

The Role of Self-Compassion in Job Seeking Prospects and Challenges among University Graduates

Ansha Ishtiaq¹, Adeela Rehman², Bushra Manzoor³

Abstract

Job seeking is an exhausting and strenuous process. Job seekers, especially fresh university graduates, face many challenges during this process, such as low confidence levels and anxiety or stress. The current study aims to explore the role of self-compassion in job-seeking prospects and challenges among university graduates. The total sample size was 335 university graduates from one private and one public sector university. A quantitative model was chosen for the current research. Data was collected through online questionnaires from graduates. The self-compassion scale by Neff and the self-structured job-seeking prospects and challenges scale were used for data collection. The findings demonstrate that there is a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges. A significant negative correlation was found between job-seeking challenges (subscale of job-seeking prospects and challenges) and self-compassion. This implies that university graduates who have higher self-compassion can cope better with job-seeking challenges. Social networks and job-seeking prospects (subscale of job-seeking prospects and challenges) had a significant positive correlation. The research illustrated that there is a difference between public and private university graduates because private university graduates have more polished hard and soft skills, as they do not have the issue of limited funding. It is concluded that self-compassion plays a safeguarding role in job-seeking prospects and challenges. Having social networks, soft and hard skills pose a prospect for university graduates in job seeking. The level of confidence and overall job-seeking process is a challenge for university graduates. Further research can introduce an intervention of self-compassion to better understand the role of self-compassion in an individual's life, and focus on how and what kind of social networks are most helpful in job seeking.

Introduction

Self-compassion is a form of therapy/meditation; by practicing self-compassion, an individual can cope with negative emotions that are caused by challenging and stressful situations. Throughout life, an individual faces various situations that lead to either positive or negative emotions. Negative emotions can cause stress and anxiety, which are hard to deal with.

¹ Department of Sociology, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

² Department of Sociology, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
Email: akramue@gmail.com

³ Department of Sociology, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
Email: bushra.manzoor@fjwu.edu.pk

Various techniques help in coping with these negative emotions, for instance, meditation, therapy, etc. Self-compassionate individuals are better at coming out of and dealing with difficult situations, as being self-compassionate means being able to realize that every single individual faces a challenging situation in life; oneself is not an exceptional case, and these situations are a part of life. A higher level of self-compassion depends on multiple factors, such as maternal solicitude and amicable relationships within families (Neff & McGehee, 2009).

Self-compassion is a functional tool; by practicing, the level of self-compassion can be increased in an individual. When an individual practices self-compassion for a while, it helps them be non-judgmental towards themselves while facing challenges and being mindful of their emotions (Smeets et al., 2014). Students usually face social anxiety due to fear of judgment, presentation, and evaluation. The anxiety and fear can be caused by over-identification and self-judgment, and constant pressure to maintain a positive image among others. Self-kindness and empathy towards oneself can buffer social anxiety. Self-compassionate students are less likely to have fear of evaluation, fear of presentation, and social anxiety, as everyone works at their own pace and path (Long & Neff, 2018).

Self-compassion is quite a new concept. Self-compassion has the same meaning as compassion. It is generally conceptualized as developing a sense of empathy, kindness, and understanding toward others. Compassion also refers to the notion of having a desire to alleviate one's suffering. Self-compassion is adopting or applying all of these concepts for oneself. Self-compassion is often misunderstood as self-esteem, even though both of these concepts are different from each other. Self-esteem is more about self-evaluating concerning social comparisons with others in terms of achievements, whereas self-compassion is a form of self-acceptance about yourself in terms of recognizing your flaws. Self-compassion has three main elements: self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity. Self-compassion is defined as being kind to yourself in the most imperfect and ruthless situations, as well as being mindful at the same time to not let negative emotions take over yourself, as human beings are imperfect (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion means being mindful of oneself and one's activities, to have a deeper understanding of one's actions. By practicing mindfulness, one can easily forgive oneself in relentless situations.

The increasing youth unemployment in the country is currently one of the major social concerns in Pakistan. There is a massive number of job seekers in the job market. But the job market doesn't have many jobs to offer, as the number of job seekers is way more than the available vacancies. At the same time, the job market has become very competitive in recent years. The recruiters want to employ individuals with not only higher degrees but also technical/IT skills. There are many prospects and challenges faced by job seekers while searching for jobs. The prospects can be defined as facilitating factors such as technical/IT skills, communication skills, graduation from a reputed university, and social networks. The challenges can be defined as hampering factors such as language skills, first-generation employees, and a lack of social support.

The job-seeking process can have various challenges, which can lead job seekers to feel emotionally drained. The job-seeking challenges generally include a lack of social and communication skills and a preference for private/reputed university qualifications. On the contrary, the job-seeking prospects can make the job-seeking process quite smooth. The job-seeking prospects include the provision of social and communication skills and technical/IT skills. Self-compassion is a form of self-acceptance and showing oneself the same amount of acceptance and kindness one would show others. The current study will explore the role of self-compassion in coping with emotional issues caused by job-seeking challenges and whether there is a positive or negative role of self-compassion in job-seeking prospects.

The job-seeking process is quite an exhausting one. Multiple factors influence the job-seeking process, for instance, writing resumes, employers' demand for work experience, etc. The job-seeking strategy is another factor that influences the acquisition of desired jobs by students. A study was conducted on job-seeking strategies among final-year university students and one-year graduates (alumni) from the faculties of AHSS and STEM. The exploratory strategies were found to be more applicable for STEM graduates, in terms of qualification match, as they explored the opportunities to their full capacity. Whereas the focused strategy worked for AHSS graduates (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022).

Personal factors can be a challenge for job seekers, such as physical issues, psychological issues, behavioral issues, family issues, and relationship issues. Social capital and human capital can also be barriers or challenges for some job seekers, such as having one working parent, which results in fewer social relations and social support. Furthermore, a lower education level is proven to be a challenge for job seekers (Moore, 2021). Social networks can be very useful during the job-seeking process. It can be termed as a job-seeking opportunity. As the saying goes, "You have to know someone who knows someone". In today's highly competitive job market, a job seeker does not only need competent academic capital and social and communication skills, but good social relations as well, especially the fresh university graduate job seekers who have little to no work experience in their desired fields.

Many job seekers give up the search due to a lack of knowledge about the job market relevant to their field. Other factors that influence job seekers to cease the job-seeking process are the nature of job content, the difference in personal/moral values of an organization and their own, and disappointment after a job interview failure or job search failure. Job seekers might feel that the job content does not match their qualifications (Ylistö, 2018).

The job-seeking process causes anxiety, depression, and negative emotions in an individual. Anxiety, depression, and negative emotions are caused by events such as job-seeking failure, lack of social support, and lack of writing skills for a resume (Buathong et al., 2021; Moore, 2019). Self-compassion can be a resourceful tool in managing and coping with these life events (Kreemers et al., 2018; Rothmann et al., 2020). The current job market has become so competitive due to fewer job vacancies. There are various reasons for the competitive job market, for instance, a lack of

employment history. Employers prefer candidates who not only have a quality employment history but also in terms of quantity, i.e., years of work experience. This particular scenario becomes an issue for graduates who will be transitioning to work life. Another reason is a lack of interview skills; most individuals are confused about even the basic questions, such as how to introduce themselves. Lack of communication skills also poses a threat to job seekers, as verbal and non-verbal communication plays a key role in interviews. In most interview cases, interviewers are thoroughly looking into the vocabulary chosen by the interviewee as well as the body language of the interviewee to analyze if he/she is a good fit for the particular vacancy. Many graduates lack resume writing skills, which is why employers are unable to judge their potential for particular job vacancies. Graduates are unable to make their resumes appealing to employers, as there are ways to build their resumes around their volunteer work, internships, and particular skills. All of these scenarios can build up emotions that eventually result in more anxiety and stressful events among job seekers. Building emotional resilience and developing skills regarding the job-seeking process can help job seekers immensely, as great interview skills, resume writing skills, etc., provide an opportunity for job seekers. To highlight this scenario, self-compassion and job-seeking prospects & challenges have to be explored among Pakistani job seekers.

Many studies have proved that self-compassion works as a barrier or mediator against negative life experiences and stressful situations that cause negative emotions in individuals (Alavi, 2021; Allen & Leary, 2010; Arch et al., 2018; Egan et al., 2022). The research was conducted in Pakistan to identify the role of self-compassion as a coping strategy and stress predictor. The sample population for this study was undergraduate students. The researchers found that students who had higher levels of self-compassion had effective coping strategies as compared to those who had lower levels of self-compassion. The study found no significant results for self-compassion as a predictor of stress. A significant difference was detected between both genders in the level of self-compassion, with female undergraduate students exhibiting a higher level of self-compassion than male undergraduate students (Salam & Farhan, 2021).

Self-compassion plays a role as a cushioning factor for a lot of negative emotions related to mental health. It helps in reducing the intensity of stress, anxiety, and depression. Research conducted in Iran studies the relationship between social safety, self-compassion, and mental health problems among university students. The study found that self-compassion is associated with low stress, anxiety, and depression. Low anxiety, stress, and depression were also associated with social safety through self-compassion as a moderator (Alavi, 2021). A study was conducted in Australia to explore the challenges faced by young people in the job searching process. This study concluded three main findings: low skills of young people in a highly competitive job market, lack of information about writing an appropriate resume and application format for landing a job interview, and, lastly, depression and anxiety, specifically social anxiety (Moore, 2019). Another study in Thailand surveyed job-seeking anxiety with socio-demographic variables among university graduates. The study highlighted that there was a moderate level of job-seeking anxiety of 60% in

university graduates. Some interesting socio-demographic variables increased job-seeking anxiety. Females were found to have more severe stress and parental influence, and final grades were found to be insignificant in increasing pressure and anxiety among university graduates (Buathong et al., 2021).

A study in Pakistan aimed to find challenges and opportunities regarding employability among Pakistani university graduates. The focus of the study was on the soft skills of university graduates, which could pose either a challenge or an opportunity in the job market. The researchers used a mixed method to validate the findings. The study found that students have exposure to soft skills, such as communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, professional ethics, etc., in various courses. Contrary to this, the qualitative findings of the study implied that there is a huge gap in the implementation of teaching these soft skills to university graduates. Hence, there is an underlying issue with the implementation of policy and practice of soft skills curriculum, which poses a hindrance for university graduates in the job market (Manan et al., 2021).

A study conducted in the US aimed to explore graduate placements and career barriers among public university graduates. The study found that students who have more internship experience than recommended were way more successful in securing jobs. The quality of internships is just as much valued as quantity. The perceived career barrier for graduates was found to be finance, whether it be the entering salary or the living costs by location. An important perceived career barrier was the lack of ability, as students apply for jobs for which they don't have enough qualifications (Wilson et al., 2016).

Research Objectives

1. To identify the level of self-compassion among university graduates.
2. To identify the job-seeking prospects and challenges faced by university graduates.
3. To explore the relationship between self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges among university graduates.
4. To identify gender differences in self-compassion.
5. To identify the gender differences in job-seeking prospects and challenges among university graduates.

Hypotheses

- H1: There are no gender differences in the level of self-compassion among fresh university graduates.
- H2: Girls have more job-seeking challenges and prospects than boys.
- H3: Social networks help acquire jobs.
- H4: Self-compassion has a safeguarding role in job-seeking challenges and prospects among fresh university graduates.

Theoretical Framework

Capital Theory by Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

The capital theory by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu applies to this study (Bourdieu, 1986). The four types of capital are introduced by Bourdieu: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. Economic capital refers to financial assets and resources. Economic capital is the root basis for other capital, as financial assets determine the status and nobility of an individual in society. The theory states that cultural capital is those assets that are transmitted and acquired in the form of skills, qualifications, and habits. The children's ability and accessibility to education can depend on the socio-economic status of the family, as capital is transmitted through generations. The development of academic capital, social skills, and linguistic skills can be beneficial for students to acquire the desired jobs. The theory also states that social capital is a web of social networks one acquires over a long period. Social relations are an important source through which one can benefit in different ways. Social capital can be understood by this maxim, "It's not what you know, it's who you know". The symbolic capital suggests that an individual develops a "taste" according to one's status and class. Individuals form a particular "taste" according to their socio-economic status and interaction with others/peers. Interaction with others develops different symbolic meanings for situations and behaviors. The "Taste" of an individual develops how they perceive and interpret their social interactions and socio-economic status. The development of particular tastes in terms of career choice can affect the job-seeking process; for instance, most private university graduates belong to business/elite-class families, so they naturally have the intention to seek entrepreneurial jobs, as it is a status symbol.

Methodology

The methodology of a research study serves as its backbone, providing a systematic and structured approach to answer research questions, achieve objectives, and draw meaningful conclusions. Islamabad was selected as a designated area of study for the current research. The federal capital area was chosen because the top-ranked universities are located in Islamabad, per the QS ranking (QS 2022). **Mixed-**method design was used for the present study, as the nature of the research questions requires both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The researcher used survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews as the primary source of data collection. University graduates from 2021 and 2022 at top-ranked public and private universities were the sampling population for the current study. Both male and female graduates were selected from the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Natural Sciences, and the Faculty of Engineering. The data were collected from 335 people over a period of two months using all the possible resources to reach out to the sample population.

The self-compassion scale was used to measure individuals' levels of self-compassion. This scale was developed by Neff in 2003 and has been used in the current study for data collection related to the variable self-compassion. The self-compassion scale is a 26-item questionnaire evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale

ranging from 1 (rarely) to 5 (almost always). The SCS is divided into 6 subscales, i.e., Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Mindfulness, Isolation, Common Humanity, and Over-Identification. A higher score indicates high self-compassion.

A self-structured questionnaire was used for identifying the job-seeking challenges and prospects among university graduates. A job-seeking prospect and challenges scale was developed, which consists of 14 items evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (almost always). The scale is divided into two subscales, i.e., Job Seeking Prospects and Job Seeking Challenges. A quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS software. An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the gender differences in the level of self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges. To identify the role of self-compassion in job-seeking challenges and prospects, a Pearson correlation test was conducted.

Results

In this chapter, the outcomes of the research conducted are presented and interpreted. Here, the researcher aims to provide a comprehensive account of the results, offering a clear understanding of how the research objectives have been addressed and whether they have been achieved. This chapter is composed of quantitative analysis. The section consists of results and tables derived from quantitative data.

Table 1.

Frequency and Percentage of Socio-Demographics (N = 335)

		<i>f</i>	%
Sex	Male	162	51.6
	Female	173	48.4
Age	22-23	61	18.2
	24-25	167	49.9
	26-27	90	26.9
	28-29	17	5.1
Graduating Year	2021	166	49.6
	2022	169	50.4
University	NUST	164	49.0
	QAU	171	51.0
Faculty	Social Sciences	112	33.4
	Natural/Applied Sciences	112	33.4
	Engineering	111	33.1

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of all age groups. The age group 24-25 has the highest frequency, which is 167, and it comprises 49.9 % of the total sample population. The lowest frequency is recorded in the age group 28-29, which is 17, with a percentage of 5.1. The age group 22-23 has a frequency of 61 with a percentage of 18.2, whereas the 26-27 age group comprises 26.9 % of the total sample

population with a frequency of 90. It also shows the frequency and percentage of sex. Females have a higher frequency of 173, which makes 51.6% of the total sample population, whereas males have a frequency of 162, which makes 48.4 % of the total population. Table 1 further shows the frequencies and percentages of faculties to which the total population belongs. The faculty of social sciences and natural/applied sciences has an equal frequency of 112 with 33.4 %. The faculty of engineering comprises 33.1 % of the total sample population with a frequency of 111.

The table also shows the frequency and percentage of graduating years. The graduating year 2022 has a higher frequency of 169, which comprises 50.4 % of the total sample population, whereas the graduating year 2021 has a frequency of 166, with 49.6% of the total sample population. Furthermore, the table shows the frequency and percentage of universities. The QAU has a slightly higher frequency of 171, which comes to 51.0 % of the total sample population, as compared to NUST, which has a frequency of 164, with 49.0 %

Table 2.

Frequency and Percentage of Preferred Job (N = 335)

Preferred Job	f	%
Government Employee	136	40.6
Civil Services	26	7.8
Own Business	74	22.1
Teaching	99	29.6

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of preferred jobs. The category government employee has the highest frequency of 136, which constitutes 40.6 % of the total population. The lowest frequency is recorded for civil services, which is 26, with a percentage of 7.8. The category's own business has a frequency of 74, and it comes to 22.1 % of the total sample population. The category teaching has a frequency of 99, which comprises 29.6 % of the total sample population.

Table 3.

Level of Self-Compassion (N = 335)

Level	f	%
Low Level	52	15.5
Moderate Level	226	67.5
High Level	57	17.0

The table shows that 67.5% of the participants have a moderate level of self-compassion, and 17 % of participants have a high level of self-compassion. While 15.5 % have a low level of self-compassion.

Table 4.*Correlation of Self-Compassion and Job Seeking Prospects and Challenges (N = 335)*

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
SCS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
JSCP	.110*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SK	.654**	.234**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MF	.792**	.285**	.633**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CH	.627**	.502**	.539**	.597**	-	-	-	-	-	-
SJ	.813**	-.078	.401**	.423**	.340**	-	-	-	-	-
OI	.591**	-.194**	.111*	.273**	.032	.545**	-	-	-	-
IS	.595**	-.284**	-.051	.331**	.046	.545**	.538**	-	-	-
JSP	.189**	.818**	.309**	.326**	.472**	-.077	-.131*	-.115*	-	-
JSC	-.146**	.615**	-.065	-.072	.206**	-.056	-.244**	-.384**	.083	-

Note: SCS = Self-Compassion Score, JSCP = Job Seeking Challenges and Prospects Score, SK = Self-Kindness, MF = Mindfulness, CH = Common Humanity, SJ = Self-Judgment, OI = Over-Identification, IS = Isolation, JSP = Job Seeking Prospects, JSC = Job Seeking Challenges.

**p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

The findings in Table 4 demonstrate a significant correlation between self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges ($r = .110^*$, $p = .045$). There is a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and job-seeking challenges ($r = -.146^{**}$, $p = .008$). There is a significant positive relationship between self-compassion and job-seeking prospects ($r = .189^{**}$, $p = .001$). Findings in the table show that there is a significant positive relationship between self-kindness, mindfulness, common humanity, and job seeking challenges and prospects respectively, ($r = .234^{**}$, $p = .000$), ($r = .285^{**}$, $p = .000$), ($r = .502^{**}$, $p = .000$). There is a significant negative correlation between over-identification, isolation, and job seeking challenges and prospects ($r = -.194^{**}$, $p = .000$), ($r = -.284^{**}$, $p = .000$). The results indicate that self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges have a positive relationship, meaning that as the level of self-compassion increases, job-seeking prospects and challenges will also increase. The positive relationship between self-compassion and job-seeking prospects implies that having high self-compassion increases the prospects of job seeking. A negative correlation between self-compassion and job-seeking challenges indicates that a higher level of self-compassion will decrease job-seeking challenges.

Table 5.*Correlation of Job Seeking Prospects and Social Networks (N = 335)*

Scale	1	2
JSP	-	-
Social Networks	.677**	-

Note: JSP = Job Seeking Prospects. **p < 0.01

The findings of Table 5 show that there is a significant and positive relationship between social networks and job seeking prospects ($r = .677^{**}$, $p = .000$). This implies that social networks are a factor in the job seeking process.

Table 6.*Independent Sample Test of Sex and Self-Compassion (N = 335)*

Scale	Male (N=162)		Female (N=173)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
SCS	79.42	13.97	79.62	12.10	.143	.887

Findings in Table 6 show that there is no gender difference in self-compassion ($t = .143$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 7.*Independent Sample Test of Sex and Level of Self-Compassion (N = 335)*

Scale	Male (N=162)		Female (N=173)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Level of SCS	2.05	.566	1.98	.575	-1.069	.286

Table 7 illustrates that there are no gender differences in the level of self-compassion ($t = -.1069$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 8.*Independent Sample Test of Sex and Job Seeking Challenges and Prospects (N = 335)*

Scale	Male (N=162)		Female (N=173)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
SCS	46.46	5.94	47.68	6.01	1.866	.063

The findings in Table 8 demonstrate that there is no gender difference in job-seeking challenges and prospects ($t = 1.866$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The present research aimed to identify the association between self-compassion and job-seeking challenges and prospects. The study also explores the level of self-compassion among fresh university graduates and job-seeking challenges and prospects of university graduates. For this purpose, questionnaire data were collected from a total of 335 fresh university graduates of Islamabad. 51.6 % of the participants were females, and 48.4 % of the total sample was comprised of males. The current research aimed to find gender differences in the level of self-compassion among fresh university graduates. For this purpose, an independent samples test was conducted. The result demonstrated that there is no gender difference in self-compassion among fresh university graduates ($t = .143$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is accepted, i.e., there are no gender differences in the level of self-compassion among fresh university graduates. An independent samples test was also conducted for the level of self-compassion and the subscales of self-compassion. No gender

differences were found in the level of self-compassion. Gender differences were found for isolation (subscale of self-compassion). The reason for this is that there is a difference in cultural context. The findings of the current research are in accordance with research showing no gender differences in self-compassion among Pakistani university students (Abbasi & Zubair 2015). In the researcher's opinion, the reason for no differences in the level of self-compassion also depends on the education of parents. As per the findings of current research, the majority of parents are well-educated. Parents are the ones who are responsible for providing a safe environment for their children where they can grow physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. In this way, individuals develop confidence in their capabilities, strengths, and values. They can deal with any difficult or harsh times with a lot of strength and support from family.

An independent-samples test was also conducted to find gender differences in job-seeking prospects and challenges among fresh university graduates. The findings show no gender differences in job-seeking challenges and prospects ($t = 1.866$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, Hypothesis 2 is rejected, which stated that girls have more job-seeking challenges and prospects. As mentioned in the thematic analysis, hard skills and soft skills are required for both genders, and they are one of the prospects of job seeking. Fresh university graduates need to be able to present themselves confidently as they have to prove their skills and capabilities to employers. The findings of the current research show that both female and male fresh university graduates share the same job-seeking challenges and prospects.

Having social networks has proven to be a prospect for fresh graduates in the job-seeking process. Findings of current research demonstrate that there is a significant positive correlation between social networks and job-seeking prospects ($r = .677^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). This means that social connections pose a massive opportunity for fresh graduates to acquire a job. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is accepted, which states that social networks help acquire a job. Social networks can help in reducing stress caused by the job-seeking process. It also increases the chance of employability for fresh graduates (Kulbo et al., 2020). A vast majority of fresh graduates believe that social networks are very helpful in attaining a job. It is a personal choice of fresh graduates whether to use their social networks or not. A greater majority are in favor of using social networks to land a job. Social networks act as a referee for fresh graduates in job seeking. This finding supports previous literature, which states that social networks greatly benefit job seekers in the job-seeking process. A stronger connection with social networks has proven to be more effective for fresh graduates to acquire a job (Trimble O'Connor, 2013).

Bourdieu explains this in social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The links between two individuals, whether they are personal links or formal/ work links, are an important source of social support. Social support can be emotional, informational, financial, and social network support. Fresh university graduates who are job-seeking need not only social network support but also informational and emotional support. Social networks are in hierarchical order, and they can be helpful to fresh university graduates, as they know insider information about current trends in the job market.

So, they can give better guidance to fresh graduates who have little information about the job market. Fresh university graduates require information about what networking channels they should use for job seeking and how to present themselves as potential candidates for a job vacancy. They can rely on this information through social networks.

From the researcher's perspective, social networks have great potential in improving the chance of employability for fresh university graduates. Due to little experience in work, fresh university graduates need an individual who can advocate for them in the job market. Pakistan has a massive culture of using social connections because of its collectivist nature of society. A lot of people use their social connections to get a job. Fresh university graduates need to build their networks, which could help them in the job-seeking process. The representatives from both universities stated that they invite individuals from industry and alumni to deliver lectures on career development. Through this activity, students can build networks within the job market.

The findings show a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges ($r = .110, p < 0.01$). This indicates that by an increase or decrease in the level of self-compassion, job-seeking prospects and challenges will also increase or decrease, respectively. This means that self-compassion acts as a barrier against job-seeking prospects and challenges. Hence, Hypothesis 4 is accepted, which states that self-compassion will have a safeguarding role in job-seeking prospects and challenges. The findings of the current research are consistent with previous literature, which explains the buffering role of self-compassion in the job-seeking process (Kreemers et al., 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, this is explained through Bourdieu's capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986). There are various job-seeking prospects such as I.T. skills, technical skills, communication skills, social networks, job fairs, and the type of university. Private universities have more resources to offer to their students because they don't have funding issues. Thus, the choice of university becomes a prospect for some students. As mentioned in the thematic analysis above, most of the companies are targeting fresh graduates from top-ranked private universities as their hard and soft skills are much more developed than those of fresh graduates from public sector universities. This refers to economic capital, as private universities have a sufficient amount of funding and resources to provide skills enhancement and career development courses to their students.

Findings of current research show that a greater majority of fresh university graduates' preferred job is being a government employee. The reason for this could be that a wider majority of both parents are government employees. As primary socialization begins at home, individuals develop a taste for certain attitudes and materialistic things as well. Following findings, fresh university graduates have grown up with parents who are government employees, so they have firsthand experience of all the perks and benefits of government jobs.

Bourdieu explains this as the development of taste (Bourdieu, 1986). Taste for something is developed through social interaction and the socioeconomic status of an individual. As a majority of graduates' parents have government jobs, fresh university graduates are probably fascinated by the benefits and stability of government jobs. Hence, fresh university graduates have developed a taste for government jobs. From the researcher's perspective, it is concluded that the government sector offers jobs that are more suitable to fresh university graduates as they don't have many years of work experience. The government sector jobs are also more promising because of the steadiness it provides. Fresh university graduates prefer government jobs because the government provides pensions for them after retirement until death. They don't have to think about their source of income in old age, as pensions are a long-term source of income.

Conclusion

Fresh university graduates encounter various job-seeking challenges and prospects. Job-seeking prospects are identified as hard skills, soft skills, job fairs organized by universities, and social networks. Job-seeking challenges are identified as the confidence level of fresh graduates, stress or anxiety related to the job-seeking process, and job location. Job-seeking challenges are identified as a lack of confidence and stress or anxiety related to the job-seeking process. Self-compassion is a form of meditation and a coping mechanism. It helps in soothing negative emotions. Self-compassion helps an individual to practice mindfulness and not to focus on their flaws. It helps individuals to realize that their life experiences are shared by all members of human society. The results demonstrated a significant correlation between self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges. There is a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and job-seeking challenges (subscale of job-seeking challenges and prospects). Self-compassion has a cushioning effect on job-seeking prospects and challenges. A majority of fresh university graduates had a moderate level of self-compassion. No gender differences were found in both self-compassion and job-seeking prospects and challenges. Social networks were found to be very helpful in acquiring a job. Most of the fresh university graduates felt quite stressed and anxious about the job-seeking process. The level of confidence also posed a challenge for fresh university graduates in the job-seeking process. Emotions are learned through socialization and social interactions. Different situations are categorized or symbolized with their appropriate emotional norms. Individuals go through cruel times or crises at one point or another in their lives. In times like these, individuals need to practice compassion for others and themselves. Self-compassion is one of the emotions. As per the findings, self-compassion plays a safeguarding role for job-seeking challenges and prospects. It indicates that self-compassion helps in combating the negative emotions related to the job-seeking process.

References

- Abbasi, A., & Zubair, A. (2015). Body image, self-compassion, and psychological well-being among university students. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 13(1), 41–47.

- Alavi, K. (2021). The role of social safeness and self-compassion in mental health problems: A model based on Gilbert's theory of emotion regulation systems. *Practice in Clinical Psychology* 9(3), 237–46. <https://doi.org/10.32598/JPCP.9.3.768.1>.
- Allen, A. B., & Leary, M. R. (2010). Self-compassion, stress, and coping. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(2), 107–118.
- Arch, J. J., Lauren N. Landy, Rebecca L. Schneider, Leonie Koban, and Jessica R. Andrews-Hanna. 2018. "Self-Compassion Induction Enhances Recovery from Social Stressors: Comparing Adults with Social Anxiety Disorder and Healthy Controls." *Anxiety, Stress and Coping* 31(5):594–609. doi: 10.1080/10615806.2018.1504033.
- Arch, J. J., Landy, L. N., Schneider, R. L., Koban, L., & Andrews-Hanna, J. R. (2018). Self-compassion induction enhances recovery from social stressors: Comparing adults with social anxiety disorder and healthy controls. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 31(5), 594–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2018.1504033>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Buathong, N., Pattanalertpaiboon, N., & Wattanapaiboon, K. (2021). Job-seeking anxiety resilience and family influence on career decision-making among senior undergraduate students in Southern Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal Name Missing*, 73(6), 363–372.
- Egan, S. J., Rees, C. S., Delalande, J., Greene, D., Fitzallen, G., Brown, S., Webb, M., & Finlay-Jones, A. (2022). A review of self-compassion as an active ingredient in the prevention and treatment of anxiety and depression in young people. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 49(3), 385–403. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-021-01170-2>
- Kreemers, L. M., van Hooft, E. A. J., & van Vianen, A. E. M. (2018). Dealing with negative job search experiences: The beneficial role of self-compassion for job seekers' affective responses. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 106, 165–179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.02.001>
- Kulbo, N. B., Wen, X., & Addo, P. C. (2020). Organisational capital and graduate employability: A serial mediation analysis of human and personal-social capital. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 30(6), 500–506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2020.1842461>
- Long, P., & Neff, K. D. (2018). Self-compassion is associated with reduced self-presentation concerns and increased student communication behavior. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 67, 223–231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2018.09.003>
- Manan, S. A., David, M. K., & Haidar, S. (2021). Soft skills, policies, practices, and self-assessment: Employability challenges and opportunities of university

- graduates in Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Sciences & Research*, 8(1), 117–140.
- Moore, K. (2019). The quest for sustainable employment: Challenges faced by young people during the job search process. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 54(1), 91–108.
- Moore, K. (2021). Critical factors that influence a young person's journey toward sustainable employment. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 21, 329–354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-020-09444-1>
- Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032>
- Moore, Katherine. 2019. "The Quest for Sustainable Employment: Challenges Faced by Young People during the Job Search Process." *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 54(1):91–108.
- Neff, K. D., & McGehee, P. (2009). Self-compassion and psychological resilience among adolescents and young adults. *Self and Identity*, 9(3), 225–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860902979307>
- Okay-Somerville, B., & Scholarios, D. (2022). Focused for some, exploratory for others: Job search strategies and successful university-to-work transitions in the context of labor market ambiguity. *Journal of Career Development*, 49(1), 126–143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08948453211016058>
- QS. (n.d.). *QS university rankings for Asia 2022*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/asian-university-rankings/2022>
- Rothmann, S., Maiolo, M. E., Paver, R., Kreemers, L. M., van Hooft, E. A. J., van Vianen, A. E. M., & Sisouw de Zilwa, S. C. M. (2020). Testing a self-compassion intervention among job seekers: Self-compassion beneficially impacts affect through reduced self-criticism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 1371. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01371>
- Salam, A., & Farhan, S. (2021). Self-compassion as predictor of stress and coping strategies: A study on undergraduate students. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19(2), 49–59.
- Smeets, E., Neff, K., Alberts, H., & Peters, M. (2014). Meeting suffering with kindness: Effects of a brief self-compassion intervention for female college students. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 70(9), 794–807. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22076>
- Trimble O'Connor, L. (2013). Ask, and you shall receive: Social network contacts' provision of help during the job search. *Social Networks*, 35(4), 593–603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2013.07.005>

- Wilson, A. B., Hall, J., & Alba, A. (2016). *Graduate student placement: An examination of experience and career barriers in a student affairs professional preparation program.*
- Ylistö, S. (2018). Why do young people give up their job search? *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v8i3.109539>