	10	3	2	0
		S	50%	33.3%	10%	6.7%	0%
4	Financial pressure adds to my stress.	F	14	9	4	3	0
		S	46.7%	30%	13.3%	10%	0%

Source: Primary Data

Abbreviations – F – Frequency, S – Statistics

The data in Table 2 indicates the career related stress factors. It is found from the study that 73.3 % of respondents feel stressed about finding a job, highlighting the need for career counselling and stress management strategies. It is found that 76.7 % respondents agree that job market competition increases their anxiety, it means employability skills need to be enhanced. 83.3 % respondents worry about a lack of experience, which is indicating a gap between academia and industry expectations. 76.7 % respondents feels the financial pressure, which is making financial literacy and part time job opportunities important considerations.

Table 3: Psychological and Physiological Impact of Stress

Sr.	Symptoms of Stress Due to Job Search	Yes (N=30)	No (N=30)	Percentage Yes (%)	Percentage No (%)
1	Sleep disturbances	21	9	70%	30%
2	Demotivation and hopelessness	18	12	60%	40%
3	Physical health issues (headache, fatigue)	16	14	53.3%	46.7%
4	Difficulty concentrating	19	11	63.3%	36.7%
5	Affects relationships with family/friends	14	16	46.7%	53.3%

Source: Primary Data

The data in Table 3 exhibits psychological and physiological impact of stress on the respondents. It is found that 70 % of respondents suffer from sleep disturbances, which is showing the strong impact of career related stress on mental health. 60 % feel demotivated, which is indicating the need for motivational workshops or mentorship programs. It is found that 53.3 % respondents experienced physical symptoms like headaches and fatigue, which may lead to long term health concerns. 63.3 % respondents are struggling to concentrate which affects their ability to prepare for job applications and skill building.

Table 4: Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Graduates

Sr.	Coping Mechanisms	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1	Exercise	8	26.7%
2	Meditation	5	16.7%
3	Talking to family/friends	15	50%
4	Seeking professional counselling	4	13.3%
5	Ignoring stress	7	23.3%

Source: Primary Data

The data in Table 4 exhibits coping mechanisms adopted by graduates. It is found from the data that 50 % respondents talk with their family or friends for social support to release the stress. It is found that 26.7 % respondents engaging the exercise activity for their physical well-being. 23.3 % respondents ignore the stress instead of actively managing the stress, it may lead to long term psychological effects. Only 13.3 % respondents seek for the professional counselling to recover the mental health.

Table 5: Support from Educational Institutions and Career Programs

Here is the table for coping mechanisms:

Sr.	Coping Mechanisms	Frequency (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1	Exercise	8	26.7%
2	Meditation	5	16.7%
3	Talking to family/friends	15	50%
4	Seeking professional counselling	4	13.3%
5	Ignoring stress	7	23.3%

Source: Primary Data

The data in Table 5 exhibits support from Educational Institutions and Career Programs to the respondents. It is found from the data that 46.7 % respondents feel that their college career counselling services are inadequate. 73.3 % respondents believed that skill development programmes helps to reduce the stress, which is emphasizing the importance of internship and practical training. 83.3 % respondents agreed that universities should implement stress management programs. Suggesting an urgent need for mental health support in educational institutions.

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

FINDINGS

Based on the estimated tables and analysis, the key findings of the study on stress management among graduates seeking career opportunities are:

1.1 Career-Related Stress Factors

- 73.3% of respondents feel stressed about finding a suitable job.
- 76.7% experience anxiety due to job market competition.
- 83.3% worry about their lack of experience, indicating a skills gap.
- 76.7% face financial stress, adding pressure to secure a job quickly.

1.2 Psychological and Physiological Impact of Stress

- 70% of graduates suffer from sleep disturbances due to job search stress.
- 60% feel demotivated and hopeless, affecting their confidence.
- 53.3% experience physical symptoms like headaches and fatigue.
- 63.3% struggle with concentration, making job preparation difficult.
- 46.7% report that stress affects their relationships with family and friends.

1.3 Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Graduates

- 50% rely on family and friends for emotional support.
- 26.7% engage in exercise, and 16.7% practice meditation for stress relief.
- 23.3% ignore stress rather than managing it effectively.
- Only 13.3% seek professional counselling, indicating a lack of awareness or accessibility to mental health services.

1.4 Role of Educational Institutions in Stress Management

- 46.7% believe their college career counselling services are inadequate.
- 73.3% agree that skill development programs help reduce stress.
- 83.3% strongly support the introduction of stress management programs in universities.

SUGGESTIONS

Enhancing Career Readiness

- Colleges should strengthen career counselling services by offering personalized job search guidance, resume-building workshops, and mock interviews.
- Industry-academia collaborations should be promoted to provide internships and hands-on experience, reducing graduates' anxiety about lack of experience.
- Skill development programs (such as certifications in finance, marketing, and digital tools) should be integrated into the curriculum to boost employability.

Stress Management Initiatives

- Universities should introduce stress management workshops that focus on mindfulness, meditation, and time management to help students handle job-related stress.
- Psychological counselling should be made accessible, encouraging students to seek professional help rather than ignoring stress.

Financial Support and Awareness

- Financial literacy programs should be introduced to help students manage job-search-related expenses and reduce financial stress.
- Colleges can collaborate with industries to provide part-time work opportunities for students to ease their financial burdens while gaining experience.

Encouraging Positive Coping Strategies

- Students should be encouraged to engage in physical activities, yoga, and relaxation techniques as effective stress management strategies.
- Social support networks, peer mentoring, and alumni interactions should be promoted to help graduates feel less isolated in their job search journey.

CONCLUSION

The transition from education to employment is a challenging phase for graduates, often leading to significant stress due to career uncertainty, job competition, and financial pressures. The findings indicate that most graduates experience high levels of anxiety, sleep disturbances, and demotivation, affecting both their psychological and physical well-being. Although some students adopt coping mechanisms like exercise and family support, many still ignore stress or fail to seek professional counselling. Additionally, educational institutions' career guidance services are perceived as inadequate, emphasizing the need for structured career readiness programs.

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