



Survey Based Evaluation of Mental Health of Students Pursuing Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Academic and non-academic institutions have different working style and environment, therefore there is difference in symptoms, reasons, and consequences of stress. According to World Health Organization report, practically about 10% of the students of any institution of higher learning are very likely to have emotional problems at some point of time which interferes seriously with their work. The relationship between university and stress is reported by students worldwide. The objective of the study is to identify psycho-social factors associated with mental health in students of higher education. An online study that was designed using Google forms and link was sent through social media platforms. Age was categorized in 17-18, 19-20, 21-22 and Above 22 categories. Total of 447 students participated where 191 were females (42.7%) and 256 were males (57.3%). The age ranges from 17 – 25 years with an average age of 21 years. Upon analysis it was found that 9.6% of the students had thought about suicide at least once. When the data was analyzed categorically it was found that the age group 17-18 was the group most vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and the age group Above 22 was the least vulnerable to suicidal thoughts.

Keywords: Mental Health, Stress, Depression, Anxiety, University Students.

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INTRODUCTION

India has one of the largest education systems in the world. Stress may produce different consequences if not managed well. Stress appears to be very common in college students' life. They have to manage a persona and have to prepare themselves for further graduate or professional training. Our education system has gradually evolved into a race, where the ethos of learning has been stripped down to a mere game of scoring marks. We are oblivious of the thousands of dreams that could not be fulfilled due to the pressure and stress inflicted on the students because of the so-called race, and it affects the life of thousands of students, and it requires a study of the impact of stress on the mental health of the students¹. According to WHO (World Health Organization) report, practically about 10% of the members of any institution of higher learning are very likely to have emotional problems at some time or the other which interferes seriously with their work². The inability to cope successfully with tremendous stress of education may lead to a cascade of consequences at both a personal and professional level. Stress has been shown to have deleterious effects on a

person's physical and mental well-being³. The relationship between university and stress is reported by students worldwide. One in five students strongly felt the need to hide their mental or emotional problems, and the reasons given by students include; feeling there was no need to, concerns they would not be believed, fears of being discriminated against, judged or stigmatized, concerns of privacy and confidentiality being breached, embarrassment and previous negative experiences⁴. So, the role of screening becomes important. Unfortunately, excessive stress can then potentially become unrecognizable, by students and professionals alike, until the effects of professional burnout become all too apparent. University students are unique group of people that are going through a critical transitional period in which they are going from adolescence to adulthood and it can be the most stressful times of a person's life. Often the causes of anxiety for a lot of students are related to trying to fit in, maintain good grades, plan for the future, and may be away from home⁵. As a reaction to this, students might get depressed. They may isolate themselves, skip classes, or cry all of the time without realizing they are depressed. Previous studies reported that the prevalence of depression in university students seems to be increasing⁶. Over two-thirds of young people do not talk about or seek help for mental health problems⁷. According to the WHO, a person can be termed depressed if shows a variable combination of loss of interest or pleasure, feelings like guilt, hopeless and restless, low mood, low self-esteem, disturbed sleep, disturbed concentration and disturbed appetite⁸. Different research studies have mentioned



different reasons behind student's stress and depression. Low financial support and the level of academic year were significantly associated with stress among nursing students⁹. Stigmatizing attitudes about depression and mental health services may become a barrier to seeking help and support. The most frequent barriers to using these services in a qualitative study were lack of time and confidentiality, the stigma associated with mental health services utilization, cost of treatment, fear of documentation on academic record, and fear of unwanted intervention¹⁰.

AIM: The aim of this study is to assess mental health of students pursuing higher education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Preparation

An Observational study was designed to determine the mental health of students perusing higher education.

Data Collection

The data was collected from the students from different universities of India through the online platform of Google forms; the link of the questionnaire was distributed through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook & Instagram.

Sample Selection Criteria

The survey was constructed for students who were pursuing higher education, therefore only the students who were pursuing higher education and were willing to participate were included. The data was collected from 21th Aug 2020

to 9th Feb 2021. The data collected was calculated using Microsoft Excel Software and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software.

Data Analysis and Statistical Application

The data collected were comprised of questions pertaining to the student's mood, their interest, their relationships and their physical wellbeing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impairment in mental health appears to be a common issue in academic institutions. The Indian education system has evolved into a mere game of scoring marks¹. Different research studies have mentioned the reasons behind students' depression and stress. One interesting institution based cross-sectional study was conducted by Manjot Singh and colleagues using the DASS-21 method with a sample size of 400 students. The overall prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress were found to be 59.2%, 86.5% and 52.7% respectively. It was also found that the prevalence of the DAS decreased with age and all the morbidity were more among females than males².

Inability to cope with the stress of education may lead to several consequences at both personal and professional level³. Total of 447 students participated where 191 were females (42.7%) and 256 were males (57.3%). The age ranges from 17 – 25 years with an average age of 21 years. According to the age criteria, they were divided into four categories those are 17-18, 19-20, 21-22 and Above 22.

Table 1: Demographic Details of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Female	191	42.7	42.7
	Male	256	57.3	100
Age	17-18	78	17.5	17.5
	19-20	179	40.1	57.6
	21-22	136	30.4	88
	Above 22	54	12	100
Academic Year	1st Year	89	19.9	19.9
	2nd Year	154	34.5	54.4
	3rd Year	83	18.6	72.9
	4th Year	84	18.8	91.7
	5th Year	34	7.6	99.3
	6th Year	3	0.7	100
	Total	447	100	

University students in their transition to adulthood particularly suffer from challenges such as exploring or developing their identity, making career choices, creating social relationships in a different environment etc¹¹. Not

everyone who is depressed or manic may experience every symptom. The severity of symptoms may vary with the individual¹². Statistical evaluation of the data obtained from the students who had the problem of concentrating after

starting the university stated that 4.25% of students always had the problem, 11.19% often had the problem, 56.15% students sometimes had the problem and 28.41% of students never had problem concentrating, Whereas Students who had problem memorizing things after starting the university education was found that 5.37% always had an issue, 13.87% often had an issue, 50.34% sometimes had an issue and 30.43% never had an issue.

Statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who felt that they were less productive was found that 5.15% always had an issue, 14.77% often had an issue, 39.82% sometimes had an issue and 40.27% never had an issue. When the data was analysed categorically it was found that the age group 21-22 (5.1%) had a maximum number of students with concentration issue and the age group Above 22 (37%) was the group where the maximum number of students had no problem in concentrating, while the most responses where students thought that they were becoming less productive belonged to the age group 21-22 (5.9%), Whereas the maximum number of students who did not believe in the above-mentioned premise were from the age group of Above 22 (42.6%).

Feeling tired and uninterested in activities are some consequences of depression, Statistical evaluation of the data obtained from the students who felt more tired after starting the university education stated that 8.05% always had an issue, 15.44% often had an issue, 48.10% sometimes had an issue and 28.41% never had an issue and students who were less interested in socializing after starting the university education stated that 8.72% always had an issue, 15.66% often had an issue, 37.36% sometimes had an issue and 38.26% never had an issue. However, when students were asked about their interest in group activities 8.72% of students said that they were always less interested in group activities after starting the university education whereas 12.08% often had an issue, 35.57% sometimes had an issue and 43.62% never had an issue. Whereas statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who were having difficulties in their relationships after starting the university education stated that 6.26% had a problem at both home or University/college, 4.47% had a problem only at home while 5.37% had a problem only at University/college. When the data was analysed categorically it was found that the age group 17-18 (11.5%) had a maximum number of students who were less interested in group activities. While the most responses where students who had problems in their relationships belonged to the age group 19-20 (8.4%) whereas the maximum number of students who did not have any relationship issue belonged to the age group of Above 22 (83.3%).

As a reaction to stress, students get depressed. They may cry all the time or isolate themselves without realizing they are depressed⁶. When participants were asked questions about their emotional wellbeing it was found that 61.74 % of students had changes in their emotional wellbeing (6.71% always had an issue, 17.45% often had an issue and

37.58% sometimes had an issue) and 38.26% participants said that they had no changes in their emotional wellbeing. However, when the statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who have been crying more than usual was done, it was found that 18.57% of the students had said yes, 75.84% students had said no and 5.59% students had said maybe.

Studies reported that stress affects the psychological health of students¹³. When students were asked about having mood swings after starting university education, 39.37% said that they were experiencing mood swings, 43.85% said that they were not experiencing mood swings and 16.78% said that they were not sure about experiencing mood swings. However, Statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who were sadder after starting the university education stated that 6.26% always had an issue, 14.54% often had an issue, 40.04% sometimes had an issue and 39.15% never had an issue. Whereas when the evaluation of data obtained from the students who experienced mood changes when the weather changed was done and it was found that 34.90% had mood changes, 51.45% did not have mood changes and 13.65% were not sure about their mood changes. Statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who felt that there was no joy in their life anymore stated that 17.45% of students felt that there was no joy in their life, 74.50% of students did not feel the same and 8.05% were not sure about their mood changes maybe. When the data was analysed categorically it was found that the age group 17-18 (50%) had maximum number of students who experienced mood swings and the age group Above 22 (55%) was the group where the maximum number of students did not experience mood swings. While the most responses where the students thought that they feel down when the weather changed were from the age group 17-18 (47.4%) whereas the maximum number of students who did not believe in the above-mentioned premise were from the age group Above 22 (55.6%).

It is reported that depression leads to various after-effects that may cause physical complications¹⁴. When the students were asked that if they had unusual pains after starting the university education, it was found that 3.13% always had an issue, 9.40% often had an issue, 33.56% sometimes had an issue and 53.91% never had an issue. However, statistical evaluation of the data obtained from the students who had a physical deformity/disability stated that 97.76% had no deformity/disability and 2.24% had a deformity/disability. When evaluation of data obtained from the students who feel that they are becoming slow at their daily work after starting the university education was done and it was found that 35.57% had an issue, 53.91% did not have an issue and 10.51% were not sure. Weight loss is also a common symptom of depression¹⁴. When statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who experienced weight loss after starting the university education was done it was found that 66.89% had experienced no weight loss, 25.28% had experienced slight weight loss and 7.83% had experienced visible weight loss.



When the data was analysed categorically it was found that the age group 21-22 (9.6%) had the maximum number of students who had experienced visible weight loss.

Statistical evaluation of the data obtained from the students who were having a problem trusting people around them stated that 46.76% had a problem trusting people, 39.82% did not have a problem trusting people and 13.42% were not sure. However, evaluation of data obtained from the students who were facing problems with decision making stated that 37.36% had a problem in decision making, 49.22% did not have a problem in decision making and 13.42% were not sure that their ability of decision making had changed.

Disturbance in sleep patterns was found to be one of the consequences of depression¹⁵. Statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who were having troubles with their sleep after starting the university education stated that 49.89% had no change in sleep, 20.58% slept more than usual, 29.53% slept less than usual. Statistical evaluation of data obtained from students who did not enjoy eating their food stated that 85.23% did not enjoy eating their food, 11.41% enjoyed eating their food and 3.36% were not sure. When the data was analysed categorically it was found that the age group 21-22 (22.8%) had the maximum number of students who had an increase in their sleep and the age group Above 22 (59.3%) had the maximum number of students had no change in their sleeping pattern.

Suicidal tendency and feeling of failure are some of the major consequences of depression¹⁴. When students were asked that, do they feel that everything that they have done has been a failure, it was found that 19.69% of students thought everything that they have done has been a failure, 70.25% did not feel the same and 10.07% were not sure how they felt. However, Statistical evaluation of data obtained from the students who thought about suicide since starting their university education stated that 9.6% of the students thought about suicide at least once i.e., 1.1% of students always thought about suicide, 1.8% of students thought about suicide more than twice, 1.3% students thought about suicide twice, 5.4% students thought about suicide once. While 90.4% of students never thought about suicide. When the data was analysed categorically it was found that the age group 17-18 was the group most vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and the age group Above 22 was the least vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. While the most responses where students thought that they had no future were from the age group 19-20 (17.9%) whereas the maximum number of students who did not believe in the above-mentioned premise were from the age group of Above 22 (79.6%).

CONCLUSION

Being a student is an important phase in a person's life. Especially college life is a vital time span. The vast majority of them are in their late adolescent age, physically getting mature, and psychologically unstable. They are undergoing various types of stress to study, to complete their assignments, to participate in various programs in the college. The stress can also be the result of the imbalance between the environment and demand. As per the study lead by us, the students were confronting issues in retaining things in which they were less interested, were facing socializing and sleep issues. Much of the participants also said they were not enjoying their food. 5% of participants had once thought of suicide. Certain factors like education counselling, parenting should be focused upon among students to decrease the prevalence of depression among youth.

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