



Silent Struggles: Exploring the Effects of Anxiety and Depression on Higher Level Students

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Abstract: *The purpose of the current study was to explore the effects of anxiety and depression on higher level students. The research was descriptive in nature, and to achieve the objectives of the study, a sample of three thousand four hundred and eighty higher level students was selected using stratified sampling technique. The data analysis statistics included both descriptive and inferential analysis. The findings reveal that anxiety and depression have a significant effect on university students, leading to poor academic performance. Moreover, males face higher levels of anxiety and depression as compared to females. This study recommends that teachers and parents should try to identify or understand if their child is going through any sort of mental discord. Teachers should act as role models for students to promote the importance of a content and calm mind and explain to them the importance of mental health.*

Key Words: Anxiety, Depression, Mental Health, University Students, Academic Achievement

Introduction

Every individual is facing their own silent struggle, their own internal fights. However content one may seem on the outside, the internal chaos is something entirely different. Foulkes and Andrews (2023) have depicted mental health as a vital part of an individual's life. An intellectually sound person leads a content life and faces all the hurdles of life with much more strength than a person who is mentally weak. Whereas Mumford (2000) observes that the proportion of anxiety- and depression related issues has been increasing at an alarming rate. This can be associated with the existing hostility, societal classes, and inferiority complexes (Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies, 2011).

Moreover, Hammoudi Halat et al., (2023) agrees that in the coming year's countries such as these will see a nation formed of resilience rather than psychopathology. On the other hand, a superior degree of coverage of trauma is acknowledged to be allied with the greater prevalence of relentless mental health issues. Alvi et al., (2023) further adds that this incessant aggression and life threatening scenarios due to the classicism and power structure boundaries has had a detrimental consequence to the psychosomatic health of the Pakistani society at large. Good mental health relies upon a refined stability of elements and that quite a few factors of existence and the world at massive can work collectively to make contributions to disorders (Haider, 2020).

Everyone has some chance of creating a mental health disorder, no count of their age, sex, income, or ethnicity. A number of psychosocial stressors including self-harm can be due to rigorous interferences in everyday practices, disconnection from the outside and internal world, scarcity of daily provisions, income inference and social seclusion (Taylor, 2019). Whereas, with cyber bullying, academic pressures, weary economic affairs students are vulnerable now more than ever and emotional counseling is of the need of the hour. Such systems have been organized; online support counsels and such programs but they mostly cater to the needs of higher level students and also only those that are mostly from the higher class of the social spectrum (Ansari et al., 2023).

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Pan et al., (2021) hastens to add that such programs are mostly expensive and being used not for the greater good of man but for the greater good of it's' owner pockets. Programs such as these need to be launched by the government, and check and balance over it must be ensured; otherwise, all efforts will be in vain. Mental issues cannot be cured in one sitting; rather, a majority of sessions are needed. Apart from these workshops and seminars should be held remarks Brooks et al., (2020). If we are to look at a global map or only at the changing scenarios regarding academics and educational systems in Pakistan, we will find that the graph is chaotic and disorganised, just as the ongoing situation

Recently, a keen interest is being taken in the domain of mental fitness of university level students as they embargo on these new journeys facing new challenges and situations. It has been observed that for most of the students, this journey is not as smooth as for his peers. Hashmi and Saleem (2020) report that the prevalence of mental health issues is increasing at an alarming rate in university students. Depression and anxiety being the most common amongst them. Most of the research scholars have announced the present ongoing situation as a severe predicament. Nevertheless, there is a lack of concrete data regarding the issue. Since the levels of depressed and anxious students are increasing rate in Pakistan there is a need to ascertain the current situation of mental health issues in university pupils and to explore whether depression and anxiety has an impact on academic achievement of higher level students.

Objectives

- To explore the effect of anxiety and depression on academic achievement of higher level students.
- To analyze the impact of anxiety and depression on higher level students on the basis of gender comparison.

Literature Review

It has been well established by Bantjes et al., (2023) that the intellectual well-being of our youth is a significant domain for research and a challenge for the government's worldwide. Issues relating to intellectual fitness can have long-lasting severe effects on individual's life, decreasing their lifestyle quality, personal wellbeing, educational performance, physiological fitness, and contentment with the higher level experience have been observed by Eisenberg et al., (2013). In higher education, students deal with all kinds of problems. Mahdavi et al., (2023) have reported most of the students attending higher education are hostelites who have feeling of loneliness, home-sickness, financial troubles and may make fatal decisions that can cause have long lasting effects.

Sadness, feeling down, and having a loss of hobby or pleasure in each day things to do are acquainted feelings for all of us. But if they persist and have an effect on our lives substantially, the difficulty may additionally be depression (Iqbal & Ahmad, 2010). The dying of a cherished one, losing employment, or breakups of any sort be it with friends, divorces are challenging predicaments for an individual to withstand. It is regular that emotions of unhappiness or anguish to enhance in reaction towards such circumstances (Mamun & Griffiths, 2020). People who experience loss on a more frequent basis as well as not getting things in any way they wish or desire would possibly describe themselves as being "depressed."

Whereas feeling unhappy might no longer be equal to having depression. The university phases can be taxing, as people are being introduced to varying ethos, values, principles, cultures and practices. As every student is unique is his own essence, it is not always known what they are bringing to the table. And students have feel they are constantly being played or betrayed by their peers in terms of both academics and emotional connections which effects their mental state (Braghieri & Makarin, 2022) causing them to feel anxious in unfamiliar situations. Depression is a recurrent and severe scientific condition which has a poor impact on an individual's way of thinking and acting (Satinsky et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Depression must not be taken lightly as it has been known to cause not only severe emotional turmoil's in an individual rather it can also have grave effects on one's physical health. Still, depression can be cured through different types of therapies. Amongst 80% and 90% percentage of humans feeling depressed, have shown a positive response to treatment (Chen, 2019). Anxiety is a sensation of discomfort and agitation and distress. At some point in our lives we all face this turmoil of unknown emotions (Zada et al., 2021). For instance, one might feel anxious regarding examinations, work

schedules, job interviews, stage fright and so much more. During instances like these, feeling anxious can be flawlessly normal. But some humans locate it tough to manage their worries (Ayesha, 2013). Their emotions of anxiousness are extra steady and can regularly have an effect on their day-by-day lives.

Many researches have reported contradictory consequences regarding the effect of depression and anxiety on academic achievement of university students. Sha`iri, (2004) have determined higher levels of anxiety and depression can lead to poor academic performance whereas Asanjarani and Asgari (2021) have determined that there is no influence of depression and anxiety on academic achievement of university students. Furthermore, Asif et al., (2020) depict depression and anxiety can impact the overall edIt has been well established by Bantjes et al., (2023) that the intellectual well-being of our youth is a significant domain for research and a challenge for the government's worldwide. Issues relating to intellectual fitness can have long-lasting severe effects on individual's life, decreasing their lifestyle quality, personal wellbeing, educational performance, physiological fitness, and contentment with the higher level experience, as observed by Eisenberg et al. (2013). In higher education, students deal with all kinds of problems. Mahdavi et al., (2023) have reported most of the students attending higher education are hostelites who have feelings of loneliness, home sickness, and financial troubles and may make fatal decisions that can cause long lasting effects.

Many studies have reported contradictory consequences regarding the effect of depression and anxiety on academic achievement of university students. Sha`iri, (2004) have determined higher levels of anxiety and depression can lead to poor academic performance whereas Asanjarani and Asgari (2021) have determined that there is no influence of depression and anxiety on the academic achievement of university students. Furthermore, (Asif et al., (2020) depict depression and anxiety can impact the overall educational performance of students. Furthermore, Grøtan et al., (2019) and Bas (2021) has determined a positive association between the two variables under study. Moreover, Zada et al., (2021) have also reported negative effects of anxiety and depression on the academic achievement of higher-level students educational performance of students. Furthermore, Grøtan et al., (2019) and Bas (2021) has determined a positive association between the two variables under study. Moreover Zada et al., (2021) have also reported negative effects of anxiety and depression on academic achievement of higher-level students.

Research Methodology

A descriptive research design was used for this study. This study was conducted to explore the effects of anxiety and depression on the academic achievement of university students. Quantitative methodology was used. The population consisted of students from the two universities in Multan City. These include Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan and the University of Education, Multan campus served as population. Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan consists of 26659 students, according to its official website. While the University of Education, Multan campus consists of approximately 8000 students. A stratified sampling technique was used to select the required sample from the population. The sample size was selected as per the recommendations of Gay et al., (2012). Accordingly, the recommended sample size should be at least ten percent of the population. A number of three thousand four hundred and eighty higher level students served as a sample of the study. A number of thirty-five hundred questionnaires were distributed amongst the selected sample, out of which thirty-four hundred and eighty responded questionnaire forms were returned. For the purpose of data collection, a self-rating questionnaire was used. The prevalence of two parameters of mental health: depression and anxiety, were measured in this study. For the data collection tool, a self-rating questionnaire consisting of twenty statements was used. The statements were derived from the Pakistan Anxiety and Depression Scale. The scale was in Urdu with a rating scale of Yes and No. The statements were translated into English, and the rating scale was tweaked according to the present context. The rating scale consisted of a five point Likert scale. The reliability of the research tool was estimated to be around 0.8 through Chronbach's alpha. Pilot testing of the tool was also done with a sample of two hundred and fifty higher level students. All ethical considerations were met throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis and inferential analysis were conducted for the purpose of data analysis. To analyse



the prevalence of anxiety and depression in higher level students, the mean and standard deviation were calculated. And to analyse the relationship between anxiety and academic performance as well as depression and academic performance, Pearson correlation was used. And to analyse the prevalence of anxiety and depression in higher-level students on the basis of gender comparison, a t-test was applied.

Table 1

Mean wise analysis of prevalence of anxiety in higher level students

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel nervous when surrounded by many people	2.7	1.2
My brain is relaxed all the time	2.1	1.2
I over think on everyday small issues	2.3	1.2
My tolerance level has decreased	4.1	1.2
I easily get irritated	2.8	1.3
I feel lazy all the time	3.9	1.2
I am scared of the unknown	2.3	0.8
I have faith in myself	2.9	1.2
I feel as if I am getting punished for something	3.0	1.2
I am happy nowadays	2.1	1.0

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of prevalence of anxiety in higher level students. With a high mean of 4.1 and 3.9 there is a strong consensus amongst respondents that their tolerance level has decreased and they feel lazy all the time. With a low mean of 2.1 there is low consensus amongst respondents that they feel happy.

Table 2

Mean wise analysis of prevalence of depression in higher level students

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
My heart feels sad	3.0	1.2
I like working	1.9	0.8
I like the world I live in	2.1	1.0
I feel disappointed all the time	3.6	1.1
My interest in everyday things has lessened	2.6	1.1
My family has noticed my sadness	3.0	1.2
I am tired of my life	3.9	1.2
I want to run from my house	3.6	1.2
I want to die	3.9	1.1
I want to stay in my bed all the time	3.9	1.2

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of prevalence of depression in higher level students. With a high mean of 3.9 there is a strong and alarming consensus amongst respondents that they are tired of their life, they have feelings of wanting to die and they want to lie in their beds all day. With a low mean of 1.9 there is low consensus amongst respondents that they like working.

Table 3

Gender based comparison regarding prevalence of anxiety

Prevalence of Anxiety	Participant	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
	Male	2028	26	5.5	11.9	3478	.000
	Female	1452	24	4.4	12.5	3473	

Table 3 shows the mean value of prevalence of anxiety in males 26 is greater than females 24 with a very minimum margin which shows males face slightly higher level of anxiety than females. Further, the t-value for both groups is high as well as the p-value .000 is less than 0.05 which represents that exists a statistical difference between males and females regarding prevalence of anxiety.

Table 4

Gender based comparison regarding prevalence of depression

Prevalence of Depression	Participant	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	df	t	Sig.
	Male	2028	32	5.4	3.9	3478	4.0	.000
	Female	1452	31	4.3	4.0	3439	4.0	

Table 4 shows the mean value of prevalence of depression in males 32 is greater than females 31 with a very minimum margin which shows males face slightly higher level of anxiety than females. Further, the t-value for both groups is moderate as well as the p-value .000 is less than 0.05 which represents that exists a statistical difference between males and females regarding prevalence of depression.

Table 5

Relationship between anxiety and academic performance

		Academic Performance	Anxiety
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.093
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
	N	3480	3480
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.093	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	
	N	3480	3480

Table 5 shows the relationship between anxiety and academic performance. The value of the Pearson coefficient correlation between academic performance and anxiety is.093. This indicates a very strong positive relationship between academic performance and anxiety. Further, the p-value is.00, which is less than 0.05, which indicates there is a statistically significant relationship between academic performance and anxiety.

Table 6

Relationship between depression and academic performance

		Depression	Academic Performance
Depression	Pearson Correlation	1	.067
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	3480	3480
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.067	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	3480	3480

Table 6 shows the relationship between depression and academic performance. The value of Pearson coefficient correlation between academic performance and depression is 0.67. This indicates a positive relationship between academic performance and depression. But the value indicates the value to be moderate to strong indicating that apart from depression others factor might also affect academic performance. Further, the p-value is .001 which is less than 0.05 which indicates there is a statistical significant relationship between academic performance and depression.



Conclusion

The current research explored the effects of anxiety and depression on higher level students. The results demonstrated a very strong positive relationship between academic performance and anxiety and a positive relationship between academic performance and depression. Moreover, the prevalence of anxiety and depression was found to be statistically higher in males than females, but with a minimum margin. These findings underscore the importance of good mental health for the academic performance of higher level students. While the study was limited by its sample size and institutional focus, it provides a valuable contribution to the growing body of research literature highlighting the importance of students' good mental health. As this study focused on only two parameters of mental health, further studies can focus on more parameters in different educational settings and can also conduct longitudinal studies.

Discussion

The analysis of the impact of mental health on academic performance showed us that mental health and academic performance indeed do have a relationship. Whereas Prabu and Saravan (2019), in their study on mental health and academic performance, used A.K. Singh and Alpana Sen Gupta Mental Health Battery and declared a significant relationship between mental health and academic performance. The findings of this study showed a strong positive relationship between academic performance and anxiety and a positive relationship between academic performance and depression. Furthermore, Basu and Banarjee (2020) also found that students, while transitioning through the different phases of adulthood and through their educational journey, face a high number of mental health issues.

On the other hand, Chen (2019) articulated high degrees of self-declared psychiatric indications and diagnosis, particularly amongst indigenous marginal individuals. This study has reported the prevalence of mental health parameters in higher-level scholars. Furthermore, results specify that males face higher levels of anxiety and depression than females. Whereas Verma (2018) has reported in her study that females face a higher level of anxiety than males. Furthermore, Malik et al. (2023) have conveyed that males are more anxious and depressed than females.

Recommendations

This study found prevalence of anxiety and depression as parameters of mental health amongst higher-level students. Further, there seems to be a relationship between the parameters of mental health and academic performance. For better mental health of students, the following recommendations are made for relevant stakeholders. There should be sincere and earnest relationships of parents with their children formed on the foundation of respect and trust and try to identify or understand if their child is going through any sort of mental discord. Teachers should act as role models for students to promote the importance of content and calm mind and explain to them the importance of mental health. Moreover, necessary changes should be made in the curriculum. Such curriculum should be established by educators and field specialists and integrate the learning of a positive and healthy mindset into everyday lessons, projects, and assignments. Workshops, seminars, and such co-curricular activities should be conducted that may transcend the importance of good mental health. Furthermore, measures for self-assessment for students should be ensured.

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