



MEANING IN MEANINGLESSNESS: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ENCOUNTER WITH NIHILISM

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Abstract

Using a phenomenological framework, this research methodically examines the complex lived experiences and coping strategies of university students who actively engage with nihilistic philosophy. Through the snowball sampling technique, seven participants were recruited from different universities of Lahore, and semi-structured In-depth Interviews were done to explore the in-depth experiences of nihilistic students. A complex network of experiences is revealed by the interpretative phenomenological analysis, which can be divided into six distinct themes that include religious and spiritual beliefs, the essence of existence, social and interpersonal dynamics, psychological well-being, and perception of death. Additionally, the study pinpoints three basic coping strategies: recognizing the healthy and unhealthy mechanisms and the impact of innate personality traits. These are crucial tools that help students navigate existential crises resulting from their philosophical perspective. The identified patterns provide a thorough comprehension of the complex relationship between nihilistic philosophy and the various aspects of university students' lives. This emphasizes how crucial it is to understand these experiences and coping mechanisms in order to modify educational and psychological support interventions.

Keywords: Snowball Sampling, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Semi-Structured Interviews, Existential Crisis, Nihilistic Philosophy.

Introduction

“Nothing is more real than nothing”[1]

Camus delves into the concept of the absurd in his novel [2] exploring the clash between the quest for meaning in life and the indifferent nature of the universe which relates to the concept of nihilism. He highlights the fundamental absurdity of human existence by describing the tale of Sisyphus, a figure from Greek mythology who is destined to push a rock up a hill constantly only to have it roll back down each time he reaches the top. According to him, Sisyphus' Punishment lacks purpose as

he cannot change his fate and has no reason to persist in his futile task. However, he also argues that Sisyphus can find significance in his suffering by accepting it and refusing to give up. He believes that in the face of the absurd, individuals must live authentically by claiming their freedom and accepting responsibility for their actions. Humans are being encouraged to develop their sense of purpose while realizing the ultimate meaninglessness of existence. This is consistent with the core beliefs of nihilism, which maintain that people can give their lives value and meaning even in the lack of any innate purpose.

The term "nihilism" originates from the Latin word "nihil," which translates to "nothing" in English, and "ism" means ideology [3]. Nihilism is the view that there are no intrinsic values or meanings in the world and that all values and meanings are ultimately arbitrary and subjective [4]. This definition of nihilism is also supported by the work of other philosophers, such as Nietzsche. He argued that nihilism is the result of the death of God, and the loss of traditional religious and moral values [5].

According to the Pakistan's Bureau of Statistics 2017 census [6], Pakistan's population stands at 207,684,628. Out of this figure, 199,958,758 identify as Muslims while 145,379 belong to other religious beliefs (others). The census further reveals that 166,148 individuals reside in rural areas of Punjab. This marks a significant increase in population compared to the 1998 census, which reported 127,433,409 Muslims, 96,142 individuals from other religious beliefs, and 41,453 people residing in rural areas of Punjab. According to Pakistan's Bureau of Statistics 2017 census [6], the rise of individuals in Pakistan who do not identify with any particular religious group or hold nihilistic beliefs is a significant phenomenon that demands immediate attention. Living without a belief system can have a severe negative effect on one's mental health and offer several challenges [7].

One prevalent emotional experience that is seen in both clinical and non-clinical populations is that of emptiness. This feeling is not specific to people with mental illnesses; anyone can have it at any time in their lives [8, 9]. Individuals may experience fleeting sensations of emptiness in relation to particular emotional states or life circumstances [10]. Other affective states like numbness [8], loneliness [7, 8], and boredom [12] are frequently linked to this experience.

But in certain mental health conditions, that feeling of emptiness can be more intense and upsetting. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition [13], chronic emptiness, for example, is a symptom and diagnostic criterion for borderline personality disorder (BPD) and is reported by 71%–73% of those with this disorder [14].

Furthermore, there are other conditions where the feeling of emptiness can be seen, including depression [7, 15, 16, 11], schizophrenia-related disorders [17, 18], a condition known as narcissistic personality disorder [7] and dissociation states [19]. Moreover, there is evidence linking the sensation of emptiness to both suicidal thoughts and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) [20, 21, 22, 14, 23, 19]. It has been proposed that the sense of emptiness could be a trans-diagnostic construct as a result of these wide correlations with different psychopathological states [24].

People's natural desire to live meaningful lives is to find meaning and purpose [25]. The desire for significance is referred to as the "will to meaning," and psychological suffering results from not finding meaning. Research has backed up the theory that psychological distress results from a loss of meaning. There is a connection between having less purpose in life and the need for psychotherapy [26], depressive and anxious feelings [27] suicidal and drug-addicted thoughts [28] and other kinds of psychological discomfort. Among other markers of healthy psychological functioning, having greater meaning has been positively correlated with happiness [27] life satisfaction [29] and work enjoyment [30]. A nihilistic mindset can make a person feel empty inside, struggle to stay motivated, and be more prone to mental health issues like anxiety and hopelessness. People are still capable of creating their own distinct, subjective meaning in life despite nihilistic beliefs.

No one definition of nihilism can encompass all of its subtypes because it is a difficult and complicated ideology. However, the various forms of nihilism mentioned below offer a helpful place to start understanding this difficult concept such as pessimism, moral skepticism, and solipsism. Arthur [31] gave the idea that the world is inherently negative or evil is known as pessimism. Pessimists argue that there is no possibility of happiness or pleasure and that life is characterized by

suffering. Pessimism can significantly alter how people conduct their lives. Pessimists might be more inclined to isolate themselves from the outside world and steer clear of connections and obligations. Hume [32] gave moral skepticism, which is a belief that there are not any unbiased moral values. Moral skeptics hold that morality is merely a question of personal preference or perspective. Moral skeptics could behave in ways that are more dangerous to others because they do not think there are any moral laws that should be followed. Additionally, they can be more prone to struggle with unclear morals and utter confusion. The idea that an individual exists alone is known as solipsism [33]. Solipsists see everything else as an illusion, including other people and their surroundings.

Nihilism is a concept in philosophy that holds that life has no intrinsic meaning, significance, or purpose. Nihilism raises important existential issues that have an impact on psychological well-being [2]. This idea is especially relevant to university students, a group that is at an essential stage in their identity formation, personal growth, and existential exploration. As students move through university life, they frequently begin a profound search for purpose, which leaves them open to the existential void that nihilistic viewpoints represent. Several psychological disorders, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and maladaptive coping strategies like substance abuse and self-harm, have been linked to feelings of emptiness [34, 23]. The relationship between feelings of emptiness and psychological disorders has been studied in the literature, but little has been researched about the in-depth experiences of those who struggle with nihilistic beliefs. Furthermore, there is an absence of research on the cultural context of Pakistan, which is surprising given the topic's importance in a multicultural and dynamic society. By using a multidisciplinary approach that includes a review of the literature and qualitative research methods, this study seeks to fill these gaps.

In Pakistan, there is still an enormous gap in research that is context-specific, despite the abundance of global literature that explores the relationship between existential concerns and mental health where the feeling of emptiness can be seen, including depression [7, 15, 16, 11], schizophrenia-related disorders [17, 18], a condition known as narcissistic personality disorder [7] and dissociation states [19]. Moreover, there is evidence linking the sensation of emptiness to both suicidal thoughts and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) [20, 21, 22, 14, 23, 19]. This oversight is especially noticeable in light of the nation's distinct cultural, religious, and social context, which may have a different impact on nihilistic beliefs' manifestation and impact than in Western contexts. A critical area of research is lacking in Pakistan regarding nihilism and its psychological consequences, particularly in light of the influence of culture on the expression and experience of psychological disorders and existential distress. The discourse that currently exists mostly revolves around the larger themes of psychological disorder and existential emptiness, paying little attention to how these ideas are experienced within the context of Pakistani culture. The groundbreaking research of Frankl [25] emphasizes the connection between different mental health issues and a lack of meaning in life; however, little is known about how these dynamics manifest among university students in Pakistan or the general population. There is a lack of research on nihilism, particularly in Pakistan, so a thorough investigation using a multidisciplinary methodology is required. Such an approach should combine a thorough review of the nationally and globally recognized literature on the topic with qualitative research methods to capture the complicated experiences of people facing existential dilemmas. This study aims to offer insights into how people navigate existential questions and find meaning in the face of perceived meaninglessness by exploring the complex experiences of nihilism. This research aims to shed light on the particular difficulties and complexities faced by people who may not adhere to religious belief systems or who hold nihilistic views, with a particular focus on the cultural context of Pakistan.

By offering a thorough analysis of how nihilism appears among Pakistani university students and the larger community, investigating its psychological effects, and looking into culturally relevant interventions, this study seeks to close the knowledge gap. This research is essential for both practical applications and academic enrichment. Individuals can create specific support systems to help people facing existential and nihilistic crises in Pakistan by comprehending the particular characteristics of these crises. The intention is to support people in resolving existential issues, discovering life's meaning and purpose, and ultimately achieving a sense of fulfillment and well-being. By doing this,

the study will make a substantial contribution to our comprehension of the human condition and provide light on how communities and individuals can effectively deal with the problems that nihilism presents.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Camus's theory of Nihilism

He perceived nihilism as a phenomenon that resulted from an imbalance between the universe's meaninglessness and the human's desire for meaning. Nihilism, in his opinion, was a natural outcome of the modern era. Despite the fact that science had demolished the previous religious and moral worldview, he claimed that it had not been replaced by anything new. People experience a sense of being meaningless and lost as a result of this [2].

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of university students with nihilistic philosophy?
2. What coping strategies are used by university students with nihilistic philosophy?

Method

Research Design

The research design for exploring the phenomenon of Nihilism Philosophy was phenomenology.

Participants

According to Creswell [35] the recommended sample size for conducting an interpretative phenomenological analysis ranges from 5 to 25. Therefore, 7 participants including 5 men and 2 women were selected from diverse backgrounds (universities) in Lahore, Pakistan. To recruit participants for the research, the snowball sampling technique was utilized.

Inclusion criteria

Men and Women with ages ranging from 18-24 years, with an educational background of at least BS/BA/BSc or enrolled in university.

Exclusion criteria

The participants diagnosed with any psychological, or medical conditions, and going for therapies, were excluded.

Material and Measures

Interview guide

The interviews consisted of pre-determined questions based on theory of nihilism philosophy while also allowing for open-ended exploration. Before the interview, participants received written informed consent and demographic forms. The researcher established a supportive environment to encourage participants to genuinely share their experiences.

Detailed field notes and reflective journals kept to document observations and reflections [34]. Participant confidentiality and privacy was guaranteed throughout the data collection process. The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately one hour. The participants' consent was obtained before recording the interview audio.

Interview Guide Verification Method

Feedback from peer reviews was carefully taken into account, demonstrating a dedication to improving and maximizing the usefulness of the guide. All of the recommendations and improvements from the validation process were carefully incorporated into the interview guide before the interviews started. This methodical approach not only highlights the dedication to careful methodology but also improves the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Procedure

Obtaining approval from the University's Institutional Review Board was the first step in this research study. After approval, the appropriate institutes' permissions were looked for in order to begin data collection. Snowball sampling was used in the recruitment process to find and select seven willing men and women participants. Every participant was asked for their informed consent after being fully informed about the goal of the study and given assurances regarding confidentiality. Additionally, participants were made aware of their freedom to leave the study at any moment. As no personal information was collected, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was maintained. Following the interviews, the data was transcribed promptly [36]. The study does not anticipate any risks associated with participation. Building rapport with the participants was a priority, emphasizing the importance of establishing a genuine connection based on sincerity and transparency to foster trust.

During each interview, probing techniques were carefully used to effectively explore relevant experiences. Furthermore, the interview guide's question sequence was freely rearranged to match the way conversations naturally developed during each interview, encouraging a smooth and organic information exchange. Following each interview session, the data was immediately transcribed in accordance with instructions [36], maintaining the authenticity and depth of the participants' experiences. Quickly after the transcription, all of the data was carefully translated into English to ensure accessibility and enable in-depth analysis. These deliberate actions highlight the dedication to laborious data gathering and processing, which in turn strengthens the validity and consistency of the study results.

Data Analysis

After data collection, this study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the data analysis technique. IPA is a method used to explore and understand individuals' subjective experiences [34]. The recorded interviews were transcribed, and IPA was conducted to identify recurring themes and meanings in the data. The findings are presented in a comprehensive and anonymized manner, contributing to the existing knowledge on the concept of nothingness within nihilistic philosophy. The IPA process consists of six steps:

- *Familiarization with the data*: This initial step involves repeatedly reading and listening to the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data. It also includes documenting initial comments and reflections and highlighting important points and issues.
- *Preliminary theme identification*: The second step entails identifying and labeling recurring themes that emerge from the data. These themes are often expressed using the participants' own words and phrases.
- *Search for theme interconnections*: In the third step, the identified themes are examined to determine how they interconnect and relate to the research question. This involves identifying patterns, associations, and relationships between the themes.
- *Systematic table of themes*: The fourth step involves creating a table or matrix that systematically organizes and summarizes the themes. This includes providing definitions, noting the frequency of occurrence, and documenting the relationship between themes.
- *Analysis of further cases*: The fifth step involves analyzing additional cases or interviews to confirm and expand on the initial findings. This process applies the same analysis process to these additional cases.
- *Writing up the analysis*: The final step involves describing the methods used, presenting the identified themes, and providing an interpretation of the findings in relation to the research question.

Results

Six major themes that significantly indicate the lived experiences are revealed. These themes include religious and spiritual beliefs, the essence of existence, social dynamics, interpersonal dynamics, psychological well-being, and perception of death.

The three major coping strategies also revealed which include healthy coping mechanisms, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and personality traits. These coping strategies helped the university students to cope with the existential crisis regarding the world and God. These results provide insight into the lived experiences of university students with nihilistic philosophy, highlighting the coping mechanisms that have influenced their worldview and the complex interactions between different aspects of their lives.

Lived Experiences of Nihilistic Students

Following are the lived experiences of the university students with nihilistic philosophy and a figure showing lived experiences:

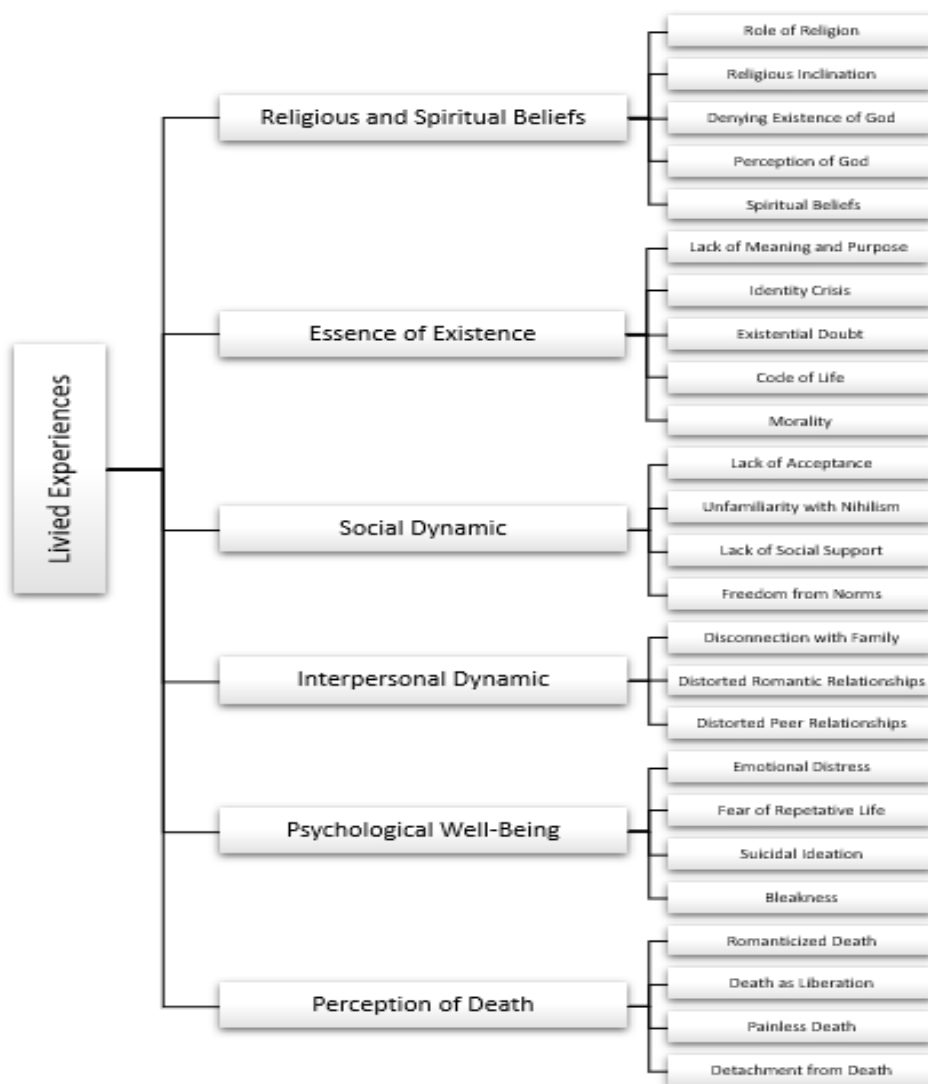


Figure 1: Showing lived experiences of nihilistic students with superordinate and subordinate themes

Table 2: Lived Experiences of Nihilistic Students

Super-Ordinate Themes	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Example Quotes
Religious and Spiritual Beliefs	Role of Religion	Religion plays a very negative role. Firstly, at an individual and personal level, it takes out the liberty and puts a mechanic schedule for kids, adults, and older people to perform rituals from their toilets to their mosques and from their Eids to their ordinary holidays conform to a very strict code, and then that takes a very negative role. It gives a big chunk of freedom and happiness to people's lives.
	Religious Inclination	I started reading psychology and philosophy, and that led me to question many things. And primarily, the existence of God, the authenticity of religious texts, and moral codes. That was the starting point. And afterward, I started questioning all the aspects of

		individual, social, personal, and every aspect of religion. So, it was a transition from really being very religious to being less religious and then agnostic to a theist.
	Denying Existence of God	I am not denying anything; I am denying the existence of God or someone who created this world. In nihilism, you are denying everything; you are not accepting anything properly.
	Perception of God	I consider myself agnostic, which entails that I can't really prove or deny whether a higher power or powers exist or not. But, you know, I think, again, I can't really deny it. I can't really prove it. So, it doesn't have much impact on my life.
	Spiritual Beliefs	I wouldn't say that I am not spiritual. I like spirituality and spiritualism. I endorse every beautiful thing, even if it is in religion I would appreciate it. I will propagate it. But I do not believe in it as an objective truth.
Essence of Existence	Lack of Meaning and Purpose	When I feel that there is nothing that matters to put it very succinctly nothing matters; everything is meaningless. Existence is meaningless. A pointless life is meaningless. Pursuing goals is meaningless. Regardless of what you think this is meaningless. This world is meaningless. It doesn't have any purpose or meaning.
	Identity Crisis	And for me, something that led me to nihilism was my sexuality. Because I'm gay. So I always didn't know from the beginning that being gay is a bad thing or a sin. It was like because I was gay, I had an existential crisis. But that existential crisis that was suppressed broke out. I went into depression and existential crisis and I started questioning everything.
	Existential Doubt	But once you start asking, why do you need to be prayed to five times a day? What kind of God needs to be prayed five times a day? And what kind of God doesn't allow music, you know? That's another question. If you just start asking, you know, start questioning everything, then you lose all purpose. I think that's the worst part.
	Code of Life	I had a lot of pretenses and I still have it. Oh, yes, I love being around you. I love your smile. I love your cheeks. I love your hair. And it was all fake, of course. But once you say it enough times, you get used to it. It's like saying a prayer. If you don't say all of the words, then it just doesn't feel complete. I pretended throughout my life and am still doing it. I have the autonomy to make my own decisions free from outside meaning or purpose constraints.
	Morality	From an atheistic worldview, it is subjective, Morality. Subjective or opinionated. They are opinions and preferences that come from, they differ a little. They are subjective-based. But if there is any objective morality, then it can come from God. Moral values are your personal choice. Which moral values do you have to adhere to? Because that comes from pain as well. And pain is very real. I think pain is something subjective, but it's real.
Social Dynamic	Lack of Acceptance	That made me feel like this community is not mine. The Muslim community is not mine. It's not for people like me. Because I cannot change myself. I would have if I had an option. Because it will make my life more easy. But, it doesn't happen that way. People used to abuse me and threaten me, so those things are not right.
	Unfamiliarity with Nihilism	But, again, who reads philosophy? Especially in Pakistani culture, people don't know what philosophy is. So, if someone reads philosophy, if someone is very mature if they are in their 30s, they might know what nihilism is. But, mostly, people aren't aware of it.
	Lack of Social Support	Usually, my core values are different from theirs. So, there is this thing that I tolerate people very well. In my class, I talk to all kinds of people. But if I have a very close circle. And there are some people in it with whom my basic values don't match. Then I am like you are on your way. I am on my way. So, this is the thing. I am on my own and have no friends.
	Freedom from Norms	It has liberated me in every sense, like from obligations, regrets, disappointments, expectations, and conflicts, from everything. It has relieved me from a lot of societal pressures and everything. You don't care about whether people are going to be hurt or not. You don't care about how you are dressed, whether you go to the prayer or not. All of those things, you don't care about those things. You don't care about your teacher's expectations or how much you are going to score in the exam.
Interpersonal Dynamic	Disconnection with Family	Yeah, with my parents, I don't feel so connected anymore. I don't like them anymore, I think there has been a distance between me and my parents until now, which means whatever I did, I did for them, but now whatever. I am doing it for myself.
	Distorted Romantic Relationships	Also, with my romantic relationships, I have never had any romantic relationships for this purpose. You know, again, what is the point? I keep repeating that. But that is one question that... To some extent haunts me in my daily endeavors. Thinking that there is no point in doing all of this.
	Distorted Peer Relationships	I lost a lot of friends. I started to distance myself from my close friends. I had an issue with my best friend from the university. It was very serious. So, he abandoned me. Maybe that could also have contributed to it. I cried a lot at that time. And I think the loneliness caused me to become that way. The loneliness of having no friends. There are no close friends.

Psychological Well-Being	Emotional Distress	After all, I knew that my emotions would come, and I had to let them come and go [Watery eyes]. So I knew that just because I was feeling emotionally bad, it did not mean that everything would become meaningful all of a sudden.
	Fear of Repetitive Life	I don't know if that was my first monotonous experience or where it was, but I started experiencing that I had to go to work every day and go home at night, and then the next day I had to go to work. I didn't feel monotonous in my university life, but I had the first experience of being a monotonous person. So, I think the first seeds of my development started when the fear of a monotonous life started to develop.
	Suicidal Ideation	But I would like to share my experience of trying to end my life during the transition period because I thought that there was no inherent meaning to life. After all, I had lost the only foundation the religion that I was standing on. And I thought that there was no point in living any longer. And I still think that there is no point in living this meaningless life.
	Bleakness	But then again, in daily life, it can become challenging to live with that kind of thought process. Because then it's like, finding motivation is very difficult. Getting up in the morning. Every day I get up and I feel like, what's the point of going to university today? What am I going to achieve today? What's the point in doing anything, to be fair? Because my brain starts to kind of, you know, it keeps focusing on the fact that I feel so empty.
Perception of Death	Romanticized Death	I feel that it will be a very liberating experience for me. Because my fantasies are the same. To float in the universe and swim. And I want to touch the stars and all that stuff. So death is a very beautiful thing in my mind. Death fascinates me a lot. Romanticized. In my mind, death is very liberating and much romanticized.
	Death as Liberation	I think that through our religious teachings, we have been taught social and religious teachings that death is something that we should be afraid of throughout our lives. I think at some point, death means liberation from this physical life because if it had to go on for eternity, we would have been in a mess.
	Painless Death	I feel like it is nothing. If you die, then it is okay. You go to the next life. The next life may be more fun and meaningful. It is possible that when you go to the next life, you will get real meaning. I think if there is a death, then it is quick. A quick death. Otherwise, there is no problem with death.
	Detachment from Death	I don't care. I don't know; I don't think about it. It doesn't matter. Even if you die, you have to die, but I don't know. It doesn't matter to me because it's like I'm living.

Coping Mechanisms of Nihilistic Students

Figure 2: Showing coping mechanisms of nihilistic students with superordinate and subordinate themes

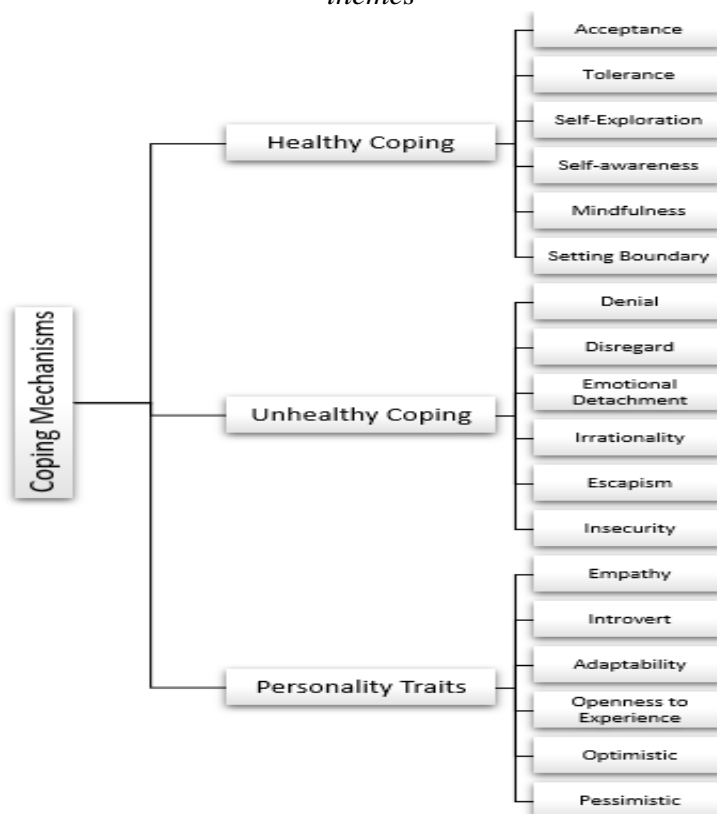


Table 3: Coping Strategies of Nihilistic Students

Super-Ordinate Themes	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Example Quotes
Healthy Coping Mechanisms	Acceptance	I have accepted my meaningless life and accepted that everyone has the right to live as they want to. And I can live my life how I want to.
	Tolerance	When we know that nothing is divine or objective, we know that we could be wrong as well, and the other person could be right as well. And that promotes tolerance for different perspectives. And in relationships, we must acknowledge tolerance and give space to each other.
	Self-Exploration	I try to write, I go to the gym. I busy myself with physical exercise and other, you know, consuming literature, watching TV shows, listening to music.
	Self-Awareness	Self-care. I think my self-awareness has also helped a lot in this regard. I do overcompensate for a lot of things when I talk about self-awareness.
	Mindfulness	But I think just the fleeting emotions, the feelings you have, you know, it's just neurotransmitters, you know, and you chase after that feeling. You try to live in the moment as much as you can. And that's how you get things done. If I know that going to the gym is going to make me happy, then I go and do it.
	Setting Boundary	I try to screen people beforehand. If they have some extreme leanings toward religion or conservative social values, I don't proceed further if I find anyone very conservative. Secondly, if I think that someone can harm me or that I can't have a good relationship with someone, I try to end it on a good note as soon as I realize it.
	Personal Growth	So, I think, with this lens, we become very empathetic towards our partners. We try to console them. We try to heal their wounds, we try to adjust to them, and we try to make them understand our situations and their situations as well. I think it's a very good relationship that will transition from very bad to very good over time. And that's just because of this realization.
Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms	Denial	I've been thinking about the purpose of life, and to be honest, it all seems more meaningless. It is just a creation of humans. To hide the absurdity that is inherent in existence, we create meaning. I am denying the existence of God or someone who created this world.
	Disregard	Once you lose respect for life, you also lose respect for the fellow human being. And then it just becomes very easy to discard them, you know. It will become very easy to discard your friends. Your friends are disposable. Your partners are disposable.
	Emotional Detachment	But there is this thing that I am detached from everyone. Even sometimes with my parents. So, that emotional attachment factor. So I am always detached from everyone.
	Irrationality	You know, life is kind of like a divine joke. All of us are but insignificant tiny particles in this vast, uncaring universe. Meaning and objective? These are merely delusions we make up to keep our minds off how absurd everything is.
	Escapism	It means freedom to do things. And to escape from this meaningless or absurd world around me. It gives me an escape from God and His imposed religion.
	Insecurity	Earlier, I used to be very jealous, which was my biggest weakness. I used to look at someone and think he was very beautiful. So jealousy. He is very successful. I used to be jealous of him.
	Personality Traits	Empathy
Introversion		I am very introverted. I didn't have much interaction with people from the beginning. And I didn't want to do it. Nor did I want to. One of the factors could be that I didn't like the people around me.
Adaptability		I think whatever the situation is, we can muddle it through, and we can enjoy it as we adjust to the different things in life.
Openness to Experience		I want to experience everything and I want to learn everything. You can say it is not possible but I am a bit adventurous in this regard.
Optimistic Pessimistic		I have plenty of hope for myself because I think whatever the situation is, we can muddle it through, and we can enjoy it as we adjust to the different things in life. My only hope for the future is that I have no hope. I hope that it ends as soon as possible. I guess you can call it hope, but I'm still hoping that it might end as soon as possible. That is because of my intense desire to throw it all away. I just want it all to ruin. I can't find any meaning in anything I do anymore.

Discussion

The results of the current research, which are based on a phenomenological analysis of university students who embrace nihilistic philosophy, offer significant perspectives into the complicated structure of experiences and adaptive strategies within this specific population. The study's main findings, which came from a phenomenological analysis, show that university students who embrace nihilistic philosophy have a complex network of experiences. The study found six key themes religious and spiritual beliefs, lack of meaning and purpose, social dynamics, interpersonal dynamics, psychological well-being, and perception of death that strongly suggest their lived experiences. These themes are consistent with previous research [37] highlighting the complexity of the issues that nihilistic intellectuals face. The lived experiences such as despair, hopelessness, and empty feelings align with earlier research, suggesting a consistent pattern across studies.

The first major theme is religious and spiritual beliefs in which participants in the study had a range of opinions about religion and spirituality, from doubt and disinterest to looking for other meanings. The subordinate themes are the role of religion, religious inclination, denying the existence of God, different perceptions of God, and spiritual beliefs. These themes are unique and previous literature is limited on this because previous studies focused on the mental health issues raised by adopting this

nihilistic philosophy not on the lived experiences of these people. The current study, however, provides more depth by examining how students deal with these emotions and demonstrating a complex range of reactions, from outright rejection to looking for alternative spiritual fulfillment sources.

Moreover, in the essence of existence major theme, the subordinate themes are lack of meaning and purpose, identity crisis, existential doubt, code of life, and morality which is in line with findings by research [38] regarding the feeling of emptiness, participants expressed worries regarding the lack of meaning and purpose in life. This is also consistent with Smith [37] observation that nihilistic people frequently experience a sense of emptiness and hopelessness as a result of their struggles with traditional religious beliefs. The novel contribution here is the relationship that is made between existential doubt and the particular circumstances of life and their way of living, showing how these existential dilemmas are made worse by the identity crisis, and uncertainty about the future. Similarly, Morality theme is also consistent with the research by Hume [32] subtype of nihilism in which he gave moral skepticism, which is a belief that there are not any unbiased moral values. Moral skeptics hold that morality is merely a question of personal preference or perspective. Moral skeptics could behave in ways that are more dangerous to others because they do not think there are any moral laws that should be followed.

Likewise, in the social dynamic theme, the study emphasized the negative effects of pessimistic views about society as well as the lack of acceptance by peers and society. The subordinate themes are lack of acceptance, unfamiliarity with nihilism, lack of social support, and freedom from norms. Gemes [39] who talked about the existential problems that nihilism presents, found resonance with this theme in a way that lack of acceptance leads to existential issues. Another study [38] explored what emptiness means from the viewpoint of those who have experienced it and it is in line with this theme. The components of emptiness were subsequently determined by the researchers. The researchers concluded that emptiness is an integrated feeling that deals with how one feels about oneself, other people, and the outside environment. This is further explored in the current study, which goes into detail about the unique social difficulties that Pakistanis face, such as adjusting to cultural expectations and values and the lack of support from the society and unfamiliarity leads toward the feeling of marginalization and disconnection from the society.

Furthermore, in the interpersonal dynamic theme, the participants reported significant problems with romantic and peer relationships, including distorted relationships and detachment. This theme expands on the discussion of spiritual emptiness and its social consequences by Cheng [40]. The study offers a more in-depth look at how nihilism impacts close relationships and social interactions among university students. This theme also aligns with the study [38] which explored the components of emptiness and the elements comprised: feeling purposeless and detached, experiencing inner voids, and sensing disconnection from others and the world.

The theme of psychological well-being in which the participants' reports of emotional distress and suicidal thoughts were consistent with the larger body of research on emptiness and mental health. The subordinate themes are emotional distress, fear of repetitive life, suicidal ideation, and bleakness. Frankl [25] asserted that people's natural desire to live meaningful lives is to find meaning and purpose. The desire for significance is referred to as the "will to meaning," and psychological suffering results from not finding meaning. Research has backed up the theme that psychological distress results from a loss of meaning. There is a connection between having less purpose in life and the need for psychotherapy [26], depressive and anxious feelings [27], suicidal and drug-addicted thoughts [28], and other kinds of psychological discomfort. This study takes it a step further by directly connecting these problems to the existential crises brought on by nihilistic beliefs and providing an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences and coping strategies used. Likewise, Individuals may experience fleeting sensations of emptiness concerning particular emotional states or life circumstances. Other affective states like numbness [8], loneliness [7, 11], and boredom [12] are frequently linked to this experience.

Moreover, the theme perception of death is this study's novel theme is the participants' complex and varied perceptions of death, which range from seeing death as a source of liberation to fear and

anxiety. The subordinate themes are romanticized death, death as liberation, painless death, and detachment from death. This theme, which has received less attention in the literature on nihilism, sheds light on how attitudes toward mortality and the afterlife are shaped by nihilistic beliefs. However, Fortuin [41] analyze how separation from religion and rationalization have turned the human search for meaning in the face of death into an individual attempt. The researchers believe that culturally established views on death, which can be classified into three cultural niches: canonical (religious and traditional), utilitarian (logical and practical), and expressive (genuine self-expression), provide meaning for humans. The novel finding in the current research is romanticized death which could be due to their unique individual experiences or liberation from the world because they do not have any meaning or purpose in their lives. The other novel findings are the painless death and detachment from death which are unexpected and are not fully supported by the previous literature.

The study also discovered three main coping strategies that these students employed: personality traits, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and healthy coping mechanisms. It was discovered that these techniques were essential for assisting the students in resolving existential crises about the universe and God. This is consistent with research by Cheng [40], who examined disengagement as an indicator of spiritual emptiness characterized by hopelessness and separation. The discovery of beneficial as well as harmful coping strategies implies that people actively look for solutions to the existential crises brought on by nihilistic philosophy. This research is especially noteworthy because it classifies coping mechanisms that are unique to handling nihilism a topic that has not been thoroughly studied in the past such as healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms. It provides a vital new perspective on how people deal with the difficulties presented by nihilistic ideas and offers paths for assistance and intervention. When the data of the current study were analyzed it becomes clear that students who adopt a nihilistic worldview deal with a variety of complicated psychological, social, and existential issues. Their coping strategies, both beneficial and harmful, demonstrate a dynamic process of adaptation and difficulty in addressing the big questions of life and purpose.

Different healthy coping strategies such as acceptance, tolerance, self-exploration, self-awareness, mindfulness, and setting healthy boundaries, show that students actively look for ways to negotiate and manage their philosophical beliefs and how they affect their day-to-day lives. This is consistent with the addresses that Stevens [42] made about the difficulties and opportunities that come up when trying to find meaning in a world full of uncertainties. Diverse coping mechanisms demonstrate people's active negotiation of their philosophical views and how they affect their day-to-day lives. This careful analysis of coping mechanisms not only adds to the current discussion about nihilism but also illuminates the adaptive mechanisms these students use when confronted with difficult life decisions. The healthy coping mechanisms are novel themes and are not supported by the previous literature due to the reason that previous literature focused on psychological distress or negative coping strategies. Similarly, A nihilistic mindset can make a person feel empty inside, struggle to stay motivated, and be more prone to mental health issues like anxiety and hopelessness. People are still capable of creating their own distinct, subjective meaning in life despite nihilistic beliefs [30]. Lastly, this novel investigation reveals new perspectives on coping strategies among Pakistani university students studying nihilistic philosophy, a subject not fully addressed in previous research. One noteworthy aspect of this study is its emphasis on coping mechanisms, which draws attention to the lack of thorough investigation of how people deal with the complexity of nihilistic beliefs in the literature.

Implications

The study emphasizes the significance of cultivating a more understanding and inclusive social discourse on a cultural level. The participants' unwillingness to speak openly about their opinions for fear of negative social consequences highlights the necessity of cultural acceptance of a range of philosophical viewpoints. A more accepting society where people feel free to express their opinions without worrying about criticism or harm can be achieved through initiatives that support diversity, tolerance, and open discussion about philosophical questions.

When it comes to creating interventions that recognize the particular difficulties faced by people who adopt a nihilistic philosophy, mental health professionals can draw therapeutic conclusions from this study. Cultural awareness and recognition of the societal context that shapes people's experiences and fears are important components of therapeutic approaches. Establishing a judgment-free environment that allows people to freely explore and express their beliefs can be crucial to building trust and promoting psychological well-being. Additionally, given that feelings of emptiness can occur in a variety of psychological states, clinicians should be aware of the possibility that these feelings are Trans-diagnostic. For better therapeutic results, interventions that target nihilism's philosophical and emotional dimensions should be developed.

Conclusion

To sum up, this research offers an in-depth investigation of the experiences and coping mechanisms of university students who adopt a nihilistic viewpoint, contextualized within Pakistani society. The research reveals complex themes, such as religious and spiritual beliefs, lack of meaning and purpose, social dynamics, interpersonal dynamics, psychological well-being, and perception of death that strongly suggest their lived experiences, despite the obstacles like a lack of relevant research and participants' reluctance owing to cultural sensitivities. The study also identified personality traits, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and healthy coping mechanisms as the three primary coping strategies used by these students. It was found that these methods were crucial in helping the students work through existential questions concerning God and the universe. It is consistent with philosophical ideas to identify emptiness, hopelessness, and despair as common emotional states, highlighting the emotional resonance of nihilistic viewpoints. The study's contribution goes beyond the boundaries of academia; it provides therapeutic implications for customized interventions, cultural considerations for promoting inclusivity, and personal insights for people navigating this worldview. Despite the study's limitations, the results improve one's knowledge of how nihilistic philosophy and lived experiences interact, and they encourage more research and discussion on these complicated and culturally influenced questions of existence.

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