
COPING MECHANISM AMONG UNEMPLOYED GRADUATES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically investigated the effect of coping mechanisms on unemployed graduates in Anambra State. The study was guided by three research questions. A descriptive survey design was adopted with a population of 18,450 unemployed graduates registered with Anambra State job centers and NYSC pass-outs in the 2023/2024 session. A sample of 400 respondents was drawn using multi-stage sampling across the three senatorial zones. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Coping Mechanism and Unemployed Graduates Questionnaire (CMUGQ)” with a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions with a 2.50 decision benchmark. Findings revealed that unemployed graduates in Anambra State adopt both adaptive coping mechanisms such as active planning, religiosity, social support, and acceptance, and maladaptive mechanisms including substance use, self-blame, and behavioral disengagement. Results further showed that adaptive coping significantly enhanced psychological wellbeing, resilience, and career readiness, while maladaptive coping increased anxiety, depression, and involvement in social vices. The study concluded that prolonged unemployment pushes graduates toward negative coping patterns. It was recommended that the Anambra State government should establish graduate empowerment schemes, structured mentorship programs, trauma-informed career counseling, and public-private job creation initiatives to strengthen adaptive coping and reduce negative outcomes among unemployed graduates.

KEYWORDS: Coping Mechanism, Unemployed Graduates, Unemployment, Under-employment.

INTRODUCTION

Employment is an important vehicle for the transformation of individuals and societies at large. Gainful employment contributes to the development of skilled manpower around the globe and it is more of an enduring method in which people apply knowledge, skills, and values necessary for personal and national growth. University education is a process that fosters the intellectual, moral, and social development of individuals, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to economic and political stability. University education develops human endowments and aims at the development of the entire potential of an individual through teaching, research, and community service. Higher education cultivates human potential and seeks to holistically develop an individual's capacity through formal lectures, practical engagements, and extracurricular activities. This is in line with Offor and Onunkwo (2021) assertion that university education is a transformative force that shapes individuals' attitudes, skills, values, and interests toward national development. These transformative changes foster cognitive, psychomotor, and affective growth, essential for socio-economic advancement and can be acquired through formal instruction in universities and continuous learning beyond the classroom. Consequently, higher education globally is seen as an instrument par excellence for sustainable development.

Nigeria, having accepted university education as the instrument par excellence for national development, went about establishing public and private universities in order to give citizens more opportunity to acquire quality tertiary education with the aim of producing graduates with suitable knowledge that will create room for innovation, employment, and nation-building in the State. Offiah and Chikeluba (2025) posited that educated graduates possess exceptional critical thinking skills, adeptness in synthesizing information from diverse sources, and effective communication. They also excel in analytical techniques, utilizing verified data for precise decisions, and demonstrate leadership skills in coordinating and supervising group actions. Furthermore, they can identify societal problems, develop innovative solutions, and work collaboratively or independently to promote progress. To harness these skills, the government is expected to establish a conducive environment that enables graduates to apply their expertise effectively, whether in employment or entrepreneurship. Government is expected to take care of the welfare of graduates by creating an enabling environment where they can function but the irony is that several governments have failed to create such environment. Hence, prolonged unemployment becomes inevitable after graduation because of absence of enabling environment.

Unemployment in many parts of the world is alarming. According to Adeleke et al. (2024), unemployment refers to a socio-economic condition in which individuals who are capable and willing to work are unable to secure gainful employment due to structural, economic, or policy-related factors. Similarly, Offiah and Chikeluba (2025) defined unemployment as sustained joblessness among the labor force, resulting in loss of income, diminished self-worth, and increased social pressure. Essentially, unemployment describes a state of economic instability or lack of opportunity that undermines normal functioning of individuals. In this context, any region that experiences repeated graduate turnout without corresponding job creation may be considered economically insecure during that specific period. Graduate unemployment dates back to the early post-independence era in Nigeria. As universities expanded access to higher education, people faced challenges in aligning academic output with labor market demands. The early 2000s saw the emergence of graduate unemployment as a social and economic issue in South Eastern Nigeria. According to Babatunde et al. (2021), the 2005 surge in private university establishment marked a turning point in graduate output, particularly in states like Anambra, Imo, and Enugu. This was largely due to rapid expansion of tertiary institutions, mismatch of curriculum with industry needs, and structural weaknesses in the economy. In the post-2010 period, graduate unemployment intensified but resistance by youth through entrepreneurship continued. The 2016 economic recession and subsequent COVID-19 disruptions brought global attention to the impact of unemployment on graduate wellbeing. However, these events also led to increased psychological distress, particularly in urban communities and vulnerable populations. The 2015 to 2023 period saw a significant increase in unemployed graduates, particularly in the South East and South South. Underemployment rates in some communities rose by as high as 55% during this period following repeated economic shocks and limited industrial growth. In Anambra State, Offor and Onunkwo (2021) posited that the history of graduate unemployment is closely tied to the region's socio-economic and political development. The 2014 to 2024 wave of unemployment saw a significant increase in social vices, particularly among graduates. This was largely due to the region's persistent job scarcity, limited startup capital, and the lack of consistent government intervention in job creation.

In recent years, unemployment has continued to be a major concern globally. Psychological distress among jobless youths remains high in many countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Asia, and Latin America. Graduate unemployment is a pressing socio-economic issue with far-reaching psychological effects that impact nearly every state and individual, either directly or indirectly. According to Tibi (2023), a staggering number of

graduates remain unemployed or underemployed due to economic downturn and skill mismatch. Furthermore, thousands of graduates across Anambra State face prolonged joblessness each year due to limited industrial capacity and psychological frustration that could have been avoided. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported in its 2023 Labor Force Statistics that the situation has deteriorated in states with high graduate output and weak industrial capacity. In Nigeria, the rate of graduate unemployment stands at 53%, affecting around 2.6 million graduates, according to official statistics from the NBS. However, this figure excludes an additional 800,000 graduates unaccounted for in the 2024 data from the Ministry of Labour and Employment. This translates to approximately 60% of Nigeria's graduates in the South East being at risk of negative coping outcomes.

Ideally, graduates in Anambra State should be able to seamlessly transition into the labor market, utilizing their skills and academic training to secure meaningful employment. This, in turn, would enable them to achieve financial stability, contribute to household income, and support state economic growth. However, the current situation paints a starkly different picture. In Anambra State, the unemployment crisis is equally dire. The state's large graduate population, coupled with a lack of adequate job creation, has resulted in an estimated productivity loss gap of over 45% for key sectors. This has led to widespread psychological setbacks among graduates, many of whom feel forced to abandon their career aspirations or resort to unsafe alternatives like cybercrime and irregular migration for survival. The Anambra State government has implemented various initiatives to tackle the pressing issue of graduate unemployment and its psychological impact, which has been a major concern in the region. According to Nwosu and Okeke (2020), the government has implemented several initiatives to address unemployment in Anambra State. These include the Anambra Small Business Agency (ASBA) loans, One-Youth-One-Skill program, State Graduate Internship Scheme, and N-Power collaborations. Additionally, the government has provided entrepreneurship training and startup grants, as well as public-private partnership programs for job creation. Despite these efforts, graduate unemployment remains a significant challenge in Anambra State.

The relationship between coping mechanism and graduate unemployment has garnered significant attention from scholars and policymakers. Coping mechanism has been defined in various ways by scholars and researchers. According to Lazarus and Folkman (2020), coping mechanism is any cognitive or behavioral effort used by individuals to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as stressful and exceed personal resources. In a broader sense, coping mechanism can be understood as any adaptive or maladaptive

strategy that reflects psychological adjustment and is influenced by environmental factors. Coping mechanism is therefore any pattern of response that is evaluated by psychological standards and is affected by social support, personality, or other intervention. Stakeholders in recent years because unemployment often serves as a catalyst for psychological decline. In Anambra State, maladaptive coping has become a pressing concern, garnering unprecedented attention. The area is witnessing an alarming rise in substance use, depression, extended joblessness, and involvement in social vices, particularly prevalent in urban centers like Onitsha, Awka, Nnewi, and different parts of Ogbaru and Idemili. According to Nwosu and Okeke (2021), Anambra State is plagued by various forms of negative coping, including increased crime, low self-esteem, drug abuse, and reduced civic engagement linked to graduate unemployment. Social media reports often reveal that many affected graduates are from institutions with poor career support systems. This correlation suggests that the escalating psychological decline in the region can be attributed to the pervasive issue of unemployment. The repeated cases of depression and suicide among jobless graduates in the State, which have resulted in the loss of human capital among youths and innocent families, serve as a stark indication that these psychological setbacks are likely perpetuated by prolonged unemployment and unstable environments, rather than unavoidable personal deficiencies. Based on the foregoing, the researcher was motivated to study the effect of coping mechanism on unemployed graduates in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the types of coping mechanisms adopted by unemployed graduates in Anambra State?
2. What are the effects of coping mechanisms on unemployed graduates in Anambra State?
3. What are the strategies for promoting adaptive coping mechanisms among unemployed graduates in Anambra State?

Literature Review

The review of related literature is structured based on the following subheadings: Coping Mechanism, Unemployment, Theoretical Framework, Factors Responsible for the Choice of Coping Mechanism Among Unemployed Graduates, Types of Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Unemployed Graduates, and Effects of Coping Mechanism on Unemployed Graduates.

Coping Mechanism

Coping mechanism is a pervasive and complex phenomenon that influences millions of individuals worldwide. Lazarus and Folkman (2020) notes that coping mechanism is a major psychological strategy facing unemployed persons, with far-reaching effects for mental health, society, and individual well-being. In a broader sense, coping mechanism encompasses not only those who are actively managing stress but also those who are overwhelmed and have given up on normal activities due to prolonged joblessness (Okeke, 2022). Okeke (2022) argues that the lack of adaptive coping skills among graduates in South Eastern Nigeria is a major concern, with many youths feeling confused, fearful, and disconnected from career services. Coping mechanism can also be defined as a state of cognitive and behavioral adjustment, where individuals are pressured, traumatized, and unable to make decisions about employment (Nwosu, 2021). According to Nwosu (2021), coping mechanism is a utilization of personal resources, where individuals are unable to contribute to productivity and community development due to lack of access to supportive environments.

Furthermore, coping mechanism can be seen as a multidimensional issue, encompassing not only psychological but also social and economic dimensions (Umeh & Eze, 2021). Umeh and Eze (2021) note that coping mechanism has far-reaching effects for communities, including involvement in social vices, inequality in life outcomes, and social exclusion. In addition, coping mechanism can be defined as a mismatch between the stress demands of unemployment and the capacity of personal resilience (Okonkwo, 2019). Okonkwo (2019) argues that the lack of relevant career guidance and early intervention systems is a major barrier to wellbeing for graduates in Anambra State. Coping mechanism can also be seen as a consequence of structural issues, including poverty, inequality, and lack of access to employment and good governance (Mensah, 2022). Mensah (2022) notes that maladaptive coping is a symptom of deeper structural issues in Nigeria, including youth unemployment, weak institutions, and lack of access to quality job opportunities. Moreover, coping mechanism can be defined as an activation of behavior, where individuals are able to manage unemployment stress due to availability of social support and personal beliefs (Suleiman, 2021). Suleiman (2021) notes that coping mechanism is a major challenge facing Nigeria, with far-reaching effects for labor systems, society, and individual families. Coping mechanism according to Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (2018) could be defined as the process by which individuals use cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing but have not yet been resolved due to

systemic weaknesses. Similarly, World Health Organization (WHO) (2023) posited that coping mechanism is defined as organized, persistent, personally motivated responses by individuals seeking to reduce psychological distress, leading to variation in public behavior including employment seeking. The term coping mechanism therefore denotes a condition of psychological adjustment or distress among populations. In other words, any region that experiences repeated graduate unemployment, economic pressure, or social frustration but fails to restore normalcy may be considered as experiencing a crisis of coping for that concerned period.

Unemployment

Unemployment represents a critical indicator that affects millions of graduates globally. Okafor and Nnadi (2021) notes that unemployment is a major concern facing Nigeria, with far-reaching effects for the economy, society, and individual households. In a broader sense, unemployment encompasses not only those who are actively job-seeking but also those who are discouraged and remain underemployed due to economic disruptions (Adebayo, 2023). Adebayo (2023) argues that the persistence of graduate unemployment in Anambra State is a major concern, with many youths feeling vulnerable, burdened, and disconnected from labor market services. Unemployment can also be defined as a state of joblessness, where individuals demonstrate skills and competencies but lack opportunities for continuous engagement, wages, and career growth (Bandura, 2018). According to Bandura (2018), unemployment reflects a non-utilization of human potential, where graduates are unable to achieve economic outcomes due to non-conducive employment environments. Furthermore, unemployment can be seen as a multidimensional issue, encompassing not only economic but also psychological and social dimensions (Eze & Uche, 2021). Eze and Uche (2021) note that unemployment has far-reaching effects for populations, including reduced self-esteem, economic dependency, and national underdevelopment. In addition, unemployment can be defined as a mismatch between labor market supply and graduate output (Bloom, 2007). Bloom (2007) argues that the lack of sufficient job creation is a major driver of graduate idleness in developing economies. Unemployment can also be seen as a consequence of structural issues, including poor infrastructure, inequality, and lack of access to capital and industrial growth (Adeyemi, 2022). Adeyemi (2022) notes that graduate unemployment is a symptom of deeper structural issues in Nigeria, including policy inconsistency, corruption, and lack of access to quality vocational training. Moreover, unemployment can be defined as a failure of the economic environment, where individuals and institutions are unable to meet

employment standards due to lack of stability (Hirschi et al., 2014). Hirschi et al. (2014) notes that unemployment is a major challenge facing Nigeria, with far-reaching effects for national competitiveness and individual survival. Unemployment according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2023) could be defined as the measurable condition of individuals within the labor force who are willing and able to work but are not engaged in any income-generating activity due to external constraints. Similarly, International Labour Organization (ILO) (2022) posited that unemployment in the context of economic downturn is defined as job-seeking rates, underemployment rates, and labor force participation that are underutilized due to structural gaps. The term unemployment therefore denotes a condition of economic inactivity or decline among graduates. In other words, any cohort that is eligible for normal labor market entry but fails to achieve expected employment outcomes may be considered as experiencing graduate unemployment for that concerned period.

Theoretical Framework

Stress and Coping Theory

The Stress and Coping Theory, propounded by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, posits that stress is a result of the interaction between environmental demands and perceived personal resources in relation to goal attainment. According to Lazarus, the Stress and Coping Theory occurs when there is a gap between job expectations and employment realities, leading to a sense of stress or strain among individuals and groups. This theory suggests that when graduates believe they are deprived of employment opportunities, they are more likely to appraise the situation as threatening and adopt coping strategies. Lazarus argued that coping is often the result of prolonged unemployment, perceived marginalization, and lack of government responsiveness, which can lead to the rejection of formal job-seeking channels. In areas where unemployment is prevalent, Lazarus contended that maladaptive coping tends to be higher, as individuals are more likely to engage in alternative identity groups. The theory also suggests that coping patterns can be perpetuated across generations, as children growing up in jobless households are more likely to adopt avoidance behaviors and values. Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory has been influential in shaping psychological thought and has been used to explain the rise of mental health issues in many communities. While the theory has undergone various critiques and revisions, its core idea that appraisal of unemployment can contribute to coping behavior remains a fundamental concept in the field of health psychology.

The Stress and Coping Theory has significant effects for understanding the role of coping mechanism on unemployed graduates in Anambra State. According to this theory, the high levels of joblessness in the area can lead to collective stress, characterized by a breakdown of career aspiration and community stability. This can result in a sense of disconnection and disorientation among graduates, making them more susceptible to engaging in maladaptive coping, including social withdrawal. As graduates in Anambra State struggle to access stable employment, they may become increasingly confused and disillusioned with the labor market systems in place. This can lead to a sense of hopelessness and fear, which can manifest in increased depression, extended years of idleness, and other forms of psychological decline. Furthermore, the lack of employment progress can also lead to the formation of frustrated subcultures, where graduates may adopt negative values and behaviors as a way to cope with their situation.

Social Support Theory

Cohen and Wills' Social Support Theory, introduced in 1985, offers a compelling explanation for the origins of human adjustment, including wellbeing outcomes. Cohen and Wills posit that individuals in society are exposed to social systems such as family, peers, community networks, institutional support, and cultural norms. However, the availability of these systems is not equally distributed among all regions. This disparity between supported and unsupported systems creates a sense of risk or protection, which can lead individuals to adopt adaptive or maladaptive coping. Cohen and Wills argue that individuals may respond to unemployment stress in various ways, including seeking help, resilience, or disengagement. Family support involves direct financial and emotional assistance, while peer support involves shared information about opportunities. Institutional support involves government policy and programs, while cultural support involves societal attitudes toward joblessness. Cohen and Wills' Social Support Theory suggests that maladaptive coping is more likely to occur when individuals feel that their surrounding systems are unable to provide assistance and encouragement, leading them to seek alternative, often negative, means to achieve relief. Cohen and Wills' Social Support Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the socioeconomic effects of coping mechanisms on unemployed graduates in Anambra State. According to the theory, the high levels of social disconnection in the area create a breakdown across multiple support systems among graduates, who feel that they are unable to achieve financial security, such as stable income and career growth, through normal job-seeking processes. As a result, some graduates may turn to cybercrime or informal street

trading as a way to adapt and find alternative means to achieve livelihoods. This can manifest in various forms of social neglect, such as irregular job search, low motivation, and other forms of disengagement. The systemic breakdown caused by unemployment can also lead to feelings of doubt and isolation, which can further exacerbate the likelihood of engaging in negative coping. Furthermore, the lack of system stability in Anambra State can also lead to a sense of career disengagement, where graduates abandon formal job-seeking means, leading to a disconnection from the labor market and increased likelihood of experiencing long-term underachievement.

Learned Helplessness Theory

Martin Seligman's Learned Helplessness Theory, propounded in 1975, posits that behavior is a result of the dynamic interaction of personal experiences, environmental outcomes, and perceived control in social contexts. According to Seligman, learned helplessness occurs when there is repeated exposure to uncontrollable events, leading to a sense of passivity and outcome expectation among individuals. This theory suggests that when graduates repeatedly face job rejections or lack of opportunities, they are more likely to stop job-seeking behavior. Seligman argued that learned helplessness is often the result of attributional style, lack of reinforcement, and vicarious experience, which can lead to the adoption of passive or avoidant norms and values. In areas where unemployment is chronic, Seligman contended that motivation to work tends to be lower, as individuals are more likely to believe that effort is futile. The theory also suggests that low job-seeking self-efficacy can be perpetuated across generations, as children growing up in jobless communities are more likely to adopt defeatist behaviors and values toward employment. Seligman's Learned Helplessness Theory has been influential in shaping behavioral thought and has been used to explain the variation in labor market participation in many settings. While the theory has undergone various critiques and revisions, its core idea that perceived lack of control can contribute to passive behavior remains a fundamental concept in the field of psychology.

The Learned Helplessness Theory has significant effects for understanding the relationship between coping mechanism and unemployed graduates. According to this theory, the high levels of repeated failure in communities can lead to low job-seeking self-efficacy, characterized by a breakdown of confidence and positive employment modeling. This can result in a sense of disconnection and powerlessness among graduates, making them more susceptible to avoiding interviews, applications, and skill acquisition programs. As graduates in Anambra State struggle to find credible employment assurances, they may become

increasingly anxious and skeptical of the labor market systems in place. This can lead to a sense of helplessness and avoidance, which can manifest in increased idleness and other forms of economic delay. Furthermore, the lack of positive modeling can also lead to the formation of negative labor subcultures, where graduates may adopt dependency-based values and behaviors as a way to cope with uncertainty.

The Factors Responsible for the Choice of Coping Mechanism Among Unemployed Graduates

The factors responsible for the choice of coping mechanism among unemployed graduates in Anambra State vary; coping choices have been linked to personality traits and structural changes in the economy. According to Nwankwo, Okeke, and Obi (2023), the 2016 economic recession led to a significant increase in maladaptive coping nationwide, including in Anambra State. The crisis resulted in widespread frustration, reduced job openings, and a decline in formal sector activities, making it difficult for graduates to secure consistent employment. In Anambra State, the issue of coping-related outcomes has been further complicated by the country's labor market system. Umeh and Eze (2022) noted that the Nigerian labor market system is often criticized for being saturated and not skills-based, leaving graduates unprepared for the realities of working in a competitive economy. This mismatch between graduate skills and industry needs has led to a surplus of graduates with certificates that are not demanded. The lack of career counseling and mindset among universities is another significant factor contributing to maladaptive coping in Anambra State. Azogu (2020) argued that many universities are not equipped with the skills and knowledge to conduct employability training, leading to a reliance on theoretical knowledge. This is particularly concerning in Anambra State, where the informal sector is a significant source of graduate survival. Government policies and distrust have also played a role in perpetuating negative coping in Anambra State. Government policies often favor the interests of a few sectors, leading to a lack of funding for job creation programs. Distrust also hinders the creation of functional empowerment schemes, as funds meant for training and startup grants are often misappropriated. According to Chukwu and Madu (2021), distrust in Nigeria leads to reduced government spending on youth employment programs.

Types of Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Unemployed Graduates

Coping mechanisms adopted by unemployed graduates in Anambra State is a pressing concern, with various types of strategies affecting wellbeing such as active coping, planning,

use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, religion, acceptance, self-distraction, denial, substance use, and behavioral disengagement. According to Nwosu, Uche, Okafor, Nnamani, Egbe, and Ogodo (2019), active coping occurs when there is direct effort to solve unemployment through skill acquisition and job applications. For instance, a graduate with access to vocational training in Awka may find it easier to start a small business. Planning arises when graduates set strategies for job search or entrepreneurship. For example, a graduate may outline steps to access ASBA loans. Obi and Madu (2020) explained that use of emotional support is caused by seeking encouragement from family and friends, leading to reduced stress. During joblessness, graduates may find it easy to maintain hope due to family backing. Religion occurs when prayer and faith communities are used to manage anxiety. For instance, a graduate may engage in church programs for networking and emotional relief. Acceptance happens when graduates acknowledge their situation without denial, which can reduce psychological strain. This type of coping can lead to both increased patience and increased proactivity. Nnadi (2020) posited that maladaptive coping such as substance use occurs when graduates resort to alcohol or drugs that do not match healthy adjustment, or when idleness leads to peer-induced drug habits. For example, a graduate may increase alcohol intake due to prolonged frustration. These types of coping mechanisms highlight the need for effective policies to address the challenge of negative coping among unemployed graduates in Anambra State.

Effects of Coping Mechanism on Unemployed Graduates in Anambra State

Coping mechanism is a catalyst for wellbeing or decline, fueling a surge in psychological outcomes that has plagued numerous youths. The recent reports of depression and suicide among unemployed graduates in Onitsha, Nnewi, and Awka are examples of the devastating effects of rising maladaptive coping in developing nations. Anambra State, in particular, is grappling with a severe youth mental health crisis (Oni and Orutugu, 2025). Regarding the psychological effects of coping mechanism, maladaptive coping in Anambra State has led to increased anxiety and depression, rise in substance abuse and self-blame, growing involvement in extended joblessness, increased social withdrawal and low self-esteem, rise in aggression due to frustration, increased loss of productive time, growing involvement in cybercrime and other vices, increased failure to secure jobs, rise in entrepreneurial abandonment, and increased migration risk. It appears that increased economic burden on families and communities, reduced productivity and graduate employability, loss of healthy and skilled workforce, increased costs of rehabilitation and security, reduced internally

generated revenue and tax base, increased poverty and inequality, reduced innovation, increased dependency on family support programs, reduced investment in human capital, and increased brain drain are some of the economic effects of maladaptive coping among unemployed graduates in Anambra State. When graduates rely on avoidance, they are more likely to depend on unsustainable measures, such as informal borrowing without repayment structure (Azogu, 2020). This can lead to an increased burden on the family system, as well as the state economy, as more youths may require additional years to become productive. Maladaptive coping can also lead to a decline in community reputation and an increase in crime. When graduates are not engaged, they are not contributing to economic production. This can lead to a decline in local enterprise growth, making it more difficult for communities to attract investment and partnerships. Maladaptive coping can lead to an increase in social vices, as graduates may rely on fraud to manage frustration which promotes economic insecurity in the state.

The rising psychological decline in Anambra State poses a significant threat to the state's human capital development, leading to an increase in unproductive graduates such as those with untreated depression, addicted youths, and migrated talents. According to Madubuike and Dimnnajiego (2023), thousands of Nigerian graduates have lost productive years due to various forms of maladaptive coping. The region has witnessed numerous cases of graduate involvement in crime, escalating at an alarming rate. These outcomes create economic insecurity, breaching stability and affecting legitimate labor and economic activities. The resulting economic insecurity sends a negative signal to investors, deterring private sector collaboration and investment. The Anambra State Ministry of Youth Development (2022) highlighted youth idleness as a significant risk factor that private partners dread. Uncertainty about graduate readiness not only hampers employment but also prompts employers to seek more prepared workers from other regions. Unstable graduates, therefore, pose a substantial human capital threat to the state. Many of the state's development challenges are attributed to maladaptive coping among unemployed graduates. It is common to see thousands of eligible graduates not presenting for job interviews, only to have a handful employed (Oni & Orutugu, 2025). Anambra State faces a gross abuse and underutilization of educational resources, directly impacting state productivity and competitiveness. Coping mechanism can therefore create psychological and economic effects for graduates in social, economic cum educational environs.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the effect of coping mechanisms on unemployed graduates in Anambra State. The population of the study consisted of all unemployed graduates in Anambra State registered with the Anambra State Ministry of Youth Development and NYSC pass-outs from 2023/2024 session, totaling 18,450. A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, simple random sampling was used to select two Local Government Areas from each of the three senatorial zones, making a total of 6 LGAs. Second, purposive sampling was used to select graduates who have been unemployed for at least 6 months post-NYSC. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select 400 unemployed graduates from the 6 LGAs. A structured questionnaire titled “Coping Mechanism and Unemployed Graduates Questionnaire (CMUGQ)” was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts in Guidance and Counseling and Psychology from Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Its reliability was established through a pilot test with 40 unemployed graduates in Imo State. Cronbach Alpha was used and reliability coefficients of 0.85, 0.83, and 0.84 were obtained for the three sections. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A sought demographic information, while Part B contained 30 items divided into three sections. Section A had 10 items on types of coping, Section B had 10 items on effects of coping, and Section C had 10 items on strategies for promoting adaptive coping. A four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1 was used. The questionnaire was administered by 6 research assistants and 387 copies representing 96.8% were retrieved and used for analysis. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions with 2.50 as the cut-off point for decision.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the types of coping mechanisms adopted by unemployed graduates in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on types of coping mechanisms adopted by unemployed graduates.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	I engage in active planning to acquire new skills for employment	3.18	0.61	Agree
2	I seek emotional support from family and friends during joblessness	3.22	0.58	Agree
3	I use prayer and religious activities to cope with unemployment stress	3.30	0.55	Agree

4	I accept my current situation and look for alternative opportunities	3.10	0.64	Agree
5	I engage in instrumental support such as applying for loans and grants	2.98	0.67	Agree
6	I resort to alcohol and substance use to manage frustration	2.76	0.72	Agree
7	I blame myself for not getting a job	2.85	0.69	Agree
8	I withdraw from social and career activities	2.71	0.74	Agree
9	I deny the reality of my unemployment situation	2.65	0.70	Agree
10	I distract myself through social media and entertainment	2.90	0.63	Agree
Total	Cluster Mean	2.96		Agree

The data in Table 1 shows that all 10 items were rated as agreed, with mean scores above 2.50. The cluster mean of 2.96 indicates that unemployed graduates in Anambra State adopt both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Research Question 2: What are the effects of coping mechanisms on unemployed graduates in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean rating of respondents on effects of coping mechanisms.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
11	Adaptive coping improves my psychological wellbeing	3.15	0.60	Agree
12	Adaptive coping enhances my resilience and hope for the future	3.12	0.59	Agree
13	Adaptive coping promotes my readiness for career opportunities	3.08	0.62	Agree
14	Maladaptive coping increases my level of anxiety	3.20	0.57	Agree
15	Maladaptive coping leads to depression and low self-esteem	3.25	0.54	Agree
16	Maladaptive coping results in involvement in social vices	3.02	0.66	Agree
17	Maladaptive coping causes withdrawal from job search activities	3.11	0.60	Agree
18	Maladaptive coping leads to substance abuse	2.99	0.68	Agree
19	Poor coping reduces my productivity and contribution to society	3.14	0.58	Agree
20	Poor coping increases financial dependency on family	3.18	0.56	Agree
Total	Cluster Mean	3.12		Agree

The data in Table 2 reveals that all items had mean scores above 2.50 with a cluster mean of 3.12. This indicates that coping mechanisms have significant effects on the wellbeing and productivity of unemployed graduates.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies for promoting adaptive coping mechanisms among unemployed graduates in Anambra State?

Table 3: Mean rating of respondents on strategies for promoting adaptive coping.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Establishment of graduate empowerment and skills acquisition schemes	3.28	0.53	Agree
22	Provision of structured mentorship and career counseling services	3.24	0.56	Agree
23	Implementation of trauma-informed psychological support programs	3.10	0.61	Agree
24	Provision of startup grants and access to ASBA loans	3.19	0.59	Agree
25	Creation of graduate internship and public works programs	3.15	0.60	Agree
26	Partnership with private sector for job creation	3.21	0.55	Agree
27	Engagement of religious and community leaders in support programs	3.05	0.64	Agree
28	Provision of digital skills and freelancing platforms	3.12	0.58	Agree
29	Regular entrepreneurship training workshops	3.17	0.57	Agree
30	Strengthening of university career guidance units	3.09	0.62	Agree
Total	Cluster Mean	3.16		Agree

The data in Table 3 shows that all 10 items were agreed to with a cluster mean of 3.16. This indicates that respondents agreed on the listed strategies for promoting adaptive coping.

DISCUSSION

The findings in Table 1 revealed that unemployed graduates in Anambra State adopt both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Adaptive strategies include active planning, social support, religiosity, and acceptance, while maladaptive strategies include substance use, self-blame, and behavioral disengagement. This supports Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory which states that individuals appraise stress and respond with either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping. The result is also in line with Nwosu and Okeke (2021) who reported increased negative coping among jobless youths in South East Nigeria. Findings in Table 2 showed that adaptive coping improved psychological wellbeing, resilience, and career readiness, while maladaptive coping increased anxiety, depression, and social vices. This aligns with Cohen and Wills' (1985) Social Support Theory which posits that availability of support systems leads to better adjustment. The result is consistent with Eze and Chukwu (2022) who found that poor coping among graduates contributes to mental health decline and reduced productivity. Results in Table 3 indicated that respondents agreed that empowerment schemes, mentorship, counseling, startup grants, and private sector partnership are effective strategies for promoting adaptive coping. This corroborates

Seligman's (1975) Learned Helplessness Theory which suggests that providing control and reinforcement opportunities can reverse passive behavior. It also agrees with Obi and Madu (2020) who recommended government intervention programs like One-Youth-One-Skill to reduce graduate idleness.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that coping mechanisms significantly affect unemployed graduates in Anambra State. While adaptive coping fosters wellbeing and readiness, the prevalence of maladaptive coping threatens human capital development and socio-economic stability in the state. The potential of the Anambra State graduate population for human capital development and economic growth is being stifled by the prevalence of negative coping among its youths and has painted a bleak picture of the graduates' future. This led to the conclusion that individuals who are unable to access structured employment opportunities turn to substance use or irregular migration as a means of coping. Hence, the future of Anambra State's socio-economic stability depends on the ability of its leaders to address the psychological and social effects of coping mechanisms on unemployed graduates. By investing in the empowerment and mental well-being of graduates, the state can unlock its full potential and create a safer future for generations to come. The time for action is now, and it is up to all stakeholders to work together to create a better future for the graduates of Anambra State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Anambra State government should prioritize the establishment of graduate empowerment schemes through structured skills acquisition centers, startup incubation hubs, and full implementation of the One-Youth-One-Skill program. This will help to reduce the number of idle graduates and provide youths with the stability and confidence needed to engage in productive ventures now that the state's labor market remains threatened.
2. The government should undertake a comprehensive reform of the career guidance architecture to emphasize job-market alignment, industry mentorship systems, and training that meet the needs of vulnerable graduates. This initiative will help address the disconnection between academic training and employment opportunities, thereby enabling graduates to acquire the requisite skills to contribute to state development.

3. The government should implement policies and programmes that address trauma and psychological disengagement, such as graduate counselling units, resilience training, and engagement of alumni associations, religious and traditional leaders. This will help to reduce psychological distress and substance use among graduates, and provide them with the support they need to make career progress.
4. Anambra State government should invest in alternative employment programmes that provide graduates with continuous access to income, such as graduate internship schemes, public works programs, and digital freelancing platforms. This will help to reduce the likelihood of graduates turning to cybercrime or migration, and provide them with positive outlets for productivity and skill development.
5. The government should strengthen its partnership with the private sector and development partners to improve graduate employability and wellbeing in Anambra State. This can be achieved through initiatives such as public-private job creation investments, reconstruction of technical training facilities, scholarship support for entrepreneurship, and digital economy programmes to create a more resilient and equitable labor system in order to strengthen human capital and reduce negative coping among unemployed graduates.

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